

Prior Knowledge Check

"A teacher is one who makes himself progressively unnecessary." - Thomas Carruthers

On the first day of class, I like to ask students to write a 1-page response to the following question: "What do you know about (Insert your field here)?" I do this for multiple reasons:

- It activates prior knowledge, requiring students to pull from their experiences and see how they might apply those experiences to class material (Pressley et al., 1992).
- It demonstrates that I value what they may already know about the field.
- It puts the responsibility on the students and illustrates that this class will require active participation.

Near the end of the semester, I return these papers to the students, and have them respond to what they wrote previously. Students are usually surprised by their initial writings and by their ability to respond with what they have learned. This activity shows how much a student's conceptualization of a field can change in just 15 weeks. It also reminds me of the quotation above—and how quickly I become unnecessary, if I do my job well.

Good luck & happy teaching!

Resources:

Pressley, M., Wood, E., Woloshyn, V., Martin, V., King, A., and Menke, D. (1992). Encouraging mindful use of prior knowledge: Attempting to construct explanatory answers facilitates learning. *Educational Psychologist* 27(1), 91-109.

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