

Instructional Practices - Small Group Reciprocal Teaching

Reciprocal Teaching is a routine for scaffolding reading comprehension, where students work as active members of a cooperative and collaborative group and are taught to use the strategies of

- predicting;
- questioning;
- clarifying;
- summarizing to comprehend text (Palinscar and Brown, 1984).

The strategies may be demonstrated in Think-aloud, modeled or discussed by you or by students and then other students take on the role as the leader, and become the initiators of using these strategies, in order to make meaning from a variety of texts. The interaction between students is reciprocal, that is, one student acts in response to another.

Students usually work in small groups of 4-6 members, talking their way through a text in order to understand it.

As a way of self-monitoring understanding, group members might stop at intervals, to ask questions, make predictions, clarify, or summarize information. The goal is for your students to use these strategies, along with other comprehension strategies, in their independent reading.

How Does Reciprocal Teaching Help Children in Their Thinking?

Research demonstrates that when students have the opportunity to think about their thinking (metacognition), to develop and refine their reading strategies, greater understanding of comprehension will occur. They develop a set of self-monitoring strategies that are interchanged and adjusted during the reading process so that meaning is constantly clarified. Think-aloud is an integral part of RT that encourages and refines this self-monitoring process.

What Is Your Role in Reciprocal Teaching?

Initially, you act as a coordinator of activity within the classroom, guiding your students where necessary, and monitoring each student's progress to ensure that they are using and refining the strategies to ensure their understanding of text.

You need to model and demonstrate reciprocal teaching often within the classroom, thinking aloud to ask questions, make predictions, clarify terms, and summarize information.

As the group begins to understand the technique, you release responsibility for the working of the group back to your students, who organize and maintain their own momentum. You can then take on the role of the coach or facilitator.

Reciprocal Teaching is an instructional routine that takes place in the form of a dialogue between teachers and students, and students with their fellow students, regarding segments of text (Palincsar, 1984). The purpose of Reciprocal Teaching is to facilitate a group effort between teacher and students in the task of constructing meaning. The dialogue is structured by the use of four strategies which foster and monitor comprehension. They are

- Predicting;
- Clarifying;
- Question Generating;
- Summarizing.

The Process

The discussion leader (a teacher or student) leads the group in making predictions about the text based on the information from the text (often the title, heading or subtitle and perhaps browsing through the text). The leader can then ask the group if they need clarification of words or ideas (clarification may be discussed throughout the dialogue). For passages begun the previous day, there is firstly a review of the main points covered so far. The text is usually read silently (definitely NOT Round Robin Reading) and notes may be individually written about points to clarify or questions to ask.

The leader generates questions and the group responds. Other members of the group are invited by the leader to ask additional questions and seek clarification of any words, phrases or sentences of which they are unsure.

The leader then summarizes what that particular section of the text was about, and asks other members if they would like to elaborate upon, or revise the summary. Finally, in preparation for moving on to the next portion of text, the group repeats the process beginning with predictions.

This is completed in such a way that responsibility for participation is gradually and confidently taken by your students to enable them to apply the strategies, and learn from this text, and transfer this to reading independently.

Your Role in Reciprocal Teaching

The teacher plays an important scaffolding role when students are learning about Reciprocal Teaching. If a student leader is not sure what to do, you may prompt in the following sorts of ways:

- What questions do you think a teacher would ask?
- Remember, *clarifying* means asking about something you don't understand.
- Remember, *summarizing* means telling a shortened version of the main points.
- If you can't think of a question, you could summarize first.

Students are also praised for their leadership and given feedback about it. For example:

- That was a good question because.....
- A question I would have asked would have been.....
- You could have phrased it this way.....

Introducing Reciprocal Teaching to Your Students

Reciprocal Teaching is complex and you would not introduce it until you know that your students are ready. This probably could be applicable to some students in Grade 1 and many more in Grade 2. You may have observed that some of your students are ready to move into such a routine. At this stage, it is very important to follow the gradual Release of Responsibility model of both the strategies and the process through:

- explicit instruction;
- modeling;
- guided practice;
- small group work.

This is completed in such a way that responsibility for participation is gradually and confidently taken by your students to enable them to apply the strategies, and learn from the text, and finally use the strategies independently.

Students who are ready to work with Reciprocal Teaching may find it useful to have a guide to the sorts of questions they can ask or a script for responding to their role. A Bookmark is useful. You can glue the two sides and laminate them for student use.

The following **questions** are useful for the person summarizing.

- What is the passage mostly about?
- What information in this passage tells you that?
- Look for the topic sentence.
- What are the most important points in this text?
- What information is less important and could be left out?

The following **stems** are useful for the person summarizing

- This text or paragraph is mostly about...
- The topic sentence is...
- The author is trying to tell me...

A Framed Summary Sentence

This story/passage about ____ begins with ____, tells us ____, and ends with ____.