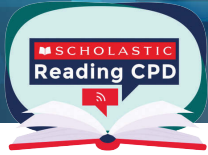# Students Leading their Learning

The Reciprocal Approach

— with Jill Eggleton QSO

Oral language is the foundation upon which all other language learning grows. It involves not only communicating, but also thinking critically and creatively. During his research, Stabb (1986) discovered a significant decline in the use of oral language, which leads to a decline in students' ability to reason.

Like all skills, in order to become proficient, oral language needs to be practised. The reciprocal approach gives students many opportunities to practise these skills in a comfortable, non-threatening, peer group environment.

Students' peers are among the most significant people in their lives and so when they are supporting each other, and taking responsibility for leading their own learning, this becomes a powerful, effective and natural form of learning.

Benefits of the Reciprocal Approach

- increasing oral language development through group discussion and listening to others
- increasing and enriching vocabulary
- developing and strengthening comprehension strategies
- encouraging sharing, participating, co-operation and collaboration with peers
- accepting the opinions of others
- developing confidence in taking a leadership role
- stimulating an interest in a variety of non- fiction topics and encouraging research
- strengthening social and emotional skills through fiction stories

Before Using the Reciprocal Approach

- Ensure students are familiar with the comprehension strategies:

   predicting

   clarifying

   question generating

   summarizing

- Ensure that students are mature enough to work in a group, independent of the teacher

Ideas to help students familiarity of Comprehension Strategies.

Predicting

1. Model the prediction strategy to the students using a fiction or non-fiction text:
Introduce the strategy by 'thinking out loud' to the students, using statements such as: *I think this could be about... because... I predict this is going to tell me... because...*

2. Focus on visual information:
Show students an illustration in a fiction text or photograph in a non-fiction text. Cover the text.

- Give the students time to discuss the visual information they can see.
- Get the students in pairs to create a short paragraph based on the illustration or photograph, captions and other visual information.
- Get the students to read their paragraphs, justifying their predictions of what the text could be about.
- Now read the original text and compare the students' versions.

3. Predicting, drawing on prior knowledge:
   Make some statements that could be either true or false, e.g., statements based on a text about sharks
   There are too many sharks in the world. True/False
   Shark fins have been used to make soup. True/False

   - Get students to discuss their predictions and give reasons for them by drawing on what they already might know about sharks.
   - Read the students the text about sharks.
   - Ask the students if their predictions were right or wrong. Why or why not?

Clarifying

- Read a selected text to students. Stop when you come to a difficult word or phrase. Show the students by 'thinking out loud' how you might find out what the word or phrase means. You can use language such as: I don't know what this word means, I will read on to see if I can find clues. This word is tricky because I am not sure how to say it.
  I will try and blend the sounds together.
  I have read on but I still can't figure out what this word means.
  I will look up the meaning in the dictionary.
  I don't know what _____ means. I will re-read to see if I can figure it out.

  - Give the students a sample of text from a book, making sure there are some challenging words.
  - Get the students to highlight words they don't know the meaning of or how to say.
  - Students can work with a partner to discuss what the words might mean in context.

- Choose a word that the students have highlighted.

- Ensure that students can locate the words in a dictionary or device and choose the meaning that best fits the text.

- Get students to work in pairs using an atlas, or device to locate countries you name. Students discuss what they know and share their knowledge with wider group.

BRIGHT IDEA

Questioners

Each day place a picture, photograph or article on the question board, e.g., a picture or photograph of

    person/animal/object

    a photograph of scene/news item.

In any spare moment during the week, students can formulate a question and place it around the picture or photograph. (No questions can be the same.)

At the end of the week, review the questions. Categorise them into open or closed questions.

As students become proficient questioners, categorise the questions into question type, e.g., literal, inferential.

Get students to think of as many different ways as they can to ask questions, e.g., *How do you think . . .? Why do you think . . .? How do you know . . . ? I wonder why . . .? What do you think of . . .? What could happen if . . .?*

BRIGHT IDEA

News Reporters

Select a reporter for the day.

At the end of the day, the reporter will present a summary of the day's events to the class in a television-style news report.

The class can evaluate the report and categorise it into: important information/less-important information, and justify their reasons.

Asking Questions

1. Read a selected text, stopping where appropriate to model a question by thinking out loud. You can use language such as:
   Why do you think...?
   How do you know...?
   What do you think would happen if...?
   Do you think... why/why not?
   I wonder why. . . ?
   I think that this is the case, but I'm not sure. . .
   I think this is why it happened. . .

2. Use headlines from magazines or newspapers, or chapter headings or titles from fiction books. Get students to make a list of all the questions they can think of.

3. Give students a large piece of paper. Get them to make columns of the different question starters, e.g., *What, When, How, Why, Where*. Give them a selected text. Have students work in pairs to generate questions and write them in the appropriate columns.

4. Read to students a non-fiction book or picture book. Students could role-play being a television or newspaper reporter and formulate questions they might ask about the topic. Or, working in pairs, one could be a character in the story and the other, the interviewer.

Summarizing

1. Read text samples to students. At the conclusion of the reading, orally model a summary of what you read. You can use language such as:
   I think the purpose of this text was... The most important ideas were...

2. After reading a selected text, get students to make lists of important ideas and interesting facts.

3. Discuss with students how visual features in informational texts can help them separate important information from less-important information. Give students an article from a newspaper or magazine. Get them to highlight titles, headings, subheadings, bold text, changes in font size, icons, etc. Discuss what these things show.

4. Give students a selected text to read and discuss. In pairs, students can create a newspaper report based on the text. They can use headlines, subheads, etc. The report should illustrate the main points of the text they read.

The Programme in Action

Important Points

- Select a text that
  is engaging
  rich in vocabulary
  has interesting visuals
  has not too much text on each page

- Demonstrate the programme in action

- Leave the group and be an observer only, or if you return, you are not the teacher but a participant.

- Students are the leader for one page each. A new leader for each page.

- The leader predicts and summarizes but any student in the group can ask for something to be clarified or ask a question.

The Leader's Role

Students should be familiar with the routine and language to use when it is their turn to be the leader.

The following format could be established:

1. Predict

Say to your group:

I think this page is going to be about . . .

You can predict by using the illustrations, photographs, captions or headings.

Tell your group to read the page silently.

2. Clarify

When your group has finished reading, ask them if there is anything they didn't understand.

Say: *Is there anything anyone doesn't understand?*

It could be a word or phrase, or anything read in the text.

3. Ask Questions

Ask your group if anyone would like to ask a question about what they have read.

Say: *Does anyone have a question they would like to ask?*

4. Summarize

Now you can tell the group what the main ideas are on this page.

Say: *I think this page has mainly been about . . .*

Points to Note

- The reciprocal approach in reading does not take the place of other reading approaches : Shared Reading, Small-Group Instruction, Independent Reading, Reading Aloud.

- In order to keep students engaged, highly motivated and interested, it is suggested that the reciprocal approach be used once every three weeks.

- In the week when the reciprocal approach is used, students would not be having small-group instruction or (class) independent reading.

- Highly engaging texts are the key to success.