



CHAPTER 1

The Four RECIPROCAL TEACHING *Strategies*

Predictions are based on facts from the book that lead you to what is likely to come next. Predicting gives you a feel for what you are reading and it makes you want to read more.

—Tanya, grade 6

Reciprocal teaching has four main strategies that teachers and students employ together to comprehend text: predicting, questioning, clarifying, and summarizing. I like to call the strategies the “Fabulous Four” or the “Be the Teacher” strategies because children can relate to and understand these terms. My students know that when I refer to the Fabulous Four I am directing their attention to a set of strategies that good readers use. They also know that the phrase “Be the Teacher” suggests that they take turns playing the teacher’s role while using the strategies.

Each reciprocal teaching strategy has an important role in the reading comprehension process. The four strategies are part of a comprehensive reading comprehension program that is based on all the strategies that good readers use, such as previewing, self-questioning, visualizing, making connections, monitoring, knowing how words work, summarizing, and evaluating (McLaughlin & Allen, 2002). The order in which the reciprocal teaching strategies are used is not fixed; it depends on the text and the reader. For example, sometimes when I am reading a mystery with students, we naturally pause between chapters, bursting with predictions for what will happen next before we summarize, ask questions, and clarify the clues that we have so far. Other times, however, it may be more natural to summarize and clarify before making predictions and asking further questions.

This chapter offers a description of each reciprocal teaching strategy along with prompts to encourage students to use the language of a given strategy. The prompts provide students with the necessary support to become independent in the strategies, and, when combined with constant modeling of the strategies, they also help students to deepen their reading comprehension and ability to apply the reciprocal teaching strategies.

Predicting

Predicting involves previewing the text to anticipate what may happen next. Readers can use information from the text and their prior knowledge to make logical predictions before and during reading. When you are reading a piece of fiction with a class, lead the students through a discussion of the text structure of stories. Review elements usually found in fiction such as characters, setting, a problem, a resolution, and a theme or lesson. Prior to reading, have your students preview the book’s covers,

title, and illustrations to look for clues about the setting, characters, problems, and key events that may appear in the text. When reading nonfiction with a class, discuss the text's headings, illustrations, and other features, such as maps, captions, and tables, to allow your students to predict what they think they will learn from their reading. For either text type, stop periodically during the reading and ask students to gather clues and make predictions for the next portion of the text. In addition to discussing predictions, you can use a graphic organizer, such as a story map, that fits the text type. Giving students the opportunity to preview what they read by discussing text features and using graphic organizers provides them with visual clues for predicting.

The language that students may use with predicting includes the following phrases (Mowery, 1995):

I think...

I'll bet...

I wonder if...

I imagine...

I suppose...

I predict...

Predicting is a strategy that assists students in setting a purpose for reading and in monitoring their reading comprehension. It allows students to interact more with the text, which makes them more likely to become interested in the reading material while improving their understanding (Fielding, Anderson, & Pearson, 1990; Hansen, 1981). In my experience, students seem to enjoy predicting and do so with exuberance.

Questioning

Good readers ask questions throughout the reading process (Cooper, 1993; Palincsar & Brown, 1986), but formulating questions is a difficult and complex task. 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, 2001). During reciprocal teaching discussions,

students can be asked to “be the teacher” as they create questions to ask one another that are based on important points in the reading.

I teach students to ask several types of questions during reciprocal teaching. However, we initially focus on questions that are answered in the text. Many students begin by asking questions about unimportant details. However, as I continue to model question formulation and students share their questions with the class, the quality and depth of their questions increase. Later in the process, I model how to ask questions based on inferences and main points in a text.

The language of questioning that students may use includes the question words *who*, *what*, *where*, *when*, *why*, *how*, and *what if*.

Most students who I work with enjoy asking questions or being the teacher during reciprocal teaching discussions. For example, during my weekly guided reading session with some second graders, I gave each student a self-stick note to mark the portion of text that he or she wanted to turn into a question. Billy became very enthusiastic every time he read silently with the purpose of generating questions. After marking a chosen page with his self-stick note, Billy would whisper to me at the reading table, “Mrs. Oczkus, I just found my question!” Students of all grade levels seem to have difficulty waiting to ask their questions, and they prefer to ask questions before they summarize, clarify, or predict the next portion of text. I have learned that it is best to take advantage of the students’ enthusiasm, and I allow students to share questions with the group first. If we are short on class time, I will pair students and have them ask their partners questions, or I will have the students individually write down their questions.

Questioning is an important strategy for good readers. In reciprocal teaching lessons, students learn to generate questions about a text’s main idea, important details, and about textual inferences, thereby improving their reading comprehension skills. In addition, questioning often becomes the favored strategy of many students.

Clarifying

Although students can be taught to identify difficult words readily and work through them, it is far more difficult for some students to recognize unclear sentences, passages, or chapters. Perhaps the difficulties occur because sometimes even though students can read every word in a given portion of text, they still do not understand the passage’s main idea.

Clarifying helps students monitor their own comprehension as they identify problems that they are having in comprehending portions of text or figuring out difficult words. During this step of reciprocal teaching, the teacher and students have the opportunity to share “fix-up” strategies to construct meaning.

Most students can easily identify words that they need help deciphering. I often model how to figure out a difficult word and call on volunteers to share such words and how they figured them out. We also may work through a word together by discussing known word chunks and sounds and the context around the word. If your students are reluctant to admit that any vocabulary has caused them problems, a good strategy is to ask them to find a word that they figured out but that might be difficult for a younger child. Then, ask them to tell the class how they would teach the word to the younger child. Sometimes, this technique increases student participation when a class is first starting to learn about clarifying.

The language of clarifying may include the following prompts:

Identifying the problem

I didn't understand the part where...

This [sentence, paragraph, page, chapter] is not clear.

This doesn't make sense.

I can't figure out...

This is a tricky word because...

Clarifying strategies

To clarify an idea

I reread the parts that I didn't understand.

I read on to look for clues.

I think about what I know.

I talk to a friend.

To clarify a word

I reread.

I look for word parts that I know.

I try to blend the sounds together.

I think of another word that looks like this word.

I read on to find clues.

I try another word that makes sense.

The clarifying step of reciprocal teaching makes problem solving during reading more explicit for students. When they learn to identify

and clarify difficult words or confusing portions of text, students become more strategic readers.

Summarizing

Summarizing is a complex process that requires the orchestration of various skills and strategies. To summarize effectively, students must recall and arrange in order only the important events in a text. The summary organization is based on the type of text—either narrative or expository (Lipson, 1996). When summarizing a story, students may use the setting, characters, problem, events, and resolution to guide their summaries. A nonfiction text requires them to determine important points and arrange them in a logical order.

During reciprocal teaching, the teacher and students take turns modeling summarizing. Students may use the following prompts to guide their summaries:

The most important ideas in this text are...

This part was about...

This book was about...

First,...

Next,...

Then,...

Finally,...

The story takes place...

The main characters are...

A problem occurs when...

Summarizing is extremely important because evidence exists that practice in summarizing improves students' reading comprehension of fiction and nonfiction alike, helping them construct an overall understanding of a text, story, chapter, or article (Rinehart, Stahl, & Erickson, 1986; Taylor, 1982). In reciprocal teaching lessons, students are provided with frequent opportunities to witness others summarizing and to participate in creating their own summaries, which helps them become more proficient readers.

Overcoming Obstacles When Implementing Reciprocal Teaching

Although study results indicate that students benefit from instruction using reciprocal teaching (see Introduction for examples), teachers may encounter some common problems when implementing the strategies in their classrooms. Figure 3 lists some of these problems—such as students struggling to use the strategies, creating a noisy classroom, and becoming bored with the strategies—and their possible solutions. Teachers also can anticipate difficulties with a specific reciprocal teaching strategy and overcome them with the suggestions provided in Figure 4.

In addition to providing students with the appropriate prompts and being aware of the problems that they may have with each strategy, reciprocal teaching instruction should include the following four instructional foundations: scaffolding, think-alouds, metacognition, and cooperative learning. Keep these building blocks in mind when introducing and extending reciprocal teaching lessons in any setting from whole-class groupings to literature circles.

Figure 3	
Problems That Teachers May Encounter With Reciprocal Teaching and Suggested Solutions	
Problem	Solution
Your students are not able to employ all four reciprocal teaching strategies easily.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use teacher modeling to introduce reciprocal teaching. Frequent teacher modeling is necessary. • You and your students can participate in think-alouds during which students explain how and why each strategy is helping them read.
You are not sure how to assess your students' progress.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Observe your students' verbal responses. • Ask students to write brief individual responses for each strategy, or have a group collaborate on a response. • To assess individual progress, call on any student in the group to share, or collect written responses.
<i>(continued)</i>	
<p>Adapted from Hacker, D.J., & Tenent, A. (2002). Implementing reciprocal teaching in the classroom: Overcoming obstacles and making modifications. <i>Journal of Educational Psychology</i>, 94(4), 699–718.</p> <p><i>Reciprocal Teaching at Work: Strategies for Improving Reading Comprehension</i> by Lori D. Oczkus © 2003. Newark, DE: International Reading Association. May be copied for classroom use.</p>	

Figure 3 (continued)

Problems That Teachers May Encounter With Reciprocal Teaching and Suggested Solutions

Problem	Solution
Even with teacher modeling, your students still are not employing the strategies on their own.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Scaffold students' progress through teacher or peer models, and have students take turns using the strategies. Allow for this constant turn-taking for the strategy to work well.• Ask students to verbalize why each strategy is important. Metacognition will aid them in using the strategies when they read on their own.
The classroom sometimes is noisy during reciprocal teaching lessons.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reciprocal teaching does require discussion and a certain amount of noise, but instruct students on how to work together quietly.• Circulate around the room to observe and listen in on groups. Call on groups to perform for the class and model quiet discussions.
You feel that you do not have enough time for reciprocal teaching strategies.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Find time by weaving the strategies throughout the day into reading and content area lessons. Once students are familiar with the four strategies, you can fit them into lessons you are already teaching.• Use reciprocal teaching at least two to three times per week in any combination of settings in order to see results.
Your struggling readers are having trouble using reciprocal teaching strategies with peers in grade-level material.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Try meeting with struggling readers several times a week to practice the strategies. Meet as an intervention group consistently all year if possible.
Your students are having trouble using the four strategies in longer texts.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Start by using small chunks of text, such as a few paragraphs, and try gradually increasing the chunks of text used during reciprocal teaching lessons to pages, lessons, and eventually entire chapters.
Reciprocal teaching has become boring for the students and/or the teacher.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Do not use paragraph-by-paragraph teacher-led lessons all the time.• Use the lessons in this book, which have dozens of applications for varying the delivery and setting for reciprocal teaching.• Include in your lessons other reading comprehension strategies such as making connections to prior knowledge and responding to literature.

Reciprocal Teaching at Work: Strategies for Improving Reading Comprehension by Lori D. Oczkus © 2003. Newark, DE: International Reading Association. May be copied for classroom use.

Figure 4

Overcoming the Difficulties That Students Experience With Reciprocal Teaching Strategies

Common Problems Students Have With...	Try...
Predicting <ul style="list-style-type: none">• making imaginative predictions that are not based on textual clues• not returning to predictions after reading to check their accuracy• predicting awkwardly with expository text	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• modeling predictions by using think-alouds and textual clues• inviting the discussion director of small reciprocal teaching groups (see chapter 4) to return to predictions after reading to check their accuracy• asking students to preview illustrations and headings and think about what they believe they will learn from an expository text
Questioning <ul style="list-style-type: none">• asking only literal or superficial questions• not asking any inferential questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• continuously modeling higher-level questions that require using textual clues and prior knowledge• providing question starters• asking students to read the material and write several questions before meeting with a group• asking partners to alternate roles—one student reads aloud and the other asks a question• having students first read the material silently while hunting for questions, then read the material aloud before writing questions to answer and discuss
Clarifying <ul style="list-style-type: none">• skipping the clarifying step altogether because they think there is nothing to clarify• clarifying words, not ideas• letting the teacher do all the clarifying	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• modeling words and ideas to clarify• explicit teacher modeling of how to clarify ideas• using the Clarifying Bookmarks (see page 95)• asking students to circle or write words and/or sentences to clarify
Summarizing <ul style="list-style-type: none">• giving summaries that are word-by-word retellings of the text• providing summaries that miss main points• rarely including main themes in summaries• not liking to summarize because it is difficult for them	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• having students work in groups on other strategies but work as a class to contribute to a teacher-guided summary• asking groups to write a summary to share with the class for comments and ideas for revision, then having them rewrite and share again• having groups write and share summaries, and asking the class to vote for the strongest summary• getting at deeper themes by asking students to write letters to you or a classmate telling what they learned from the book• trying the “clear” summary minilesson (page 182) or the movie clips or freeze frames lesson (page 116)• making the summarizer task fun by having a student be a “reporter,” using a microphone or drawing a quick sketch on a whiteboard or sheet of paper

Adapted from Hacker, D.J., & Tenent, A. (2002). Implementing reciprocal teaching in the classroom: Overcoming obstacles and making modifications. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 94(4), 699–718.

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Scaffolding

Scaffolding reading instruction is similar to teaching a child how to ride a bicycle. First, the child watches people bicycle riding to get the idea and motivation for his or her own riding skills. Then, the parent holds on to the bicycle's seat and guides the child for a time. Eventually, the parent lets go of the seat but remains nearby (possibly even running next to the bicycle) in case support is needed. Finally, the child pedals away on his or her own.

During reciprocal teaching, the instruction is scaffolded, or supported. The students can see models of the four strategies, experience some "seat holding" as they try out reciprocal teaching in a supported environment, and, finally, work independently as they read while using reciprocal teaching strategies to help them comprehend the text. Every time students are engaged in reciprocal teaching, each has the opportunity to participate in scaffolded instruction because modeling and support are integral steps of the reciprocal teaching model. Therefore, students are propelled to the next reading level as the support that they receive guides them through more difficult texts and reading tasks.

Think-Alouds

Reciprocal teaching is not a pencil-and-paper activity. It was designed as a discussion technique in which think-alouds play an integral part. During a reciprocal teaching think-aloud, the reader talks aloud about each of the four strategies. Think-alouds show students what a good reader is thinking while reading, which again provides scaffolding toward developing good reading comprehension.

The steps to reading comprehension are less tangible than, say, the steps to a math problem, so this type of instruction may be new to teachers and students alike. Successful reciprocal teaching gives students ongoing opportunities to witness and conduct think-alouds using the four strategies. The teacher should not introduce reciprocal teaching and then abandon the modeling. Instead, think-alouds should occur every time students engage in reciprocal teaching lessons, and they should be conducted by both the teacher and students, who can take turns verbalizing the use of the reciprocal teaching strategies. This method allows students to see more clearly the steps to creating understanding while reading.

Metacognition

Metacognition is the awareness of one's own thinking processes. The think-aloud process goes hand in hand with metacognition as students talk about their thinking and how they are using predictions, questions, clarifications, and summaries. As the teacher, you can lead your students by sharing how the strategies have helped you comprehend a given text.

A discussion rich with metacognitive thinking will include student comments such as the following:

Prediction helped me the most today because it got me interested in the reading.

Clarifying helped me figure out the word *citizen* because I thought of the word *city*, and I reread the sentence to see what made sense.

Summarizing helped me remember all the important events in the story.

I had to reread the book to get the main idea so I could ask a question.

Metacognition is an integral component in reciprocal teaching because students learn to consciously think about and reflect on their strategy use. Ultimately, all students are trained to employ the same strategies that good readers use when monitoring their reading comprehension, and, therefore, students improve their own comprehension.

Cooperative Learning

The National Reading Panel (2000) recommends cooperative learning for improved reading comprehension, especially in content area texts.

Because reciprocal teaching is intended to be a discussion technique, cooperative learning is integral to it. Reciprocal teaching builds on the cooperative nature of learning that causes one's reading comprehension to be deepened through social interactions.

The cooperative nature of reciprocal teaching is an important part of the scaffolded instruction, think-alouds, and metacognition inherent to reciprocal teaching lessons. Even when I teach whole-class lessons, I incorporate quick activities throughout the lesson that require students to turn to a partner in order to engage the students in more cooperative learning practice. Cooperative learning also occurs when students and teachers think aloud during discussions and their metacognition is made

public. The following are some specific examples of cooperative learning in various classroom settings: If the class is reading a social studies text, I may model a summary of a portion of it and ask partners to work together to create a summary for the next section. When reading a novel as a class, groups of students each may be assigned a strategy to report on to the class. Even during guided reading group sessions, I might have pairs ask each other their questions after reading. Cooperative learning is, of course, already in place during literature circles, where students may work together to construct a recording sheet that includes their group members' collaborative efforts for a prediction, question, clarification, and summary.

What Reciprocal Teaching Does Not Accomplish

Although reciprocal teaching touches on four important strategies that students will use almost every time they read, students also need instruction in interacting with the text through personal connections, connections to other books, and connections to the broader world around them (Keene & Zimmermann, 1997). Depending on the text selection, the teacher may activate the students' prior knowledge or may need to supply some background information before reading to help them understand the text better. Good readers also visualize as they read and comprehend, and students may need further assistance in this important reading strategy. Many texts also require and invite the reader to make an aesthetic response to reading (Rosenblatt, 1978). Rich classroom discussions in which students have opportunities to react personally and emotionally to the reading, to express their opinions of the text, and to evaluate the text are extremely valuable in teaching reading. Discussion of the author's craft, the theme of the piece, or controversial issues addressed in text are all critical to helping students to comprehend text. If reading instruction were to focus only on the four reciprocal teaching strategies, teachers would miss out on important opportunities to build students' reading comprehension based on many of the humorous, interesting, and emotional responses that students have to what they read. It is through these types of aesthetic responses that teachers often are able to motivate students to love reading.

Figure 5
Books on Reciprocal Teaching or With Lessons That Strengthen Reciprocal Teaching

- Cooper, J.D., Boschken, I., McWilliams, J., & Pistoichini, L. (1999). *Soar to success: The intermediate intervention program*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Hoyt, L. (1999). *Revisit, reflect, retell: Strategies for improving reading comprehension*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Hoyt, L. (2002). *Make it real: Strategies for success with informational texts*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Lubliner, S. (2001). *A practical guide to reciprocal teaching*. Bothell, WA: Wright Group.
- McLaughlin, M., & Allen, M.B. (2002). *Guided comprehension: A teaching model for grades 3–8*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association.
- McLaughlin, M., & Allen, M.B. (2002). *Guided comprehension in action: Lessons for grades 3–8*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

Reciprocal teaching is a wonderful tool that educators can use as part of their repertoire of reading comprehension strategies, but they also should teach scaffolded lessons on other strategies that students will need to become successful, lifelong readers (see the list of general reading comprehension books in Figure 1 on page 5). Figure 5 offers a list of books on reciprocal teaching and that contain lessons on reciprocal teaching for further reference.

Assessment Options for Reciprocal Teaching

Assessment tools for reciprocal teaching include the observation of students during discussions and some occasional, brief written responses using the four reciprocal teaching strategies.

What to look for (see the rubric in Appendix A on page 195)

- student use of each strategy
- orchestrated use of all four strategies
- ability to define each strategy and explain how it helps with reading comprehension (see also Appendix C on page 203)

How to help students

- teach the minilessons at the end of each chapter to small groups or the whole class

CHAPTER SUMMARY

- Reciprocal teaching, when used consistently, can produce rapid results and growth in comprehension for readers of all ages (Cooper et al., 2000; Palincsar & Brown, 1984).
- Four strategies used by good readers—predicting, questioning, clarifying, and summarizing—are employed in any order during reciprocal teaching sessions.
- Predicting helps students anticipate events, actions, and problems in the text.
- Questioning is important because good readers self-question before, during, and after reading.
- Clarifying assists students in identifying problems or areas of confusion as they read and offers ways to solve the problems.
- Summarizing is a complex skill that requires students to select and arrange in order only the most important points from the text. Evidence exists that, when students are taught to summarize, their reading comprehension improves.
- When attempting to implement reciprocal teaching, teachers also may face common obstacles (see Figure 3 on page 19).
- Students may encounter some common difficulties as they work through the strategies (refer to Figure 4 on page 21).
- The building blocks to successful reciprocal teaching instruction are scaffolded instruction, think-alouds performed by the teacher and students, metacognition, and cooperative learning.
- Reciprocal teaching, although very effective, does not stand alone. Its four strategies are part of a broader comprehension framework of skills and strategies that should be modeled for and taught to students. Other important comprehension strategies include visualizing, making connections, and evaluating, or making judgments (Keene & Zimmermann, 1997; McLaughlin & Allen, 2002; Pearson et al., 1992).

Reflections for Group Study, Self-Study, or Staff Development

- 1 Describe each reciprocal teaching strategy and explain how each helps readers to understand text. How do the strategies work together as a package? In what order should you teach them?
- 2 What are some language prompts that you can use with your students to get them started with reciprocal teaching strategies?
- 3 List some common obstacles that teachers encounter when implementing reciprocal teaching. How can you anticipate and overcome them?
- 4 List some common problems that students may have with each strategy. How can you assist your students with these problems?
- 5 How will you address your students' problem areas and reinforce their strengths?
- 6 Why does reciprocal teaching not stand alone? What other important strategies should be part of a comprehensive reading comprehension program?
- 7 What are the four important building blocks that must be in place in order for reciprocal teaching to be successful? Explain how each foundation works to create an environment for learning.
- 8 Demonstrate a sample think-aloud using one of the strategies.
- 9 Name some assessment tools that you can use to evaluate student progress in the four strategies.