**Reciprocal Teaching: Making it work for LHS**

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Reciprocal Teaching is a reading comprehension instructional strategy (Palincsar & Brown,1984). In Reciprocal Teaching teachers model the roles (Predictor, Questioner, Clarifier and Summarizer) that students will play in small group discussions about text and gradually release responsibility to students. Students then take turns playing these roles. Thus, Reciprocal Teaching allows students to share their questions, summaries, and predictions. It also allows members of the group to clarify for others. When well implemented, Reciprocal Teaching builds student comprehension and personal accountability to the group, leading self-regulation, group interaction and the development of text-based problem-solving skills (Brown and Campione,1994).

In addition, RETELL suggests that teachers provide guiding questions and sentence stems to help students develop academic language. For example, the clarifier may use the following sentence stems: “What I’m thinking is \_\_\_\_, but that isn’t making sense. I need to \_\_\_\_.” The use of sentence stems is one way that RETELL makes participating in Reciprocal Teaching accessible to ELLs at different proficiency levels. RETELL also suggests that teachers use prompts to develop students’ academic language as they engage in discussions, such as

“What other words do we know that we can use in place of \_\_\_\_?” Sentence stems specifically provide ELLs with a frame to form their responses and so reduce the language load so that the cognitive load can increase.

As teachers enrolled in RETELL begin to practice strategies and approaches that have a proven record, administrators are able to see the strategies and their efficacy in the classroom. Reciprocal Teaching, with its building of academic language and shared responsibility for academic discussion, aligns with the shift in Common Core. Reciprocal Teaching provides ELLs with exposure and practice to more academic facility with academic language across the language domains: reading, writing, listening, and speaking.

**The Use of Reciprocal Teaching - My Thoughts**

Reciprocal Teaching is an effective strategy for all learners, including ELLs. It is crucial, however, that teachers assess their students’ skill levels in summarizing, clarifying, predicting, and questioning before implementing this strategy. Not all learners are able to perform each skill effectively. Some students will need additional modeling and practice before they are required to play a role that is unfamiliar. Therefore, at least when beginning to implement this strategy in their classrooms, teachers may prefer to incorporate variations of Reciprocal Teaching.

**Reciprocal Teaching and RETELL**

The RETELL PD highlights Reciprocal Teaching as an effective strategy to use specifically with ELLs in Sheltered English Instruction (SEI) classrooms. According to RETELL, Reciprocal Teaching allows ELLs to participate in small group work, express themselves orally and listen to others. Adopting different roles in a discussion fosters oracy, and because the discussion is focused on a text, participation also promotes skills in reading and writing. RETELL suggests that students change roles for each group discussion. Thus, the summarizer becomes the clarifier; the clarifier becomes the questioner, and so on. As presented in RETELL, the teacher’s role is to “guide and nurture the students’ ability to use the four strategies successfully in the small group” (Administrator Endorsement Course, Version 2, Sept. 2013-2014).

First, struggling learners and newcomer ELLs who may not have had significant experience in cooperative learning activities may need significant teacher modeling for each type of role and procedure. In fact, it is advisable that teachers explicitly pre-teach the requirements of each role and the expectations for individuals and for the group. For example, it may be helpful for students, especially ELLs, to stay with the same role of “summarizer” in different types of tasks, to practice and develop summarization skills over time before they play other Reciprocal Teaching roles. Another variation is to have learners work only in pairs to develop and practice two selected roles (such as predictor and questioner) before joining two other pairs (who may be focusing on summarizer and clarifier roles) to form quads.

Reciprocal Teaching also lends itself to Think/Write/Pair/Share formats. For example, the teacher first models a skill such as clarifying, and then allows pairs to think through their guiding questions that require clarifying. Students use sentence frames to clarify, they think about their clarification statements, and then using sentence frames, they write these clarifications and share these with their partners.

Strategic pairings of ELLs with other ELLs or mainstream learners (depending on the instructional purpose) allows for language output in a reduced risk task. In addition, teachers who have ELLs with lower levels of English proficiency or students who struggle may want to pre-select sentence frames and guiding questions to differentiate for language proficiency and/or to focus on specific types of questioning. Teachers may also want to pre-plan to add a variation for what happens when the summarizer actually has a question or the predictor needs clarification. This can often be accomplished if learners maintain a log during the activity.

Reciprocal Teaching can be a highly effective strategy. However, its effectiveness requires teachers to pre-select and plan tasks that build skill development in each specific discussion role. Teachers must model and teach each role and then provide students with guided practice, ensuring that students are capable in the roles they are assigned. Teachers then gradually release responsibility to students. Careful planning, modeling and practice will result in a higher level of reading engagement and effective participation in academic discussions. Teachers’ pre-planning must take into account the need to differentiate within each role and to scaffold reading materials based on language proficiency so that ELLs can participate equally with their peers.