

Reciprocal Teaching Strategies

Reciprocal teaching is an excellent reading technique which aids the teaching process. Read on to find out more



Reciprocal teaching is best represented as a dialogue between teachers and students in which participants take turns assuming the role of teacher. ~ Annemarie Sullivan Palincsar

Reading is perhaps one of the most important tools to gain knowledge. Forget school going students, sometimes many of the adults also fail to grasp sufficient information from the text that they read. Reading with understanding is a habit that needs to be imbibed in students at a young age. Young school going students need to be taught the importance of concentrated and constructive reading, and hence teachers often make use of several reading techniques and teaching methods that aid the students. One such technique is the reciprocal teaching technique, which is a remedial technique, aimed at developing and enhancing reading comprehension.

What exactly is the Reciprocal Teaching Technique?

According to Palincsar, who introduced this technique, the formal definition of reciprocal teaching is as follows: Reciprocal teaching refers to an instructional activity that takes place in the form of a dialogue between teachers and students regarding segments of text which is structured by the use of four strategies: summarizing, question generating, clarifying, and predicting. According to Palincsar, during reciprocal teaching, the teacher and students take turns assuming the role of teacher in leading this dialogue, which leads to an interesting group learning experience.

The Basic Strategies of Reciprocal Teaching

There are four basic strategies in reciprocal teaching, which, if applied while reading, can enhance the understanding and enable maximum grasping of information by the student from the given text. These strategies are as follows:

Predicting:

This is the stage where the students are encouraged by the teachers to predict or hypothesize about what the students think the author will discuss in the text. While predicting, students often have to draw upon the background knowledge pertaining to the subject in concern, which eventually enriches the learning experience by linking the new knowledge that they will come across in the text with the already possessed knowledge. Also, this helps enhance the students' understanding of text structure as they learn the purpose of headings, subheadings, and questions that are embedded in the text and thus are useful means of anticipating further information.

Encourage the students to think on the following lines:

- I am looking at the title and other visual clues that are appearing along with the body text on the page. What do I think we will be reading about?
- Thinking about what I have read and discussed so far, what do I think might happen next?

Summarizing:

Summarizing the important information as you simultaneously process the text helps students to identify and integrate the most important information in the text. The length of the text after which summarization can differ from person to person. Text can be summarized after a few sentences, paragraphs, or across the passage as a whole. Usually while making use of the reciprocal teaching techniques, the students should be advised to begin summarizing at sentence and paragraph levels. As they master the technique, they can become proficient enough to integrate at the paragraph and passage levels.

Encourage the Students to think on the following lines:

- What does the author want me to remember or learn from this passage?
- What is the most important information in this passage?
- What are the valid and logical questions that can be phrased about the text?

Question generating

As students we are always taught to question everything since asking questions leads you to more and more information. The questioning technique reinforces the summarizing strategy by taking the reader's understanding to the next level of reading comprehension. Questioning requires the students to process and identify the information that is present to them and further analyze its significance to generate a valid question, which they can answer themselves. This strategy has a major advantage of flexibility since students can be taught to generate questions at many levels.

Encourage the Students to think on the following lines:

- What question do I have about the text that I read?
- What are the concepts in the passage that I did not fully comprehend or am unsure about ?
- I'm curious about 'so-and-so' things mentioned in the text

Clarifying

Clarification of any doubts or questions regarding the text as and when you are reading it is very important for reading comprehension. It is particularly important while working with students who have a history of comprehension difficulty, since at times students may believe that the purpose of reading is saying the words correctly rather than understanding the underlying meaning of the written text. When you ask the students to clarify a particular concept in the text, their attention is brought to the fact the text is not being understood. The students will then think of the reasons why there is difficulty or failure in understanding. The reasons might include new vocabulary, unclear reference words, and even unfamiliar or rather difficult concepts. The clarifying technique makes the students aware of such impediments to comprehension and encourages them to take the necessary measures to restore meaning. For example rereading the text or looking up difficult words or asking for help tends to restore meaning of the previously un-understood text.

Encourage the Students to think on the following lines:

- One of the words from the text that I wasn't familiar with was...
- What other words or additional concepts do I need for further clarification and better understanding?

How Students Benefit from Reciprocal Teaching

Students involved in the reciprocal teaching process tend to learn the art of checking their own understanding of the material, which they have encountered. They do this by generating questions, clarifying concepts and summarizing important information from the text. The ultimate purpose of reciprocal teaching is to help students actively bring meaning to the written word, with or without a teacher. The reciprocal teaching strategies not only assist reading comprehension but also provide opportunities for students to monitor their own learning and thinking processes. The structure of the dialogue and interactions of the group members in reciprocal teaching system requires all the students to participate and foster healthy relationships and hence helps create an ideal learning atmosphere. Not only does the reciprocal teaching system benefit the slow learners, but also normally achieving or above average students. This technique also facilitates peer-to-peer communication as students with more experience and confidence help other students in their group to decode and understand the text. Students who ask more questions stimulate deeper thinking and understanding in their peers as well.

How Reciprocal Teaching can Assist the Teachers?

Teachers who are planning to adopt the reciprocal teaching technique into their curriculum should make their preparations for the same well in advance. A digest complete with graphic organizers of the questioning, summarizing, clarifying and predicting strategies is highly recommended for the teachers to get used to the intricacies of reciprocal teaching. Once the teacher is well versed with these techniques, sufficient planning must be done about the text to be provided for instructive purposes during the nascent or learning phase since the ability levels of the students should be taken into account before choosing a challenging text.

Once the process of reciprocal teaching starts, a daily journal about students' progress should be maintained to track the performance of students. The reciprocal teaching system not only facilitates the routine teaching procedures but also aids the teacher understand the grasping level, and overall comprehension abilities of every student. Listening to students during the dialogue is also a valuable means for teachers to determine whether the students are learning the strategies and benefiting from them. In addition to this, the teacher can check the students' understanding by asking the students to answer questions and write the summaries of the text. Teachers should keep in mind that the early stages of reciprocal teaching require continuous monitoring and evaluation of performance to figure out the kind of support the children require. However the monitoring levels can be made less frequent as the students become more adept at monitoring their own performance and progress.