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PREVIEWING:

A DIRECTED READING-THINKING ACTIVITY

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Previewing is an effective reading strategy that has been examined by researchers (Perry, 1959; Smith, 1985; Stauffer, 1969) as a technique to help students to retain textbook material. In previewing, students learn to establish purposes for reading and to make accurate predictions, actions which reinforce and enhance the learning process. Yet, many students do not bother to preview. Students open their textbooks and just start reading from page to page--an unstructured activity which severely limits the amount of learning accomplished.

Perry (1959) conducted previewing research with 1500 Harvard freshmen. Of the students surveyed in this study, a mere 15 previewed the assigned 30-page chapter in a history book and read the summary at the end of the chapter. Interestingly, only these 15 students were able to write a brief summary of the extremely detailed factual material. They--unlike the 1,485 students who read without purpose and word-by-word--understood what the material was about as opposed to simply recalling details (Smith, 1985). They alone demonstrated superior reading comprehension.

Apparently, many students do not see the value of previewing before reading. They disregard this effective reading strategy and do not obtain an overview of the material to be read. The need is, quite obviously, to awaken our students to realize the importance of using this simple learning construct. How can we, as classroom teachers, graphically demonstrate the effectiveness of previewing? How can we motivate our students to use this strategy in their own textbook reading?

As one answer to these relevant questions, I have designed an instructional model which incorporates the

designed an instructional model which incorporates the Stauffer (1969) directed reading-thinking activity for teaching students to preview. This innovative model, hopefully, will encourage your students to preview their textbook material. Three steps are involved: Step I, Before Reading; Step II, While Previewing; and Step III, After Previewing. They are as follows:

Step I, Before Reading

Define the term "previewing." Previewing, according to Wassman and Paye (1985), is a sorting technique which allows the reader to read selectively and locate the important ideas of the passage. In this reading strategy, the readers asks and answers three main questions before reading--(a) "What is my purpose for reading?" (b) "How is the material organized?" and (c) "What will be my plan of attack?" (Smith, 1985)

Give each student a copy of the previewing model (at end of article). Explain that before reading a selection, students must observe, think, and ask questions about the specific sections of a textbook, such as its preface, table of contents, introduction, and diagrams.

Define these specific sections and have students locate them using their science or social studies textbooks. Ask students such questions as, "What kind of information does the table of contents provide?" "Why are diagrams important?" "What is a summary?" Asking these questions will enable you to determine your students' understanding of the function and relationship of these textbook sections.

Step II, While Previewing

Encourage students to use their own experience to reconstruct the author's ideas through hypotheses (Stauffer, 1969). Pertinent here are the constructs of predicting or defining a purpose for reading, reading and selecting relevant data, and evaluating and revising predictions based on the acquired information (Tierney, Readence, & Dishner, '85).

In implementing this step, choose a reading selection from the science or social studies text. Divide it into parts and have the students read the title. Ask them three questions: (a) "What is this selection about?" (b) "What do you think might happen in this section?" and (c) "Which of these predictions do you agree with?" (Stauffer, 1969). Encourage responses and let the students share

their predictions with the class.

Step III, After Previewing

Have students silently read the first page of the selection to check their predictions. Comprehension questions--such as "Were your predictions correct?" and "What do you think will happen now?"--will assist students in evaluating their former questions and formulating new ones. Let students prove their predictions by reading aloud a specific sentence as evidence. Have them make predictions about events in the next segment of the selection. Ask students to review their reading strategies. They can continue to read with the same purposes or establish new ones.

Repeat Steps I, II, and III with the next reading segment and provide enrichment activities to enhance learning. For example, let students act out the reading selection, have them put events described in the passage in sequential order, write reviews of the selection, summarize the passage.

This three-step previewing model can be easily adapted for classroom use with elementary to college levels. It can be used with almost any reading selection. It enables students to develop and to be aware of their own purposes for reading and making predictions. Most important, the teacher, rather than set in the traditional role of questioner, is now cast in the innovative role of facilitator or guide of the reading-thinking process.

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Previewing Model

Step I, Before Reading

OBSERVE



THINK



ASK



Preface

Introductions

Table of Contents

P R E V I E W Chapter Title(s)

Headings & Subheadings

Boldface & Italicized Print

Captions

Graphic Illustrations

(Maps, Graphs, Diagrams
Tables, Charts)

First paragraph

First sentence in every
other paragraph

Last paragraph

Summary

Step II, While Previewing

ASK 3 Questions



C O N S I D E R

What is this selection
about?

What might happen in
this selection?

*Which of these predic-
do you agree with?

Step III, After Previewing

ASK Questions



PROVE Predictions



REVIEW Previewing
Strategies



Were my predictions
correct?

Read aloud a sentence
from the selection which
supports your prediction.

Continue to read with
the same purpose or
formulate new ones.

What will happen next?

Repeat Steps I, II, and III with a new selection.

* Stauffer, 1969