Reciprocal Teaching

FOR-PD’s Reading Strategy of the Month May-July 2005
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Rationale:
“Reading comprehension has been defined as a process of constructing meaning from written texts, based on a complex coordination of a number of interrelated sources of information (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, & Wilkinson as cited in Mastropieri, Margo, & Scruggs, 1997).” The most important goal of reading education is to develop readers who can derive meaning from texts. There is considerable evidence that good readers are strategic readers. Strategic readers have a repertoire of strategies that they can pull from as they read. Strategic readers are highly metacognitive, which refers to the reader’s awareness of his or her own reading and thinking and the ability of the reader to apply self-correction measures in an effort to understand the text.

Why do strategies work? Strategies are effective because they encourage development of text representations that may not develop in the absence of instruction (Pressley & Wharton-McDonald, 1997). Students must receive explicit instruction in when to use the strategy, why to use the strategy, and how to use the strategy. In the 1970’s and 80’s researchers identified strategies that increased student understanding of text and the most effective ways to teach those strategies. In 2001, the National Reading Panel identified multiple strategy instruction as an effective means of improving text comprehension.

Reciprocal teaching is a scaffolded discussion technique that is built on four strategies that good readers use to comprehend text: predicting, questioning, clarifying, and summarizing (Palinscar & Brown, 1984). Reciprocal teaching is a research-proven technique for teaching multiple comprehension strategies (Oczuks, 2003). The National Reading Panel (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2000) has advocated the use of cooperative and collaborative learning with multiple reading and learning strategies and highly recommends reciprocal teaching as an effective teaching practice that improves students’ reading comprehension.

Reciprocal Teaching focuses on helping students acquire comprehension strategies. Teaching students the four strategies empowers students with tools that excellent readers use to meet their goals in reading a text. Poor readers become active and strategic much like “excellent readers.” By using Reciprocal Teaching, teachers instruct students by using four basic strategies instead of reading skills. Teaching students multiple strategies encourages them to read as good readers read by providing them a bank of strategies they can draw upon. Students practice the strategies while reading actual text. Students are able to generalize the strategies into other content areas because they have been provided with meaningful and authentic purposes for use of the strategies. The teacher provides the scaffolding and support as students develop the strategies. Scaffolding provides support to help learners bridge the gap between what they know and can do and what they need to accomplish in order to succeed in a learning task. Students provide support to each other and develop a sense of community.

The goals of reciprocal teaching include (Oczuks, 2003):

- Using four strategies to improve comprehension
Teacher scaffolds instruction of the strategy by modeling, guiding, and applying the strategies.
Guide students to become metacognitive and reflective in their strategy use
Help students monitor their reading comprehension
Use the social nature of learning to improve and scaffold reading comprehension
Instruction is provided through a variety of classroom settings – whole-group, guided reading groups, and literature circles.

Brown and Palincsar (1984) provided the initial research on this teaching technique. They found that students who were taught these strategies and who were involved in the Reciprocal Teaching routine, made significant gains in comprehension in a relatively short time frame. Students who scored around 30 percent on a comprehension assessment scored 70 to 80 percent after just 15-20 days of instruction using reciprocal teaching (Brown and Palincsar, 1984). After one year, the students maintained the comprehension growth they had achieved (Oczuks, 2003). In her own research with reciprocal teaching, Oczuks (2003), found that student’s reading levels rose one half to one full grade level in just 18-20 reciprocal teaching lessons two or three times per week. In another study, Cooper et. al. reported dramatic results in reading levels after 76 reciprocal teaching lessons (Cooper, Boschken, McWilliams & Pistochni, 2000).

How to Use the Strategy:
The first step is direct explanation of the strategy. This entails telling and showing students when and how the strategy should be used. The teacher should explain to students that they will be introduced to four strategies that good readers use to comprehend text – predicting, questioning, clarifying, and summarizing.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predicting</th>
<th>Good readers predict before reading the text and while reading the text. When you make a prediction, you make a guess as to the content of the text based on clues the author provides. As you read, you will either confirm or revise your prediction. You might also make other predictions. Model how to predict for students by looking and noting the title, author, cover illustrations (if using a book), and illustrations or graphics within the text. Model for students how to use clues from the text to make predictions. &quot;When I predict, I use what I have read or clues from the illustrations to help me figure out what I will learn or what will happen in the text.&quot;</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Questioning</td>
<td>Good readers ask questions before reading, during reading, and after reading. Questions are asked of the author or about the content of the reading. Explain to students that asking questions helps the reader monitor and understand their reading. &quot;When I ask a question, I ask something that can be answered as I read or after I finish reading.&quot; Model for students how to generate questions. Students can also develop questions based on the text.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Clarifying</td>
<td>When good readers read a word that doesn’t make sense or read a confusing part of the text that doesn’t make sense, they stop and</td>
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clarify. Explain to students what clarifying entails. "When I clarify, I make clear something that was confusing or that I didn’t understand. For example, I came to a word I didn't know. I thought to myself, there are a couple of things I could do. First, I could read on and hopefully, the word will make sense to me after reading further. Or I could ask a friend to help me understand this word." At this point students might brainstorm ways they can clarify when the text doesn’t make sense to them. Write down and hang up the brainstorming that students do so that they can refer to it later.

Summarizing

After reading a text, good readers are able to recall important points and details from what they have read. Knowledge of text and story structure will help students develop good summaries. Model for students how to identify key ideas and how to put those key ideas together to create a summary. "When I summarize, I tell in my own words the important things I have read."

- Next, the teacher models the strategy through the use of think-alouds. During this step, the students really gets to see what should be going on in their head as they read. Think-alouds make the invisible processes visible to students. Students might be given the task of taking notes while the teacher is modeling. Students can take notes on the language the teacher uses while modeling the strategy or why each strategy was used. As the teacher continues to model, students should begin assuming some of the tasks. Research has shown that both teacher and student use of think-alouds improves reading comprehension (Duke & Pearson, 2002)

- Next, the teacher and students should collaboratively use the strategies; I do it, you do it, we do it. The teacher must facilitate discussions in which students and/or teachers collaborate to form joint interpretations of text and explicitly discuss the mental processes and cognitive strategies involved in comprehension. Research on collaborative use of strategies indicates that students make significantly higher gains on comprehension subtests than those students who were not involved in collaborative use of the strategy (Williams, 2002).

- The final step of instruction is guided practice with students moving toward independent use of the strategies or what is better known as gradual release of responsibility. Scaffolding is the process of providing teacher support and gradually removing it until students are working independently. Scaffolding includes teacher modeling, student participation, and reflection on strategy use (Oczuks, 2003). During this step, guided reading groups are instituted.

**Predicting**

*Predicting* involves previewing the text to anticipate what will happen next. The thinking processes involved in predicting assist students in making meaning (Block, Rodgers, & Johnson, 2004). In order to do this successfully, students must activate relevant background knowledge that they possess on the topic. Once students have made a prediction, they have a purpose for reading, to confirm or disprove their prediction. Furthermore, the opportunity has been created for the students to link the new
knowledge with the knowledge they already possess. By making predictions, readers are using the following processes: prior knowledge, thinking on a literal and inferential level, adding to their knowledge base, linking efferent and affective thinking processes, making connections, and filling the gaps in the author's writing (Block et. al., 2004).

Readers must make logical predictions based on information from the text and their prior knowledge. Knowledge of fictional text structures such as characters, setting, problem, resolution, theme or lesson assist students in making predictions. Nonfiction reader aids such as text headings, illustrations, and features such as maps, captions, and tables also help students make logical predictions about what they think they will learn from the reading. Giving students the opportunity to preview what they will be reading by discussing text features and using graphic organizers provides students with visual clues for predicting (Oczkus, 2003).

**Before reading**, good readers make predictions about what they are going to read. Students should be encouraged to look at the front cover of trade books and picture books. Subheadings, illustrations and captions, as well as graphics and charts in informational text. Students should make logical predictions based on what they have seen. Asking students, "Based on the information you have seen, what do you think you will learn?" Ask students for their rationale. "What in the text makes you think this way?" "Did you use any other information aside from the text to formulate your prediction?" This is a skill that all students must have for the FCAT; they must be able to provide evidence from the text.

**During reading**, good readers gather evidence about their predictions; revising, abandoning, or creating new predictions based on what they are reading. Students should be asking themselves, "Does the text support this prediction?" If evidence to support their prediction is not in the text, should the prediction be revised or abandoned?

The teacher should draw the student's attention to specific contextual features for making predictions rather than simply asking them to guess what will come next. Some questions for focusing students on contextual features include:

**Narrative Text:**

- What do you know about this character that helps you predict what s/he will do next?
- Given the situation in the story, what will possibly happen next?
- In stories like this one, what usually happens next?

**Informational Text:**

- What do you know about this subject that can help you predict what will be covered next?
- Look at the sub-heading (or picture, map, graph, etc.). What does the sub-heading lead you to believe will be presented next?
- Why do you think the author wrote this? What information will be presented next?

To **assess** prediction skills, the teacher might observe the student as they are reading. When observing the students the teacher will hear the language of prediction (Mowery in Oczkus, 2003). The students might say things like:
I think ....
I’ll bet...
I wonder if ...
I imagine ...
I suppose ...
I predict ...
I think this text will be about...

By observing, teachers can see specific reading behaviors that students demonstrate. When observing students make predictions from fiction, the teacher should look for the following reading behaviors:

- Does the student preview the cover of the text and make predictions based on the illustration or title?
- Does the student stop to make predictions while reading?
- When reading the text, does the student make predictions based on clues from the text or illustrations?
- Does the student use knowledge of story structure to make predictions?

When observing students make predictions from nonfiction text, the teacher should look for the following reading behaviors:

- Does the student use headings or subheadings to make predictions?
- Does the student use illustrations, charts, graphs, or maps to make predictions?
- Does the student predict what is likely to be learned based on clues from the text or illustrations?
- Does the student use prior knowledge of the topic to make predictions?

Questioning

Good readers ask questions throughout the reading process. When students generate questions, they first identify the kind of information that is significant enough to provide the substance for a question. They then pose this information in question form and self-test to ascertain that they can indeed answer their own questions. Question generating is a flexible strategy to the extent that students can be taught and encouraged to generate questions at many levels.

When students know prior to reading that they each need to think of a question about the text, they read with an awareness of the text’s important ideas. They automatically increase their reading comprehension when they read the text, process the meaning, make inferences and connections to prior knowledge, and finally, generate a question (Lubliner in Oczuks, 2003). Students must be shown how to generate questions about a text’s main idea, important details, and about textual inferences.

To assess the students ability to develop questions, the teacher might observe the student as they are reading. When observing the students the teacher will hear the language of questioning (Oczuks, 2003). The questions might include the following words:

- Who...
- What...
By observing, teachers can see specific reading behaviors that students demonstrate. When observing students generate questions based on fiction or nonfiction text, the teacher should look for the following reading behaviors:

- Are student generated questions based on the text?
- Does the student generate questions based on the main idea of the text or story?
- Does the student generate detail-oriented questions?
- Does the student generate questions based on story structure?
- Does the student generate questions based on text structure?
- Does the student generate inferential or higher order questions?

**Clarifying**

**Clarifying** is an extremely important strategy for those students who have a history of comprehension difficulties. Students may believe that the purpose of reading is to say the words correctly. They may not even be bothered that words, sentences, or even whole passages do not make sense. By teaching students to clarify, it will help focus their attention on the fact that there may be reasons why the text is difficult to understand. The clarifying strategy teaches students to identify when they don’t understand and to take necessary steps to restore meaning. The clarifying strategy makes problem solving during reading more explicit. When students can identify and clarify difficult words and confusing portions of text, they are becoming strategic readers.

Teachers must model how to figure out difficult words and confusing portions of text. A teacher may model figuring out a difficult word by identifying chunks within the word, blending the sounds of the word, thinking of another word that is similar to the confusing word, or using the context of the word. A teacher may ask students to circle confusing words, phrases, or sentences while they read. A teacher may model figuring out confusing ideas by modeling how to reread the text, reading on for more clues, using background knowledge of the topic, or talking to a friend about the reading. One way Oczkus (2003) taught clarification to her students was through the use of a bookmark. The bookmark cued students to fix-up strategies that could be used when trying to clarify words or ideas.

Teachers should model the use of these four strategies to help students figure out meanings of words as they read.

- Look for little words inside big words.
- Look for base or root words, prefixes, or suffixes.
- Look for a comma following an unfamiliar word. Sometimes the author will give the definition after the comma.
- Keep reading to see if you can get a sense of the definition.
Teachers should model the use of these fix up strategies to help students who don’t understand ideas in the reading (Tovani, 2000).

- Stop and think about what you have already read.
- Reread.
- Adjust your reading rate: slow down or speed up.
- Try and connect the text to something you read in another book, what you know about the world, or to something you have experienced.
- Visualize.
- Reflect on what you have read.
- Use print conventions (key words, bold print, italicized words, and punctuation).
- Notice patterns in the text structure.

To assess student use of clarification skills, the teacher might observe the student as they are reading. When observing students that are not understanding words or ideas, the teacher might hear the following language (Oczkus, 2003):

- I didn’t understand the part ...
- This (word, sentence, or paragraph) didn’t make sense...
- I can’t figure out...
- I couldn’t pronounce ...
- I don’t know what ___ means.
- This part isn’t clear....

After students have been taught to clarify misunderstandings, the teacher will hear students saying the following:

- I reread the parts that I didn’t understand.
- I read on to look for clues.
- I thought about what I know.
- I looked for parts of the word I know.
- I tried to sound the word out.
- I think this word is similar to....
- I tried another word that made sense.

When observing the students "clarify," the teacher will see the students demonstrate specific reading behaviors. When clarifying with fiction, students may express confusion with specific portions of text, such as ideas or events that are difficult to understand. Students may also identify words that are difficult to pronounce. When clarifying with nonfiction text, students point out confusion related to the content of the text. They should point out a specific section of the text that is confusing. Often times, students will identify words that were hard for them to pronounce. These words may be content-related. When students are able to clarify they are able to identify specific strategies they have used and tell how the strategy has helped them to understand the text (Oczuks, 2003).

**Summarizing**
Summarizing provides the students an opportunity to identify and integrate the most important information. Summarizing is extremely important in helping students’ reading comprehension by helping them construct an overall understanding of the text (Oczuks, 2003). Summarizing reading helps students become proficient readers.

To summarize effectively, students must recall and reorganize only the important pieces of information from the text. Knowledge of text structures and features also helps students summarize information. When summarizing a story, students may use characters, setting, problem, events, and resolution to help guide their summary. When summarizing informational text, students must be able to determine important points and arrange them in a logical order. For informational text, the students must be able to identify the main idea(s) of the text and supporting details.

Another reading strategy that supports summarization is Story Mapping. Story maps are templates that provide a concrete framework for students to identify the elements of a story. Both of these strategies will assist students in summarizing the key points of text.

To assess the student’s ability to summarize, the teacher might observe a retelling of what the student has read. When observing the students summarize, the teacher will hear the language of summarizing (Oczuks, 2003).

- The most important ideas are …
- The main idea is …
- This part was about …
- First, …. Next, …. Then, …
- This story takes place in …
- The main characters are …
- The problem of the story is …

When observing the students summarize the teacher will see students demonstrate specific reading behaviors. When summarizing stories, students will explain in their own words the main characters of the story, the setting of the story, problem of the story, key events from the story, and the resolution of that problem. They might even summarize the story chronologically. When summarizing informational text, students will explain in their own words the main points and details from the text. They will leave out unnecessary information and details. They might even refer to illustrations from the text during the retelling.

References:


Shanahan & F.V. Rodriguez-Brown (Eds.), *49th yearbook of the National Reading Conference* (pp. 477-486). Chicago, IL: National Reading Conference.


