

## FOR-PD's Reading Strategy of the Month



(Developed by Glass, C. & Zygouris-Coe, V., 2005)

### Rationale:

Reciprocal teaching is an instructional strategy 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 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.

There is strong evidence to support reciprocal teaching as an effective instructional technique that can increase the kind of reading comprehension that is necessary for improved test scores (Ozucks, 2003). Palinscar and Brown (1984) found that when reciprocal teaching was used with groups of students for 15-20 days, the students' reading scores on a standardized assessment of reading comprehension increased from 30 percent to 80 percent. In a study by Palinscar and Klenk (in Ozucks, 2003), students not only improved comprehension skills using the reciprocal teaching method almost immediately, but they also maintained the improved comprehension skills when tested a year later.

Several other studies have demonstrated increased scores on measures of reading comprehension. Miller, Miller, & Rosen's (1988) study found that students taught using reciprocal teaching scored significantly higher on a multiple-choice reading comprehension test. Westera and Moore (1995) used three groups of students: those who received reciprocal teaching for a short period of time, those who received reciprocal teaching for an extended period of time, and the control group who did not receive reciprocal teaching. Their results indicated that the pre-test and post-test reading comprehension scores of students receiving extended reciprocal teaching were significantly higher than the control group. The findings of their study showed that students who received 12 to 16 reciprocal teaching sessions gained on average of more than one age-equivalent year in tested reading comprehension over a five-week period. In this study, 95 percent of the extended reciprocal teaching students showed gains in comprehension, compared to 47 percent of students in the short reciprocal teaching group, and 45 percent of the students in the control group. In a study of high school freshmen, Alfassi (1998) reported that there was a significant difference between reciprocal teaching students and the control group on a measure of passage comprehension. The reciprocal teaching group demonstrated significant improvement on scores from pre-test to post-test. Finally, Johnson-Glenberg's (2000) study demonstrated that those students receiving reciprocal teaching had a more significant gain in answering implicit and explicit open-ended questions than the control group.

A 1990 study by Lysynchuk, Pressley, & Vye investigated the relationship between reciprocal teaching and standardized measures of reading comprehension. They hypothesized that if students with poor comprehension were able to learn the four reciprocal teaching strategies and apply them on their own, that there would be an increase in student performance on standardized measures of comprehension. On pre-test and post-test measures of reading comprehension, the reciprocal teaching students made more gains than the control group. The reciprocal teaching students had an overall mean pre-test to post-test gain of 9.97 percentile points, where as the control group had a corresponding gain of 1.63 percentile points. In this same study, daily comprehension measures were also taken. The students read a 200-word passage and were asked to complete either a retelling or answer 10 short answer questions. Reciprocal teaching students outperformed the control group on both measures.

### How to Use the Strategy:

The outcomes reported above support the conclusion that the teaching of reading strategies, in this case reciprocal teaching strategies, can improve reading performance. Last month, predicting and questioning were introduced. This month clarifying and summarizing will be introduced.

#### 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.

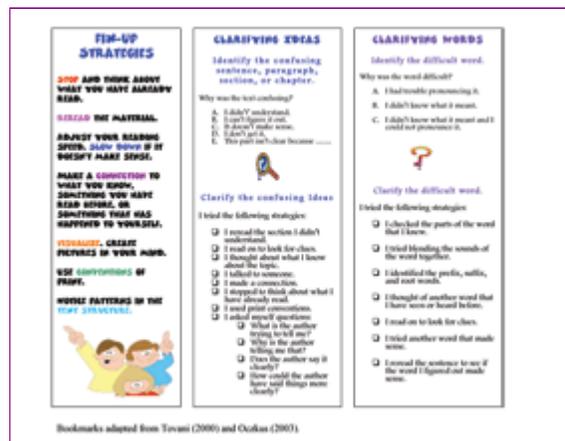
Teachers must model how to figure out difficult words and confusing portions of text. A teacher may model figuring out a difficult word by identifying chunks within the word, blending the sounds of the word, thinking of another word that is similar to the confusing word, or using the context of the word. 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.



(Above are bookmarks that can be used when teaching students to use clarification. These bookmarks were adapted from Tovani (2000) and Oczkus (2003).)

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.

One reading strategy that we have already featured is the **Herringbone Pattern**. The Herringbone organizer provides a scaffold on which students can build their summary. It helps students identify the main idea and supporting details in informational text. 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.

### **Resources:**

**ReadWriteThink Lesson Plan** - This lesson plan uses reciprocal teaching strategies as a vehicle for revising student writing.

**English Online** - this site provides an overview of reciprocal teaching.

**Project WebSIGHT** - this site provides an overview of reciprocal teaching, lesson plans at the elementary and middle school level, and teacher resources.

**Reciprocal Teaching: Support for Struggling Older Readers** - this online article details a secondary teachers use of reciprocal teaching.

**Reciprocal Teaching Bookmarks** - you can print these out and use them with your students.

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FOR-PD is a project of the <http://forpd.ucf.edu/index.html> College of Education and administered under a grant from the [Florida Department of Education](#) and [Just Read, Florida!](#)