

DOINGWHATWORKS



Video

FULL DETAILS AND TRANSCRIPT

Reciprocal Teaching in High School

Gateway High School, California • February 2009

Topic: Adolescent Literacy

Practice: Comprehension Strategies

Highlights

- Eleventh-grade teacher Suzanne Herko describes how she teaches her Humanities students about the strategies and structures of Reciprocal Teaching
- Students discuss *The Great Gatsby* in groups of three and four; each plays a role (discussion leader, summarizer, questioner, predictor).
- Through the engagement with text, their peers, and focused strategies students gain metacognitive skills in reading.

About the Site

Gateway High School

San Francisco, CA

Demographics

27% White

25% Hispanic

24% Asian

17% Black

7% Other

1% Native American

67% Free or Reduced-Price Lunch

9% English Language Learners

Gateway High School is a charter high school in San Francisco with a focus on “academic excellence through personalized, student-centered learning” (mission statement). Key components of their program include:

- Learning Center
- Reading Support Program
- Schoolwide reading strategy instruction

Gateway staff work collaboratively to help students develop strong reading skills by:

- Engaging staff in schoolwide literacy professional development,
- Using diagnostic testing to identify the specific needs of struggling readers,
- Providing intervention support to struggling readers through an intensive reading support program,
- Providing ongoing support to students through the Learning Center,
- Using strategies schoolwide for promoting reading development such as the use of literature circles and Reciprocal Teaching across grade levels, and
- Holding high expectations for all students to become successful readers

Full Transcript

My name is Suzanne Herko. I teach Humanities 11 at Gateway High School, which is a charter school in San Francisco, California. Our humanities program is an integrated study of U.S. literature and history. I think reading instruction is appropriate for all ages. As we learn and as we develop, we constantly benefit from increased understanding of how we learn, and reading instruction is all about learning how you learn. It’s all about learning how to make sense of new things. The more you understand how you make sense of things in reading, the better reader you can be.

Student: So, Nick, what happened?

Student: Alright, so he moved, I guess. He left the country, met some friends, got a dog...

Herko: Reciprocal Teaching is a way of having students co-construct understanding of difficult text. It models the things that good readers do as they read. So, they read, they summarize, and they try to make sense and understand their reading. They question themselves about what they have read, and they predict what’s going to go on next. And what Reciprocal Teaching does is it takes those kind of natural instincts that good readers do, and it makes them explicit through students having designated roles in the Reciprocal

Teaching process. We have one student read. We have one student summarize. One student questions. One student predicts. We rotate through those roles. As a group of three or four, students then co-construct their understanding of the text.

Student: "... over again with the summer."

Student: Basically, what this summarizes is like, he was basically walking along one day, some man came up to him, and kind of gave him the...

Herko: I have chosen *Gatsby* as part of our curriculum to teaching Reciprocal Teaching because even my best readers in the class, even though they might be able to understand the basics of it, they really benefit from spending additional time and the insights of other people as they do it. So, I think it's really important that there be a text that's complex enough so that there are lots of different entry levels for students.

Student: You know, how he is giving him directions, he feels lonely.

Student: What do you predict, Sydney?

Student: I'm not the predictor; that's her job.

Student: I predict that something changes. His life is going to start to turn around for him.

Herko: It's our first day of reading the book. We had done a lot of pre-reading activities with them, kind of schema building activities in terms of ideas and themes. So they were kind of prepared conceptually to enter the book, but we had not yet read it together. And so, what we saw today was their really initial attempt to make sense of Fitzgerald and his writing.

Student: Based on the cover, with like the city at night and it has a lot of lights on it, I said that there would be a lot of nightlife.

Herko: My role as a teacher in Reciprocal Teaching is to build students to independence in utilizing these metacognitive processes in their reading. We start it by modeling what it looks like. We move it to having them practice it on their own with monitoring and then practicing it to independence. It's called kind of a reading apprenticeship model in the sense that all along I'm there. I'm helping them to understand how to do it, cheering them on, giving them positive feedback, giving some suggestions on how to do it better, and then at some point they can do it on their own.

We do some direct teaching around each of the roles. I think the only role that is particularly difficult for students to encounter is the summary role. Most of that, I'll kind of front load in the fall by doing lessons around summary, and we do that mostly around expository text. We talk about finding the main idea and how to kind of glean the main idea from something. We use sentence stems, and I've given students some sentence stems for what the main idea might be in a particular paragraph. And then we just practice it a lot and give them feedback on it. It's really all about them practicing again and again. It's also about, I think, students understanding how to summarize in a bunch of different texts. A text can't be too hard; it can be

too easy. If it's something that's way too hard for them, they can't even begin to summarize.

Student: They're talking about Daisy and her husband, and, like, basically, how her family is wealthy, her husband's family is wealthy, and how he left Chicago, and just basically, just their life story.

Herko: So, when students first start Reciprocal Teaching, I think there are a lot of both kind of cultural and personal roadblocks that can inhibit their embracing it. I think on the cultural level, it really involves students putting themselves out there in the classroom. And if students are not such good readers, they feel very insecure about participating fully in it. And so I think one of the first struggles is creating a comfortable climate in the classroom so that students can really take those risks and make mistakes and feel okay with it and move on and get better. I think on the personal level also, because they're struggling with perhaps insecurity, they don't necessarily want to embrace this new thing because it feels like maybe it's too forced or it's something that they're not going to be able to do. And so I've experienced resistance from students that they don't want to try it out. They're kind of scared to put themselves on the line. So, I think the biggest struggle is really developing student buy-in into it. And I think that one of the ways that you do that is by really being explicit about how these are the things that good readers do, and as good readers, we can always find text that we find challenging. And what we need to do is just be prepared to meet those challenges.

Student: "I drove over to East Egg to see the two old friends whom I scarcely knew at all." Actually, I think we should stop there.

Student: Alright, they went to play some football. Can you actually read it again? You read it pretty fast. I'm not going to lie.

Student: That's a great idea.

Student: "Why they came East, I don't know..."

Herko: One thing I noticed is that students become much more aware of their processes as readers. They start saying things like, "Oh, you know, I really need to reread this," which sometimes would seem obvious to a teacher but isn't necessarily obvious to a student. Oftentimes students have this idea that when you read something, either you get it or you don't get it. So, I see them being more metacognitive in understanding what they need to do in order to make sense of stuff. I see them also gaining more confidence in terms of their ability to approach difficult text, so that by the time we get to the spring, students are doing much more independent reading of difficult texts, and they're less intimidated by it because they kind of feel like, "Hey, I have conquered this text, and I've done that, and I can do this other one as well."

Student: I think he's going to have an argument with Tom because they both love the same kind of—like, they both like Daisy.

Student: Fight for his love. Okay.