

INTRODUCTION

It is no wonder that reading comprehension continues to hold a prominent place on the list of “very hot” topics in the 14th annual “What’s Hot” in literacy research survey conducted by Cassidy and Cassidy (2010). Teachers across the United States continue to report that students have difficulty comprehending what they read. In recent years, an alarming 69% of fourth graders and 70% of eighth graders read below the proficient reading level on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (National Center for Education Statistics, 2009). Some students can decode words, but have difficulty understanding what they read. As a staff developer and literacy coach, I have experienced this phenomenon firsthand: In the schools where I work, which range from urban to suburban schools, many students have trouble summarizing or pulling main ideas from their reading. The students may complete a reading assignment and not even realize that they had problems understanding the text. Sometimes while focusing on decoding, primary students lose comprehension as they learn to read. Second-language learners often find the vocabulary load overwhelming, and most students struggle when reading nonfiction texts. Likewise, in my own bilingual, fifth-grade classroom, the students experienced difficulty reading and understanding the grade-level social studies text and literature anthology.

Teachers often complain that students cannot remember what they read and are not really engaged with the text. Recent reading research suggests that an urgent need exists for educators to teach comprehension strategies at all grade levels from primary to secondary grades (Block, Parris, & Whiteley, 2008; Kincade & Beach, 1996; Pearson & Duke, 2002).

Students at all grade levels need strategies for clarifying unknown words and ideas that they encounter while they read. Many students need modeling and guided instruction in answering and asking comprehension questions and in making better predictions. Summarizing feels like a daunting task to many students as they struggle to sort out main ideas and order events in a text. What tested strategies can teachers use to improve their students’ reading comprehension?

Reciprocal teaching is a scaffolded discussion technique that is built on four strategies that good readers use to comprehend text:

predicting, questioning, clarifying, and summarizing (Palincsar & Brown, 1984). Although reciprocal teaching was introduced in reading journals in the 1980s, this research-proven technique for teaching multiple comprehension strategies is now becoming more widely recognized and used. Students who engage in reciprocal teaching not only improve in their reading level but also retain more of the material covered in the text (Reutzel, Smith, & Fawson, 2005). Research also points to using cooperative or collaborative learning with multiple strategies and highly recommends reciprocal teaching as an effective practice that improves students' reading comprehension (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development [NICHD], 2000; Pearson & Duke, 2002; Pressley, 2002; Reutzel et al., 2005). During reciprocal teaching lessons, students assist one another in applying the four reciprocal teaching strategies.

Originally, reciprocal teaching was designed as a paragraph-by-paragraph discussion technique in which the teacher would model each of the four strategies in a think-aloud, demonstrating the use of the strategies by talking through his or her thoughts while reading. Then, students would take turns "being the teacher" and using a think-aloud with each strategy. Since the original model was developed, however, the creators (Palincsar & Brown, 1984) and others (Cooper, Boschken, McWilliams, & Pistochini, 2000; Eggleton, 1996; Lubliner, 2001) have field-tested other models and teaching ideas that build on the original intent of reciprocal teaching. Regardless of the classroom setting, which may include teacher-led or peer-led groups, the original goal of reciprocal teaching—to improve students' reading comprehension—is maintained. This teaching model allows the teacher and students to scaffold and construct meaning in a social setting by using modeling, think-alouds, and discussion.

The goals of reciprocal teaching (Harvey & Goudvis, 2007; Keene & Zimmermann, 2007; McLaughlin & Allen, 2002; Oczkus, 2004; Pearson, Roehler, Dole, & Duffy, 1992) are the following:

- To improve students' reading comprehension using four comprehension strategies: predicting, questioning, clarifying, and summarizing
- To scaffold the four strategies by modeling, guiding, and applying the strategies while reading
- To guide students to become metacognitive and reflective in their strategy use

- To help students monitor their reading comprehension using the four strategies
- To use the social nature of learning to improve and scaffold reading comprehension
- To strengthen instruction in a variety of classroom settings— whole-class sessions, guided reading groups, and literature circles
- To be part of the broader framework of comprehension strategies that comprises previewing, self-questioning, making connections, visualizing, knowing how words work, monitoring, summarizing, and evaluating

What the Research Says About Reciprocal Teaching

Palincsar and Brown (1986), known as the creators of reciprocal teaching, found that when reciprocal teaching was used with a group of students for just 15–20 days, the students' reading on a comprehension assessment increased from 30% previously to 70–80%. According to a study by Palincsar and Klenk (1991), students not only improved their comprehension skills almost immediately but also maintained their improved comprehension skills when tested a year later. This powerful teaching technique is especially effective when incorporated as an intervention for struggling readers (Cooper et al., 2000) and when used with low-performing students in urban settings (Carter, 1997). Although originally designed for small-group instruction with struggling middle school students, reciprocal teaching has proved to yield positive and consistent results with primary and upper grade elementary students who are taught in large-group, teacher-led settings and in peer groups (Coley, DePinto, Craig, & Gardner, 1993; Cooper et al., 2000; Kelly, Moore, & Tuck, 1994; Myers, 2005; Palincsar & Brown, 1984, 1986; Palincsar & Klenk, 1991, 1992). Rosenshine and Meister (1994) reviewed 16 studies of reciprocal teaching and concluded that reciprocal teaching is a technique that improves reading comprehension.

Lublimer (2001) pointed out that reciprocal teaching is an effective teaching technique that can improve on the kind of reading comprehension that is necessary not only for improved test scores but also for life in the Information Age. A growing need exists for students to learn sophisticated reading skills that they can employ in the workforce and in a world that is bursting with print materials and data. Students

should be prepared to comprehend and evaluate a wide variety of complicated texts, from books to electronic sources, and reciprocal teaching strategies can help them achieve that goal.

How Reciprocal Teaching Fits Into the Rest of the Reading Program

Even though reciprocal teaching is a powerful research-based teaching technique, it is not comprehensive enough to stand alone as a method for teaching reading comprehension. Reading is a complex process that has many facets, and reciprocal teaching was designed to focus on just four important strategies that good readers use to comprehend text (predicting, questioning, clarifying, and summarizing). McLaughlin and Allen (2002) and others (Harvey & Goudvis, 2007; Keene & Zimmermann, 2007; Oczkus, 2004) provide a broad framework for teaching comprehension that comprises the following eight strategies necessary for teaching students to understand what they read:

1. *Previewing*—Activating prior knowledge, predicting, and setting a purpose
2. *Self-questioning*—Generating questions to guide reading
3. *Making connections*—Relating reading to self, text, and world
4. *Visualizing*—Creating mental pictures
5. *Knowing how words work*—Understanding words through strategic vocabulary development, including the use of graphophonic, syntactic, and semantic cueing systems
6. *Monitoring*—Asking whether a text makes sense and clarifying by adapting strategic processes
7. *Summarizing*—Synthesizing important ideas
8. *Evaluating*—Making judgments

Some additional resources that will give you the big picture for teaching reading comprehension appear in Table 1.

Think of reciprocal teaching as a reading vitamin that ensures reading success and strengthens overall comprehension instruction. The reading program provides a healthy diet of comprehension, but when students also partake in at least two weekly doses of reciprocal teaching, their reading improves and they become stronger. Reciprocal teaching

Table 1
Resources on Teaching Reading Comprehension

- Block, C.C., & Parris, S.R. (2008). *Comprehension instruction: Research-based best practices* (2nd ed.). New York: Guilford.
- Duffy, G.G. (2009). *Explaining reading: A resource for teaching concepts, skills, and strategies*. New York: Guilford.
- Duke, N.K., & Pearson, P.D. (2002). Effective practices for developing reading comprehension. In A.E. Farstrup & S.J. Samuels (Eds.), *What research has to say about reading instruction* (3rd ed., pp. 205–242). Newark, DE: International Reading Association.
- Harvey, S., & Goudvis, A. (2007). *Strategies that work: Teaching comprehension for understanding and engagement* (2nd ed.). York, ME: Stenhouse.
- Hoyt, L. (2002). *Make it real: Strategies for success with informational texts*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Keene, E.O., & Zimmermann, S. (2007). *Mosaic of thought: The power of comprehension strategy instruction* (2nd ed.). Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- McLaughlin, M., & Allen, M.B. (2009). *Guided comprehension in grades 3–8* (combined 2nd ed.). Newark, DE: International Reading Association.
- McLaughlin, M., & Vogt, M.E. (Eds.). (2000). *Creativity and innovation in content area teaching*. Norwood, MA: Christopher-Gordon.
- Miller, D. (2002). *Reading with meaning: Teaching comprehension in the primary grades*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse.
- Oczkus, L.D. (2004). *Super six comprehension strategies: 35 lessons and more for reading success*. Norwood, MA: Christopher-Gordon.
- Oczkus, L.D. (2009). *Interactive think aloud lessons: 25 surefire ways to engage students and improve comprehension*. New York: Scholastic; Newark, DE: International Reading Association.
- Pearson, P.D. (1985). Changing the face of reading comprehension instruction. *The Reading Teacher*, 38(8), 724–738.
- Pressley, M. (2002). *Reading instruction that works: The case for balanced teaching* (2nd ed.). New York: Guilford.

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complements core reading instruction. In the schools in which I consult, reciprocal teaching is taught side by side with the other comprehension strategies.

We teach one of the comprehension strategies from the broader list each week, focusing on that strategy during whole-class and small-group instruction. We call this the “focus strategy of the week.” Then, the teachers select a regular time for students to employ the four reciprocal teaching strategies so they can experience the power of multiple-strategy instruction. The kid-friendly term I use for the broader list is the “Super Six,” which are making connections, predicting/infering, questioning,

monitoring/clarifying, summarizing/synthesizing, and evaluating (Oczkus, 2004), and the term I use for the reciprocal teaching strategies is the “Fab Four.”

For example, in Kathy Langham’s fifth-grade room, she posts the Super Six in a list and teaches one strategy each week with her basal reader and social studies text. The Fab Four is posted right next to the Super Six, arranged in a circle. Kathy’s students use the Fab Four during literature circles with novels twice during the week. A first-grade teacher, Mr. Romero, displays the strategies in the same way, with the Super Six on one poster and the Fab Four in a circle on another. He uses a character for each of the reciprocal teaching strategies and displays props to represent and prompt each one (props will be explained in more detail later in the book). His class of 6-year-olds understands that when it is time to read with the Fab Four they will employ all four strategies in the same lesson, usually during a read-aloud or partner reading. Students benefit from ongoing instruction in all of the comprehension strategies as well as the Fab Four. Chapter 2 provides more detail about introducing reciprocal teaching in any classroom.

My Experiences With Reciprocal Teaching

What do you know about reciprocal teaching? I like to survey teachers and ask them to categorize themselves on their level of knowledge about reciprocal teaching using an exercise metaphor. See where you fit into the survey. Are you a bystander? You’ve heard about reciprocal teaching but haven’t tried it. Or are you a walker? You’ve just dabbled in using the four reciprocal teaching strategies. Maybe you are a jogger, and you’ve actually used reciprocal teaching full force for some time. Or perhaps you are a runner or someone who has years of experience using reciprocal teaching (or RT, the unofficial nickname among fans).

When I speak to an audience of teachers and ask them if they have heard of or tried reciprocal teaching, depending on where I am in the United States, the experience level varies. Once I define the strategy, more heads nod with familiarity, but many teachers admit to having little experience with reciprocal teaching. I, too, had heard about reciprocal teaching and its effectiveness early in my teaching career, but with a busy schedule, I placed this strategy on my to-do list and only dabbled in it a bit with my students. If I had known the incredible impact that reciprocal teaching can have on reading comprehension, I certainly

would have incorporated it into my teaching much sooner. Reciprocal teaching has revolutionized my teaching, and writing books on the topic has given me the opportunity to help thousands of teachers dramatically improve comprehension in their classrooms.

My interest in reciprocal teaching was awakened while I was serving as a literacy coach and consultant in an inner-city school in Berkeley, California, USA, where the staff and I used reciprocal teaching as part of an intervention for struggling readers (Cooper, Boschken, McWilliams, & Pistoichini, 1999). Many of the intermediate students in our intervention read two or three years below grade level and, although they could decode words, were severely lacking in reading comprehension skills. After just three months of using the reciprocal teaching strategies with these students three times per week, we witnessed dramatic results. Many of the struggling students had jumped one or two grade levels in reading ability. We also saw their attitudes change from reluctant and negative to more confident and assured. We witnessed students who had struggled now learning to love reading.

I asked myself, if reciprocal teaching yields such promising longitudinal results in an intervention group, why not weave this strategy into the fabric of classroom reading instruction so all students could benefit from it? So began my journey. As a literacy consultant and coach in many schools in the San Francisco Bay area and around the United States, I have shared reciprocal teaching with thousands of teachers in myriad classrooms and at a variety of grade levels. As I continued using reciprocal teaching with struggling readers in various schools and settings, their teachers noticed that within a few weeks the below-level readers became more confident and motivated readers. After more results revealed that the students had improved by one to two grade levels, I began to wonder if reciprocal teaching could be applied to other teaching contexts.

I found research to support student growth in reading comprehension in a variety of settings, not just with struggling readers (e.g., Carter, 1997; Palincsar & Brown, 1984, 1986; Palincsar, Brown, & Campione, 1989; Palincsar & Klenk, 1991, 1992). Then, I began to experiment with reciprocal teaching in my own teaching during whole-class sessions, guided reading groups, and literature circles. Although it took time to introduce, model, and reinforce the reciprocal teaching strategies, the lessons were worth the effort, as my students improved their use of reading comprehension strategies and their understanding.

Because most of the students had some experience with predicting, questioning, clarifying, and summarizing, I built on their knowledge by presenting the four strategies as a package. My students enjoyed the engaging lessons and benefited from using reciprocal teaching throughout the day, because we applied the strategies in content area reading.

I have used reciprocal teaching in every way possible to strengthen students' comprehension. I have taught the reciprocal teaching strategies—predicting, questioning, clarifying, and summarizing—to the whole class by using Big Books and short newspaper and magazine articles. Reciprocal teaching provides me with a simple, consistent lesson format to use with any grade level during guided reading (see Chapter 4). We give struggling readers an extra dose of reading comprehension instruction by using reciprocal teaching in special intervention groups (see Cooper et al., 1999). During literature circles, students take on the roles of the predictor, questioner, clarifier, and summarizer as they construct together the meaning of a text while deepening their understanding of the four strategies. We also train cross-age buddies to focus on reciprocal teaching strategies as they read and discuss picture books together. By employing these strategies in a variety of settings, you can provide your students with many opportunities to use the strategies to improve their reading comprehension.

What Is New in the Second Edition?

Writing a second edition is not an easy task, especially when the first edition has been well received in the field. I still believe in the principles I wrote about in the first edition of this text. The research on reciprocal teaching remains consistent and solid. However, in the past seven years since I first wrote about reciprocal teaching, I've taught hundreds of lessons and gained new insights from many K-12 teachers across the United States and internationally. (*Reciprocal Teaching at Work* has been translated into French!) So, the main goal this time around is to share new, exciting, and easy-to-implement lessons and ideas to make your reciprocal teaching even more effective.

The second edition has the following features:

- Updated, creative, exciting lessons and tips for using reciprocal teaching in whole-class settings, guided reading groups, and literature circles

- New insights on the implementation of reciprocal teaching and easy options for getting started at any grade level
- More explicit support materials and visuals, including reproducibles and posters, to use when guiding students in the use of the four reciprocal strategies
- Ideas and lessons in every chapter that will help you differentiate instruction for all readers, including struggling readers and English-language learners (ELLs)
- Expanded specific suggestions for K–5 and adolescent literacy in grades 6–12
- Suggestions for using reciprocal teaching as a Response to Intervention (RTI)
- Additional assessment options to guide your instruction
- More ideas for helping students become independent in their use of the strategies
- Extra support materials in the appendixes, including practical ideas for using reciprocal teaching with your core district program, ways to incorporate reciprocal teaching when using the Internet, and a flexible lesson plan menu for easily creating dozens of fresh lessons for your grade level

This book is designed to equip you with all of the tools you need so that ultimately you can use reciprocal teaching to improve your students' reading comprehension skills and attitudes toward reading.

Online Staff Development Guide

In addition, I created a staff development guide that provides a detailed outline for staff development or self-study of reciprocal teaching. This guide can be found on IRA's website at www.reading.org/general/publications/books/bk507.aspx. Principals, literacy coaches, and study teams will find the suggestions helpful as they design and lead meetings.

The staff development guide includes the following:

- Proven suggestions for conducting better discussions and meetings—that is, how to get beyond “I liked...”
- Ideas for incorporating *Reciprocal Teaching Strategies at Work*, the award-winning DVD companion to the book (available at www.reading.org)

.reading.org), and informal free clips of reciprocal teaching in action in real classrooms (available at www.reading.org/general/publications/books/bk507.aspx)

- The Reciprocal Teaching Lesson Observation Form to use in coaching

The online guide includes the following outline of study for each chapter in the book:

1. Read and Discuss—Questions and points to consider before, during, and after reading
2. Try Reciprocal Teaching in Your Room—Lessons to try prior to meeting with colleagues
3. Professional Development Discussion Breakout Groups—Teachers choose topics and divide into teams to discuss and report back to the entire group
4. Teacher as Reader—Optional reading at the adult level to practice reciprocal teaching strategies firsthand
5. Before the Next Meeting—Suggestions for teaching and observing others

Organization of the Second Edition

The chapters of this book are organized around classroom settings and can be read in any order to suit the needs of your students and teaching style. However, I recommend reading Chapter 1 first, because it covers the rationale and important understandings central to reciprocal teaching, outlines the four reciprocal teaching strategies, and explains options for getting started. Whether you implement reciprocal teaching during whole-class lessons, guided reading groups, or literature circles, the principles of this multiple-strategy approach are the same. However, the teaching method varies slightly in each of these different settings, and you will need to make adjustments for your grade level as well (see Table 2).

Chapter 1 includes many foundational ideas to help you begin using reciprocal teaching with your class and keep it going all year long. Each of the four strategies—predicting, questioning, clarifying, and summarizing—is described in detail, with ideas for prompting students to use the language unique to it. Because teachers sometimes encounter obstacles when implementing reciprocal teaching, the chapter includes

Table 2
Reciprocal Teaching in Different Classroom Settings

Classroom Setting	Why Use Reciprocal Teaching in This Setting?
Whole-class session	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To introduce the class to reciprocal teaching strategies • To continually model the four strategies for students in teacher think-alouds • To establish common language and terms • To provide reinforcement in core required reading and content area reading throughout the school day
Guided reading group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To reinforce or introduce reciprocal teaching strategies in a teacher-led, small-group setting • To provide extra support or intervention to students who struggle or to English-language learners • To differentiate instruction based on informal assessments and students' needs • To provide a Response to Intervention
Literature circles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To release responsibility to students for reciprocal teaching strategies • To reinforce and strengthen student use of reciprocal teaching strategies

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practical ways to overcome such difficulties and information about the four critical foundations necessary for getting the most from reciprocal teaching: scaffolding, thinking aloud, thinking metacognitively, and learning cooperatively. Models for using reciprocal teaching as an RTI plan are outlined with suggestions for using reciprocal teaching during each tier of instruction. Suggestions for incorporating reciprocal teaching into a broader list of comprehension strategies are outlined.

Chapter 2 is loaded with practical ways to introduce reciprocal teaching in your classroom. You might also try a variety of these lessons throughout the year to continue deepening your students' understanding of the strategies. Introductory lesson ideas include sharing the Fab Four using read-alouds and poetry, incorporating characters to represent each strategy, and using hand gestures to cue the strategies. Icons, posters, and bookmarks provide supports for students as they work in pairs and teams to practice the strategies. A discussion of texts and materials to use during reciprocal teaching lessons is provided.

Chapter 3 offers engaging lessons to introduce the whole class to the four reciprocal teaching strategies via depicting each strategy as a character, modeling the use of a variety of resources, and scaffolding with collaborative and partner activities. The Four Door Chart (see page 110), popular with students as well as teachers, serves as a useful discussion guide and progress-monitoring assessment too. Practical lessons assist students in remembering and internalizing reciprocal teaching strategies for eventual independent use.

Many new ideas for leading students in reciprocal teaching discussions in guided reading groups are given in Chapter 4. Lessons for use with fiction and nonfiction are outlined. These teacher-led, small-group lessons can be the training ground for students' transfer to literature circles. The chapter includes a variety of suggestions for using graphic organizers, learning cooperatively, and teaching word analysis. In addition, intervention lesson ideas for struggling students are provided, along with suggestions for the effective use of coaching prompts during guided reading. Practical ideas for keeping the rest of the class busy during guided reading are outlined.

Chapter 5 explores reciprocal teaching in literature circles, which is an excellent way to continue to provide students with opportunities to strengthen their use of reciprocal teaching strategies as they become more independent. Lessons for introducing the roles of predictor, questioner, clarifier, and summarizer are provided. The chapter also outlines a special discussion director role that rounds out the literature circle with prompts for connecting students' background knowledge and questions to the text. Many innovative tools, such as role sheets, a discussion spinner, and minilessons on each of the four strategies, are included. Easy options for getting started with literature circles are included as well as suggestions for teaching students literature circle social skills. Finally, the chapter offers literature circle assessment tools for students and teachers.

The Conclusion summarizes the main points about reciprocal teaching as an effective method for teaching reading comprehension and offers a quick reference for readers who have a specific question about how or why reciprocal teaching should be part of their classroom agenda. In the Conclusion, teachers' common questions about reciprocal teaching are addressed in a practical question and answer format.

The appendixes include the following useful tools to support reciprocal teaching in the classroom:

- Appendix A: Informal Assessments
- Appendix B: Strengthening Comprehension With Cross-Age Tutors and the Fab Four
- Appendix C: Lesson Planning With the Fab Four Menu
- Appendix D: Using Reciprocal Teaching With the Internet
- Appendix E: Icon and Strategy Posters

Special Features in This Book

The lessons in Chapters 2 through 5 all follow a similar format (see box).

Background and Description	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thoughts and reflections on and experiences from using the lesson • Brief description of the lesson • Reciprocal teaching strategies emphasized and what else may be needed
Materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supplies needed for the lesson
Teacher Modeling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing scaffolded instruction; modeling the strategies for students in a think-aloud
Student Participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Releasing to students the responsibility for using the strategies first in partners and collaborative teams, then independently
Assessment Tips	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessing students after the lesson

Minilessons that focus on individual reciprocal teaching strategies are found near the end of each chapter and can be used when students need reinforcement for a particular strategy. The minilessons follow the same format with similar headings as the longer lessons in each chapter. Keep in mind that reciprocal teaching strategies should be taught in concert with one another, so if you focus on only one strategy

during a minilesson, let your students know how that strategy fits back into the larger framework of all four reciprocal teaching strategies used to comprehend text. Remind your students that readers rarely use one strategy at a time while reading; instead, they use the four strategies together as they make their way through a text.

Throughout this book you will find the “Classroom Story” feature, which includes detailed accounts of reciprocal teaching lessons taken from classrooms around the United States. Some of these stories focus on the strategies specifically, and others help show you what the strategies look like at a variety of grade levels. You will also find many classroom examples throughout each chapter to give you a better look at how reciprocal teaching looks at a variety of grade levels. I include a combination of actual student and teacher names as well as pseudonyms, because some of the lessons are retold exactly as they happened and others are combinations of lessons I’ve taught or observed. So as you read, you’ll find dozens of classroom examples sprinkled throughout the book to provide you with a variety of examples of reciprocal teaching in action!

This book extends the successful research of those who have so generously shared their reciprocal teaching ideas. The chapters are organized in a practical manner to make it easy for you to implement this instructional method in your own classroom. In addition to the many chapter features previously described, each chapter contains ready-to-use reproducible forms that will help students understand the reciprocal teaching strategies and the texts that they are reading. The goal of this book is to provide you with the practical, motivating tools that you need to improve the reading comprehension of all students by using reciprocal teaching strategies.