

# Reciprocal Teaching

Reciprocal teaching is an instructional procedure designed to enhance students' comprehension of text. The procedure was designed by Anne Marie Palincsar, from Michigan State University and Anne Brown, from the University of Illinois.

It is characterized by:

- a **dialogue** between students and teacher, each taking a turn in the role of dialogue leader;
- "**reciprocal**": interactions where one person acts in response to the other;
- structured dialogue using **four strategies**: questioning, summarizing, clarifying, predicting.

## Why were these four strategies selected?

Each of these strategies helps students to construct meaning from text and monitor their reading to ensure that they are in fact understanding what they read. Students may find the set of cards developed by Kathie Babigian, helpful to guide their questioning process:

**Summarizing.** This strategy provides the opportunity to identify, paraphrase, and integrate important information in the text.

**Questioning.** When students generate questions, they first identify the kind of information that is significant enough that it could provide the substance for a question. Then they pose this information in a question form and self--test to ascertain that they can indeed answer their own question.

**Clarifying.** When teaching students to clarify, their attention is called to the many reasons why text is difficult to understand; for example new vocabulary, unclear referent words, and unfamiliar or difficult concepts. Recognizing these blocks to understanding signals the reader to reread, read ahead, or ask for help.

**Predicting.** This strategy requires the reader to hypothesize about what the author might discuss next in the text. This provides a purpose for reading: to confirm or disapprove their hypotheses. An opportunity has been created for the

students to link the new knowledge they will encounter in the text with the knowledge they already possess. It also facilitates the use of text structure as students learn that headings, subheadings, and questions imbedded in the text are useful means of anticipating what might occur next.

### **How are the four strategies used in a session?**

The discussion leader generates questions to which the group responds. Additional questions are raised by other members of the group. The leader then summarizes the text and asks other members if they would like to elaborate upon or revise the summary. Clarifications are discussed. Then, in preparation for moving on to the next portion of text, the group generates predictions. The goal is flexible use of the strategies.

### **How are the four strategies introduced to students?**

- During the initial phase of instruction the teacher assumes primary responsibility for leading the dialogues and implementing the strategies.
- Through modeling the teacher demonstrates how to use the strategies while reading text.
- During guided practice the teacher supports students by adjusting the demands of the task based on each student's level of proficiency.
- Eventually the students learn to conduct the dialogues with little or no teacher assistance.
- The teacher assumes the role of a coach/facilitator by providing students with evaluative information regarding their performance and prompting them to higher levels of participation.

### **How should students be grouped for instruction?**

Students should be taught in small heterogeneous groups to ensure that each student has ample opportunity to practice using the strategies while receiving feedback from other group members. The optimal group size is between six to eight students. Frequent guided practice is essential in helping students become more proficient in their use of the strategies.

## **What criteria should be used to select appropriate instructional materials?**

- Select materials on the basis of the student's reading/listening comprehension level.
- Identify materials that are sufficiently challenging.
- Incorporate text that is representative of the kinds of materials students are expected to read in school.
- Generally students have been taught the Reciprocal teaching procedure using expository or informational text. The story structure in narrative text lends itself quite well. also. Students are taught to use the four strategies incorporating the elements of story grammar (e.g., the setting, characters, plot, problem, and solution).

## **How much time should be allocated for instruction?**

The first days of instruction are spent introducing the students to the four strategies. The length of each session will depend upon the age and the attention of the students but will usually fall within the range of 20 to 40 minutes per session. It is recommended that the initial instruction take place on consecutive days. After this point, instruction can be provided on alternate days if necessary.