



## Literacy at Hartford Public High School

April 4, 2005  
Volume 2 Number 29

### Reciprocal Teaching

from Classroom Instruction that Works  
by Robert Marzano, et al.

Reciprocal teaching is one of the best researched strategies available to teachers. It involves four components: summarizing, questioning, clarifying, and predicting. The strategy provides for a deep level of understanding necessary for an effective summary.

**Summarizing:** After students have silently or orally read a short section of a passage, a single student acting as teachers (i.e., the student leader) summarizes what has been read. Other students, with the guidance of the teacher, may add to the summary. If students have difficulty summarizing, the teacher might point out clues (e.g., important items or obvious topic sentences) that aid in the construction of good summaries.

**Questioning:** The student leader asks some questions to which the class responds. The questions are designed to help students identify important information in the passage. For example, the student leader might look back over the selection and ask questions about specific pieces of information. The other students then try to answer these questions, based on their recollection of the information.

**Clarifying:** Next, the student leader tries to clarify confusing points in the passage. He might point these out or ask other students to point them out. For example, the student leader might say, "The part about why the dog ran into the car was confusing to me. Can anyone explain this?" Or, the student leader might ask students to ask clarification questions. The group then attempts to clear up the confusing parts. This might involve rereading parts of the passage.

**Predicting:** The student leader asks for predictions about what will happen in the next segment of the text. The leader can write the prediction on the blackboard or on an overhead, or all students can write them down in their notebooks.

### Example of Reciprocal Teaching in Music:

Collin was selected to be the leader of his reciprocal teaching group. After the students in the group read the first few paragraphs in the passage the teacher had taken from the Internet, Collin explained the terms *tone* and *harmonics*. He also did a nice job summarizing the information about sound waves. The questions he asked the class about *frequency* and *hertz* indicated that most students understood that part of the passage. The "clarifying" part of reciprocal teaching was easy for him because he couldn't understand the statement that "even if pitch and volume change, the shape of the sound waves stays the same." Other students agreed that the information about pitch and volume was particularly difficult to understand, but some of them tried to help clarify it. Collin began to understand the concept a little better, but he admitted it was still fuzzy in his mind. Finally, Collin examined the list of topics along the side of the page from the Web site, and predicted that they were now going to learn about tone, harmonics, sound waves, and frequencies as they applied to the brass, string, percussion, and woodwind sections.

Remember: although reciprocal teaching begins with the generation of a summary statement, it might be considered a "first draft" of a summary. The technique supports the generalization that to effectively delete, substitute, and keep information, students must analyze the information at a fairly deep level.