Literature Review: "Reciprocal Teaching"

Palinscar, Brown, and Campione (1989) define Reciprocal Teaching (RT) as a dialogue involving the teacher and their students. This discourse is described as "reciprocal" because each student converses with others (classmates as well as teacher) typically within a structured learning environment.

Hurley & Tinajero (2001) clearly note that the true sense of literacy needs to include both proper speaking and listening skills. The inclusion of public speaking opportunities with ELLs is often neglected. Also stated in Hurley & Tinajero (2001), RT helps promote public speaking since it can be a practical oral approach within an interactive EFL lesson. This particular strategy encourages the use of receptive language which typically is an easier process to acquire (as opposed to productive language) for second language learners. The designers of RT state that this method of instruction will also help students explore and retain the subject matter at a higher level of understanding through spoken discourse with their classmates (Palinscar & Brown, 1985).

RT strategies encourage thinking aloud by the students particularly as they serve as RT "Teachers" during an instructional exercise. By the students acting as the classroom teacher (within RT) this form of role-playing taps into those higher-level thinking skills that strengthen conceptual understanding. The teaching of higher-level cognitive skills (i.e., connecting to prior knowledge) helps with content comprehension, such as reading (Hurley & Tinajero, 2001).

Lederer (2000) states that RT has been found to be an effective comprehension technique to use with students with varied needs (such as learning disabilities). This study determined that the effectiveness of RT works well with a

diverse group of students within an inclusive classroom. Therefore, ELLs may function well in this form of instruction without having to be pulled-out of the typical classroom and, particularly, from their main classroom peers who can serve as role-models in acquiring English language skills.

With an emphasis on meta-cognitive activities within a collaborative setting, RT utilization of think aloud strategies helps to encourage social interactions by students (Kucan & Beck, 1997). These complementary tactics can actually promote greater language acquisition of ELLs.

In terms of the social and collaborative prospects that RT can foster, students take ownership of their responsibilities in this instructional process when they feel comfortable with expressing their ideas and opinions in an open and supportive learning environment. The student takes turns articulating their thoughts by following designated cooperative learning roles within small, less threatening groups. This "learning community" is able to reinforce understanding not only by the teacher, as expected, but by the support and collaborative efforts of the student's peers. All members of the group have a shared responsibility for leading and taking part in communicating their thoughts during the structured learning experiences set forth by the teacher (Hashey & Connors, 2003).

A hurdle in accepting the use of RT and, thereby, effectively presenting the requisite strategies, is the teacher's belief in constructive learning (e.g., students will draw their own meanings from what they read), along with his/her teaching abilities using the RT process. A teacher who does not support or understand constructivist theory may not be open to teaching using this method. Additionally, teachers who are supportive of this process and want to use RT strategies need to be properly trained (Hacker & Tenent, 2002).

In determining the how and when in deciding to use the RT approach as part of instruction, the ability to integrate within an academic subject area and related lessons can be a struggle.   Working collaboratively with other willing teachers, such as a co-teaching partnership, can help ensure best instructional practices. This can be a time-consuming process which provokes the question of whether this is a valuable use of both the teacher's and students' time. An elementary teacher, who could more easily integrate the strategies within the content areas, may see greater success using the RT process in relation to the single-content area secondary teacher, for whom integrative strategies can prove to be more challenging (Hashey & Connors, 2003).

Summary: Providing public speaking experiences in an EFL or inclusive classroom can be integral in promoting greater oral communication among the students. Reciprocal Teaching would help with the promotion of public speaking since it can be a useful orally interactive EFL learning experience. A topic read and then discussed, as well as the ability to "think out loud", typically helps in the process of understanding concepts at a higher cognitive level.

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