

Reciprocal Teaching (RT) – Peer to Peer Teaching

Description

Reciprocal Teaching consists of a set of strategies that are first introduced and modeled by the teacher and then used by students in pairs or in small groups. The skills are (1) summarizing or retelling, (2) predicting, (3) clarifying, and (4) asking and answering questions (see other strategies for more detail about individual strategies). Strategies can be taught in any order but are most powerful if taught in combination. During the initial phase of instruction, the teacher assumes the primary responsibility for teaching and demonstrating the strategies. Students slowly take over and practice these strategies with each other until they can work independently in their groups. The strategy is best used with “informational” non-fiction texts but can be adapted for narratives.

Purpose

Reciprocal teaching consists of a set of strategies that are used to increase comprehension, promote collaboration, and foster meta-cognitive skills. Teachers and students take turns interacting with the text and leading various activities. The technique not only supports improved listening skills and greater understanding of written texts, but also helps students monitor their own learning and thinking. Low level readers can greatly benefit from the opportunities to practice communication skills in a supportive setting (pairs or small groups) where they can interact with authentic or adapted materials and practice their communication skills while completing a meaningful task.

What to Do

1. Prepare students to use *Reciprocal Teaching* strategies by explaining that you will teach them how to improve their comprehension skills (listening and reading).
2. Introduce the *Retell* or *Summarize* strategy by reviewing a text (oral or written) that students are familiar with. That way, students can focus on the strategy without getting frustrated by too difficult content or new vocabulary.
3. Start by using the *Think Aloud* strategy as you model how you would retell or summarize the section. Say something like, “OK, this text is about Multiple Intelligences; let me see if I remember all the important points. I remember that there is not just one type of intelligence but there are many and that people are smart in different ways. So that can be my first sentence of my summary. ‘There are many ways of being smart.’ So now I need to explain what I mean by that.”
4. Demonstrate the *Clarification Strategy* and continue to use the *Think Aloud* process. Say something like, “I don’t remember the difference between ‘interpersonal’ and ‘intrapersonal,’ so let me write this down as a question so I can double-check and clarify this point.” Then write down the clarification question, “What is the difference between ...?.” Use the same procedure to identify a part of a sentence or passage that might be confusing.

5. As the week progresses, introduce the other RT strategies by modeling them. Select texts that easily let you demonstrate a particular strategy (e.g., texts that have multiple headings, pictures, or graphs that allow students to practice “predicting”).
6. Set up pairs or teams and clarify roles. Ask a team leader to model use of the strategy or lead the task while other students respond. Circle the room and observe but don’t intervene unless invited to do so.
7. Ask students to report back on their discussion and highlight interesting ideas from the group.

Keep in Mind

It may take students a while to become comfortable as peer teachers but it is a set of strategies worth sticking with because of its many benefits. Highlight how much communication skills practice students are getting when they work in small groups or pairs where everyone is involved.

Focus on one strategy at a time, model it, and give students content materials that are easy to understand for the most part. (The exception is practicing *clarifying* where the focus needs to be on sorting out unfamiliar information or understanding new vocabulary).