Reciprocal Reading

Reciprocal Reading is a structured approach to teaching strategies (questioning, clarifying, summarising and predicting) that students can use to improve their reading comprehension. Initially, students develop their use of these strategies by observing a teacher ‘thinking aloud’. This is followed by opportunities for students to work in groups so that they can continue to observe others using the strategies and experiment with the strategies whilst receiving feedback. Ultimately, the aim is for students to use the strategies with increasing independence and sophistication.

The project is being led by FFT Literacy (part of the Fischer Family Trust) which has developed the programme based on previous international work. We are testing a whole class approach in Year 4 and a targeted approach for students struggling with reading comprehension in Years 5 and 6.

Why are we funding it?

Reciprocal reading (or teaching) has been used widely in English speaking countries, but it is rarely used in the UK. There is some previous non-experimental evidence on reciprocal teaching: a meta-analysis of 16 studies (including some randomised trials) found an average effect size of 0.32 on reading test performance, and higher effect sizes for comprehension tests. These are large effects, but the underlying studies all assessed slightly different programmes, and were not of uniformly high quality. FFT Literacy has conducted its own evaluation of Reciprocal Reading delivered as a targeted intervention to 48 students, which showed promising results.

There is extensive evidence to support the teaching of reading comprehension strategies, but this is often challenging for schools to do. Reciprocal Reading provides a structured approach to develop pupils use of comprehension strategies and it can be used in schools as an alternative to guided reading. Reciprocal Reading is potentially a very cost-effective approach. This trial will form part of the North East Primary Literacy Campaign.

How are we evaluating it?

A team from Queen’s University Belfast, led by Andy Biggart, has been appointed as the independent evaluator. The design is a two-armed randomised controlled trial involving 100 primary schools, with 50 schools receiving Reciprocal Reading and 50 acting as a business as usual control group. The trial is an efficacy trial so aims to test whether the intervention can work under ideal conditions (e.g. when being delivered by the intervention’s original developer).

When will the evaluation report be due?

The evaluation report will be published in Summer 2019.