

# Getting into Reciprocal Teaching

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*"I had some knowledge about Reciprocal Teaching, such as the four roles of predicting, questioning, clarifying, and summarizing."*

*"I did not understand how to get students actively involved in Reciprocal Teaching."*

The comments above represent teacher education students' initial thinking about Reciprocal Teaching (Palinscar & Brown, 1984) as they reflected on their work in my reading classes at North Georgia College & State University. Thanks to a mini-grant from the Georgia Reading Association awarded in February, 2006, I had the opportunity to make a positive impact on my teacher education students' knowledge base and use of Reciprocal Teaching with their elementary students in reading comprehension. The grant allowed me to purchase 21 copies of *Reciprocal Teaching at Work* (Oczkus, 2003) and one copy of the companion video, *Reciprocal Teaching at Work: Strategies for Improving Reading Comprehension* (Oczkus, 2005) to use in my classes.

In this article I describe the qualitative action research project, "Getting Into Reciprocal Teaching," as it was implemented during the Spring and Fall semesters, 2006, through two of my reading classes at North Georgia College & State University.

## Reciprocal Teaching

Reciprocal Teaching (RT) was originally designed as a discussion technique for use with struggling readers to promote active comprehension through PREDICTING, QUESTIONING, CLARIFYING, and SUMMARIZING (Palinscar & Brown, 1984). As the teacher models how to a.) predict and check predictions after reading a portion of text b.) ask questions and generate answers based on a text c.) clarify vocabulary terms and/or ideas, and d.) summarize the main idea(s) in a text, students learn "how to" and then try the processes themselves. Gradually, students strengthen their comprehension skills through reading and discussion revolving around the four strategies.

RT includes scaffolding (teacher modeling with the goal of having students gradually become active users of the skills); thinking aloud (stating aloud your thinking

processes making them visible for students), meta-cognition (knowing about knowing: for example, "I know that predicting helped me most today because . . ."); and cooperative learning (working with others to learn and share thinking processes) (Oczkus, 2003; 2005).

Today, RT is used to help diverse readers and is often effective when combined with props, writing, and role-playing. Oczkus (2003) introduces the roles of "The Powerful Predictor," "Quizzical Questioner," "Careful Clarifier," and "Super Summarizer." The roles, combined with simple costumes and/or a dramatic voice, engage readers as they take on certain personas. For example, "The Powerful Predictor" may include a flowing scarf draped over the head like a fortune teller who sees the future.



Ashley Graham as the "Powerful Predictor"

Oczkus (2003) describes RT using a variety of texts, including textbooks, big books, picture and chapter books, and high-interest articles. She demonstrates diverse writing techniques such as a "clear summary" written on an overhead transparency with dry erase markers and a "four-door" strategy using a simple piece of notebook or typing paper and pencils for recording notes. Her "Be the Teacher Bookmark," (2003, p. 53) is a handy guide for students as they are learning the RT process.

## Background

Prior to this project, I only had one copy of the book, *Reciprocal Teaching at Work* (Oczkus, 2003), and I did not have a copy of the video. I had read the book and used Oczkus' "Be the Teacher Bookmark" to model RT for my teacher education students in a few classes before 2006, although I had never used the book as a class text. My teacher education students would practice RT in small groups after I modeled it, and some of them would get excited about the "Be the Teacher Bookmark" and try it out with their elementary students in content reading. (See Figure 1)

I wondered, "How would my teacher education students' knowledge of teaching reading comprehension skills through RT be affected if they had an opportunity to read and study RT in depth as part of the course curriculum and observe RT in action with real elementary students in multiple contexts?" This thought was my guiding question.

I knew that RT is a very powerful reading comprehension tool, and I felt that it was underused by my teacher education students. I wanted them to focus on its potential for improving their elementary students' reading comprehension during their field placements and internships and of course, their future teaching. Thus, I sent a proposal to GRA in the fall, 2005. (See Figure 2)

The grant was awarded in February, 2006. I ordered Oczkus' books and video from the online IRA marketplace ([www.reading.org](http://www.reading.org)) and began the project in March, 2006, during my spring semester course, Diagnosis & Remediation of Reading Disabilities. The following fall semester, 2006, I used it again in my course, Teaching Reading in the Content Areas.

### Method

#### Participants

In spring, 2006, the 26 participants were Early Childhood Education majors enrolled in Diagnosis & Remediation of Reading Difficulties. There were two male students and 24 female students. One-third were graduate students and two-thirds were undergraduates.

In fall 2006, 27 students were enrolled in Teaching Reading in the Content Areas. Their major was Special Education/Early Childhood Education. All the participants were female and the majority were undergraduates.

#### Procedures

In the Diagnosis & Remediation of Reading Disabilities class, the teacher education students first learned to conduct an informal reading inventory (IRI) to make a diagnosis of their elementary-age case students' reading problems and then created lesson plans for remediation based on the diagnostic work. We discussed strategies for various reading problems, including RT for reading comprehension problems.

In the Teaching Reading in the Content Areas class, the teacher education students worked in groups to prepare a unit on a topic of their choice. For example, a unit on Landforms included work on constructive and destructive forces with selected Georgia Performance

FIGURE 1

#### Modeling RT using "Be the Teacher Bookmark"

- Read—selected text (fiction or non-fiction) or text portion.
- Predict—"Based on the front and back covers, I think this book is going to be about a boy, Jack, who either has a dog or finds a dog and the dog somehow relates to whatever happens with him not wanting to write poetry." (Check predictions after reading. What predictions have you found evidence for or against thus far?)
- Question—"Why does he think only girls can write poetry?"
- Clarify—"I thought at first the teacher's name was 'Miss Sketchberry' but as I reread I noticed that it is actually 'Miss Stretchberry.' Stretch means to expand, so the teacher's name reminds me that her job is getting Jack to expand his skills."
- Summarize—"This part is about Jack not wanting to write poetry and his stab at understanding (or not understanding) what makes a poem a poem."

[Book: *Love that Dog* (Crech, 2001)]

FIGURE 2

#### "Getting Into Reciprocal Teaching" Plan

- The Instructor models RT and then has students practice RT in small groups.
- The Teacher Education students read the text *Reciprocal Teaching At Work* (Oczkus, 2003) in pairs over several weeks.
- The Teacher Education students view the video *Reciprocal Teaching At Work: Strategies for Improving Reading Comprehension* (Oczkus, 2005) making notes, comparing and contrasting the book with the video and sharing ideas afterward in small groups and with the instructor.
- The Instructor models RT again and then has the Teacher Education students practice RT in groups of four (if necessary).
- The Teacher Education students decide whether RT is appropriate for their elementary students during field placements and/or internship work and use RT if their cooperating teachers agree.
- The Teacher Education students and the instructor write reflections describing their RT experiences.

Standards, a textbook, trade books, a high-interest article, website work, hands-on experiments, and a guest speaker. Half the class took place in the computer lab and the other half took place in a classroom where the RT reading and video viewing was accomplished, followed by other strategy demonstrations to promote content reading, such as QAR [Question Answer Relationships (Raphael, 1986)].

#### Data Collection

Data included the teacher education students' written work, field notes made by the researcher after class sessions, and random student comments. (See Table 1)

Written work included weekly group writing and teacher education students' reflections about their learning. For instance, in pairs the teacher education students answered two or more questions at the end of each of the four book chapters, reading for that specific information, and then sharing with their group their answers to the questions and their thinking about the reading, as a scribe recorded all information for the group. This strategy is read-write-think-pair-share based on think-pair-share (Lyman, 1987). While viewing the video, the teacher education students took notes about RT integration ideas for whole class, small group, and literature circles.

**TABLE 1**  
**Data Collection**

| Spring 2006 | Fall 2006 |                                     |
|-------------|-----------|-------------------------------------|
| 03/22       | 08/29     | Background, Modeling, Oczkus, Ch. 1 |
| 03/29       | 09/05     | Oczkus, Ch. 2, 3                    |
| 04/05       | 09/12     | Oczkus, Ch. 3, 4                    |
| 04/12       | 09/19     | Video                               |
| 04/19       | 09/26     | Review                              |
| 04/26       | 12/07     | Final Written Review                |

In addition to weekly group writing, the teacher education students wrote reflections describing their RT knowledge before the grant work and their learning after work with the grant materials. One teacher education student stated, "I had heard of *Reciprocal Teaching* but the term had no real meaning for me."

Another wrote, "Although the book helped bring the meaning more depth, the video brought true life to *Reciprocal Teaching*. Watching the teachers use all the roles (predicting, questioning, summarizing, clarifying) really cemented them. I learned how to model the roles and use them in small focused groups and in whole-class sessions with younger and older students." A student described using the personas: "For instance, I often used the "Paula the Predictor" personality in a first-grade class. I would throw a scarf over my head and use a child's head as the crystal ball. I would say things like, 'Hmmm, looking at this picture, I predict that we will read about . . . I would also lead predictions based on the last couple of sentences on a page, and then the students would have a turn to make predictions. I would ask for several at a time and we would check our predictions after reading the next page(s). Some of the students would use the same voice that I did!"

I wrote field notes after each class session based on observations during the classes as I listened to the groups, answering questions and facilitating learning. Following is an example of field notes observation: "The teacher education students often appeared bored with the book reading q/a, although they demonstrated in their written work that they were, indeed, learning the RT information." I recorded random student comments during and after class sessions as I heard specific comments. Following are examples of teacher education student comments that I heard repeated several times by various students: "I thought RT would be too overwhelming to actually use it in a class, but now that I've seen the video, I get it." "I understand how to apply RT now that I've seen the video."

#### Data Analysis

For data analysis, I used the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss, 1987). I read the written work, field notes, and comments three times, once at the end of the semesters and the other two readings of data from both classes during January 3-15, 2007. During these readings, I made notes about recurring patterns. I also charted the teacher education students' applications of RT with their own student readers to look for patterns about their use of RT. (See Table 2)

#### Results and Discussion

Following are the results of the project, based on data analysis. Three consistent patterns were reflected throughout the data:

**1. An increase in RT knowledge** – The participants' RT knowledge base was broadened beyond that of the

**TABLE 2**  
**Reciprocal Teaching Application**

|              |                                                                                                                    |
|--------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Spring, 2006 | 13 of 26 participants applied RT with their individual student readers                                             |
|              | Reasons for not implementing RT: personal choice based on readers' needs                                           |
| Fall, 2006   | 20 of 27 participants applied RT with their elementary students during field placements                            |
|              | Reasons for not implementing RT: supervising teachers' discretion (3); personal choice based on readers' needs (4) |

four strategies involved to understand how to integrate the strategies effectively with actual students.

**2. Praise and positive comments for the video with RT integration** – Observing teachers using RT effectively with actual students in various contexts (as in the video) was key to the participants' understanding of how to integrate RT with their own students.

**3. The choice for implementation of RT** – The use of RT was directly related to the teachers' perceived expertise, autonomy, and interest with any student.

In the Diagnosis & Remediation of Reading Disabilities class, the teacher education students generally used RT as a remediation strategy only when comprehension was one of the main reading problems for their case readers. [For instance, case readers whose main problem was decoding required strategies such as Making Words (Cunningham & Cunningham, 1992) rather than RT as the primary remediation strategy.]

In the Teaching Reading in the Content Areas class, the teacher education students generally applied RT during field placements in local schools with their elementary school readers when it was allowed by their cooperating teachers, when they decided that it was appropriate, and when they would feel comfortable using it in their particular context.

The participants in both classes repeatedly stated aloud and in their written work the high impact of the video for understanding how to connect the RT book

information with integration of the strategies for actual students. Participants were generally motivated by the dramatic role-playing that the teacher demonstrated in the video to get student readers interested and involved in reading comprehension.

As one student stated, *"My student reader (first grader at the time of this work) could retell in facts but his prediction skills were weak. I decided to focus on improving his prediction skills, which I hope will lead to improved overall comprehension of the texts he reads. I planned to do this by introducing "Petra the Powerful Predictor," using my own version of a character from the RT information that we learned in class. The student was absolutely stunned when I showed up dressed like a fortune telling gypsy. I informed him that his regular tutor could not come today and asked me (the predictor) to stop by and play a game with him. This character activity in RT was very successful. The student's ability to predict the events (of a text) and access prior knowledge definitely improved while doing this lesson. He was one hundred percent engaged with this activity. At the end of the lesson, we reviewed his predictions to see if they made sense."*

Some participants who had field placements in the upper elementary grades indicated that they used RT with their students in small groups after modeling it with or without the character props. For instance, one participant had students take on the predictor, questioner, clarifier, or summarizer roles in small group discussions about a portion of shared text from *Number the Stars* (Lowry, 1998) during a unit on the Holocaust. Another participant conducted literature circles while the class was reading a text, having students assume the roles of discussion director, literary luminary, illustrator, or connector while she took on one of these roles each day to model "how to" with the four RT strategies, as Oczkus (2005) demonstrated in the video.

All participants in both classes stated that the study had improved their RT knowledge base. Following is a teacher education student's statement: *"After studying the RT book and video, I now understand how using RT can be exciting in the classroom. It can be used to make a regular lesson into a fun, interactive learning opportunity. The four strategies allow the teacher to tap into the various learning styles of the students. After studying RT, I have thought about how I could make my upcoming teaching FUN. I reflected how boring science and social studies were as a child. My new goal is to prevent my students from being bored by incorporating RT into my lessons and my classroom!"*

### RT Innovations

At the end of the study, I asked some of the participants if they could share any innovative ideas for using RT in the future. Here are some of the ideas they shared with me. I hope that you, the readers, may add your own ideas to this list in the future:

- Use puppets for the dramatic roles. Example: paper bag puppets for the "powerful predictor," "quizzical questioner," etc.
- Guide students to write dramatic skits using the four RT strategies with a text and then have students act the skit out for younger students to begin learning it.
- Design character T-shirts for use with each persona. Example: Clarifier T-shirt: "Let's clear this up!"
- Create a super hero for each persona. Example: The questioner can "fly in and save the day" like a superman/woman.
- Make masks or fan faces to hold up when impersonating a character through RT.
- Have students make up new personas for whatever text(s) they are reading. For example, a science text about insects might inspire students to use an insect for each role, like Miss Spider with her predicting web and Mr. Fly for the summarizer to "stick to the point."

### Limitations and Implications

This project was limited to participants in my two classes who had access to elementary student readers during field placements and/or internships in local schools during 2006.



Marla Founts reads with a student

Future and practicing teachers can improve their RT knowledge base and their teaching practice about active comprehension for student readers through appropriate use of the materials described in this project, reading the text with note-taking and sharing, viewing the videotaped demonstrations of the RT information with student readers, and having opportunities to practice the strategy with actual student readers. The grant materials are now available for use with future classes in Teacher Education at North Georgia College and State University.

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*A book is the only place in which you can examine a fragile thought without breaking it, or explore an explosive idea without fear it will go off in your face. It is one of the few havens remaining where a man's mind can get both provocation and privacy.* — Edward P. Morgan