

# Reciprocal teaching: a schoolwide core teaching and learning strategy

Educational psychologist and teacher Julia Westera is a passionate advocate for reciprocal teaching (RT). Her 2002 doctorate focused on its use as an inclusive, schoolwide strategy and more recently she co-authored *BES Exemplar 4* on the same theme. Julia’s ambition is to see reciprocal teaching used in a powerful way in our schools, increasing the likelihood of success for our tamariki and encouraging them to become life-long learners.

In this Q & A session, Janina Gaudin asks Julia to explain what reciprocal teaching is, and why she believes it has such potential.

## So Julia, what is reciprocal teaching?

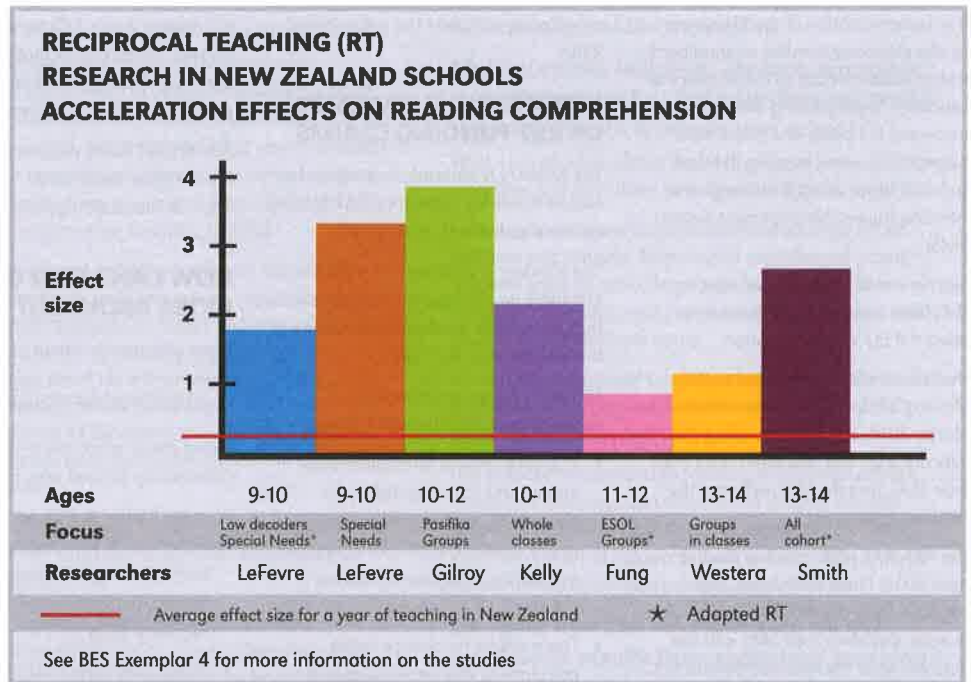
Reciprocal teaching is a package of strategies that increases a student’s ability to access and understand what they are reading, especially challenging text. It can also be used for small-group collaborative investigation. It involves four thinking strategies: clarifying, questioning, summarising, and predicting, as well as thinking about thinking strategies (metacognitive instruction).

The teacher explicitly coaches small groups of students in these four strategies while they are immersed in a cooperative group routine. This involves each student taking a turn at leadership of the group and in sharing responsibility for understanding the text they are reading together. Students may quickly become self-managing in this discussion group. However, reciprocal teaching is most effective if the teacher or tutor continues to scaffold the learning of the four strategies while managing repeated opportunities for deepening understanding and practice with increasingly challenging text or tasks.

## Why is reciprocal teaching important?

We know that for students to feel successful at school, they need to understand text and learn from it. We also know that many students do not have some of the basic thinking strategies required for this. We know that these strategies can be explicitly taught, and we know that reciprocal teaching, a package of just four thinking strategies, can significantly improve students’ understanding of text.

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- RECIPROCAL TEACHING – ALIGNMENTS**
- NZ Curriculum and Te Marautanga
  - SOLO Taxonomy (surface, deep and conceptual understanding)
  - Inclusion (develops all key competencies)
  - The inquiry approach
  - Te Kotahitanga
  - Boys’ literacy
  - NCEA preparation
  - Positive Behaviour for Learning (PB4L)
  - Modern Learning Environments (MLE)
  - Efficient, effective reading and thinking

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A second reason for reciprocal teaching being important is that alongside developing deeper thinking skills and metacognitive awareness, students can develop cooperative, collaborative reasoning and leadership skills.

A third reason is that when students are fluent with the integrated use of both thinking and cooperative strategies, they are empowered to cope with any difficult reading or problem solving experience, including at tertiary level.

### Where does reciprocal teaching come from?

Reciprocal teaching was developed by two world-leading applied researchers in educational and cognitive psychology: Anne Brown and Annemarie Palincsar. At the time it was developed, reciprocal teaching was considered a breakthrough in teaching methods. Reciprocal teaching is now supported by over 30 years of research, and it still stands out as a centre stage teaching method.

As a package reciprocal teaching combines cognitive/metacognitive methods with interactive, equitable, and authentic teaching methods. It is also underpinned by the apprenticeship and the scaffolding approaches.

### Why use reciprocal teaching?

I believe that it ticks all the boxes and Box No. 1 is that it has a large evidence base that shows that it can significantly accelerate learning.

In his book *Visible Learning*, Professor John Hattie ranks reciprocal teaching third out of 49 of the most effective teaching strategies.

*Exemplar 4: Reciprocal Teaching* is part of a Best Evidence Synthesis (BES) series of exemplars featuring teaching strategies that have proven to be highly effective for diverse (all) learners. In it, we describe six different implementations in New Zealand primary, intermediate, and secondary schools. These studies include senior primary students with behavioural issues, low decoders, ESOL students, and an entire cohort of 13-year-old students in a multicultural secondary school.

The bar graph (see page 7) shows the results of these studies in comparison with 'business as usual', which is represented by the red line for the average effect size for a year of teaching in New Zealand. Overall, the bar graph shows how effective reciprocal teaching can be with a wide range of students. Most impressive are the results for a cohort of Year 9 students, who made very significant gains in higher order thinking skills (asTTle reading, deep features) through 15 or more 30-minute sessions using a skilled coaching team approach.

When writing this exemplar we were alerted to integrity concerns raised by the developer, Annemarie Palincsar, and other researchers in educational psychology. These include widespread 'pepper-potting' and 'lethal mutations'. New Zealand teachers say 'dabbling' in the approach is common here. The consequence can be nil or negative results for our students.

### OK, so it's got a large evidence base and performs powerfully when implemented with integrity. Are there still more reasons to use reciprocal teaching?

It is also a multi-purpose tool. It is a key method for all students to improve in foundation literacy, language, and deeper thinking skills, as they learn to cope with and understand challenging text and curriculum content. It can be used in nearly all learning areas: science, Te Reo, mathematics, philosophy, physical education – you name it.

Reciprocal teaching also provides a dynamic approach

for enhancing all key competency areas. These include foundation skills in effective and meaningful 'collaborative reasoning'. Teachers learning this method become excited about how their students become empowered and self-managing learners – both as individuals and as group members. Even fringe students become active class members and develop cooperative leadership skills. Arguably, reciprocal teaching can enhance skills central to resiliency building, wholesome community participation and leadership, and life-long learning.

### Multi-purpose, inclusive, life-long relevance ... that's impressive! But how does reciprocal teaching fit with teachers and schools?

Well, reciprocal teaching is clearly aligned with our current priorities and directions (see Alignment table, page 7).

I see it as a core teaching and learning strategy for all teachers and schools. Even highly experienced expert teachers from all schooling levels have told me how reciprocal teaching continues to enhance how they teach and how their students learn.

In addition, reciprocal teaching can complement our focus on digital technology and contribute towards building more dynamic classrooms.

If it is deeply embedded in schools, it can build a more connected language and culture and deepen ako and kanohi ki te kanohi (face-to-face) relationships. There is certainly a bit of anxiety but also a buzz when a whole school moves in the same direction on this one.

### OK Julia, how can we make sure we get worthwhile results from reciprocal teaching?

Well, robust and high-impact results for all students are clearly connected with reciprocal teaching being well designed and effectively implemented in a schoolwide approach.

A basic would be that we have trained operators, at least one in each school. Further, many schools will need external expert facilitators, particularly in the professional development and start-up stages, and also to maintain momentum in working collaboratively towards a high-impact, quality and sustainable strategy specifically for the school. Reciprocal Teaching 3 Track (RT3T), the new model, should help schools design their approach.

### So to summarise, reciprocal teaching is a multi-purpose package of strategies that can be used to accelerate learning, especially in literacy and deeper thinking skills – all within a short timeframe if well implemented. That's impressive!

*Julia is currently working on updating and integrating the evidence base further, focusing on efficient and effective professional development, tailored schoolwide implementation, and web-based resources. She is co-working with schools and colleagues and developing lead schools. The RTeach website is <http://rteach.co.nz>*

**BES Exemplar 4/Ngā Kete Raukura He Tauira 4: Reciprocal Teaching by Adrienne Alton-Lee, Julia Westera and Cathy Pulegatoa-Diggins** is available from the Education Counts website: [www.educationcounts.gov.nz/topics/BES/bes-exemplars](http://www.educationcounts.gov.nz/topics/BES/bes-exemplars). Hard copies are available free for NZ educators from [orders@thechair.minedu.govt.nz](mailto:orders@thechair.minedu.govt.nz)

this means in terms of the amount or type of payment, there needs to be a clear link between the payment received and the work completed. Services will be responsible for complying with the requirements of employment-related legislation such as the Commerce Act 1986 and the Income Tax Act 2007.

### WHAT HAS CHANGED?

To reflect the 'gain or reward' requirement, changes have been made to the following licensing forms:

- » EC/1 HB Application Form
- » EC/3 Licensing Assessment Tool for Home-based ECE services
- » EC/8 Application to Amend a Licensed Early Childhood Service's Details.

A letter has been sent to all home-based service providers reminding them about the 'gain or reward' requirement and detailing the changes that have been made to the licensing forms.

If you require further information about 'gain or reward', please contact either Robyn McClymont on (04) 463 2895 or Catherine Bell on (04) 463 8098.

### THINGS TO NOTE:

#### Next issue of update

The next early childhood education ECE Update will appear in Volume 93 Number 8, which is available from Monday 19 May.

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#### Ordering resources and publications

To order early childhood education resources and publications, contact Wickliffe.

Wickliffe provides customer services for the Ministry of Education publications. If you need to order anything, phone: 0800 660 662, fax 0800 660 663 or email [orders@thechair.govt.nz](mailto:orders@thechair.govt.nz)

#### Useful links

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