Reciprocal teaching

Teaching strategies for reading comprehension

Best for:

Deep learning
Years 3–9
Transfer learning
Surface learning

Overview

Description	Teacher and students exchange views about segments of text. Teacher and students take turns in the role of teacher in leading this dialogue.
	The dialogue is structured using four main strategies:
	• **summarising** — provides the opportunity to identify and integrate the most important information in the text
	• **question generating** — reinforces the summarising strategy
	• **clarifying** — helps teach students about the reasons why a text may be difficult to read and to take the necessary measures to restore meaning (e.g. reread, ask for help)
	• **predicting** — activates students' background knowledge about the topic and gives a purpose to reading — to prove or disprove their hypotheses.
Learning focus (based on Literacy general capability — Reading and viewing progression: Understanding texts)	**Comprehension**
	• contribute to group discussion, demonstrating understanding of a range of texts read by proficient readers (P4)
	• ask relevant questions to demonstrate understanding of a text (P4)
	• recount or describe sequenced ideas or information (P5)
	• identify a clearly evident main idea in a simple text (P5)
	• recount or describe the most relevant details from a text (P6)
	• identify the main idea by synthesising information across a simple text (P6)
	• explain how inferences are drawn using background knowledge or language features (P6)
	• identify the main idea in a text (P7)
	• draw inferences and identify supporting evidence in a text (P7)
	• read and view elementary and some moderately complex texts (P7 and P8)
	• identify the main idea and related or supporting ideas in a moderately complex text (P8)
	• summarise the text, identifying key ideas only (P9)
	Processes
	• use processes such as predicting, confirming predictions, monitoring and connecting relevant elements of the text to build or repair meaning (P9)
	Vocabulary
	• identify key words and the meaning they carry (P5)
Teacher preparation	Assemble required materials, including one or more relevant texts, dictionaries (or links to online dictionary) and reciprocal reading prompt cards. Templates are available on various websites or use the information below to create your own.

Suggested implementation

1. Through modelling and guided practice, introduce the whole class to each of the skills in the process. This can take a few lessons to do well and can build on work from previous years.

2. Work with one small group at a time, so you can model the whole recirocal teaching process. Provide the group with:

    *   the set of prompt cards shown below

    *   multiple copies of an information text (digital or print)

    *   access to dictionaries (online and/or print)

    *   three atlases, if relevant

    *   paper or software for note taking.

3. Work through the instructions on the cards in sequence.

For the first few sessions, the teacher can guide implementation, but the aim is for groups to function independently.

Reciprocal teaching prompt cards

The cards

A   **Predicting:** The leader asks the students to read the topic sentence or subheading and then predict what the rest of the paragraph will be about. Since the topic sentence signals the information to follow, students can be taught how to skim read at this point.

B   **Reading:** This card invites the students to read up to a certain point. They can read silently, to the group, to a partner or in unison, to add variety.

C   **Clarifying:** This card gives the readers the opportunity to have any unfamiliar words, locations or pronunciations 'made clear'.

At first, the students may not volunteer that they don't know something. So you might pick out a word or a place in the text and ask the group to clarify it. Encourage all members to offer clarifications, and talk about how the purpose of reading is to gain meaning in order to learn, deepen our understanding of a topic and enhance our enjoyment of texts.

D   **Questioning:** Ask the students to generate questions at this point (for more on questioning, see the links below). The questions can be answered orally or, depending on your purpose, you might like the group to record some of their questions and answers.

E   **Summarising:** This is the perfect moment to teach key points, note taking and, to some extent, paraphrasing.

F   **Swapping leaders:** Passes leadership to another student.

Some descriptions of reciprocal teaching include only four roles: summarising, questioning, clarifying and predicting.
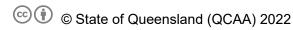
Further reading

- For a video of a highly accomplished teacher using the strategy, see the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) webpage, 'Reciprocal teaching', www.aitsl.edu.au/tools-resources/resource/reciprocal-teaching-illustration-of-practice.

- For further background and useful templates, see the WETA Public Broadcasting *Reading Rockets* webpage, 'Reciprocal teaching', www.readingrockets.org/strategies/reciprocal_teaching.

- For support in generating different types of question, see

  – Speech and language development Australia's resource, 'Blank's levels of questioning', https://salda.org.au/professional-learning/free-resources/blanks-questions/

  – Edutopia for Jackie Walsh's question stems, www.edutopia.org/article/teaching-students-how-ask-productive-questions.

Acknowledgment

This strategy draws on ideas from Palincsar, AS & Browne, AL 1984, 'Reciprocal teaching of comprehension-fostering and comprehension monitoring activities', *Cognition and Instruction*, vol. 2, pp.117–175.