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**Reciprocal Teaching in a College-Level Chinese Classroom**

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Summited in partial fulfillment  
of the requirement for the degree of  
Master of Arts in Teaching  
Moravian College  
Bethlehem, Pennsylvania  
2016

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### **Abstract**

The qualitative research study investigates the observed and reported experiences of college students when reciprocal teaching approach was implemented in a CFL (learning Chinese as a foreign language) reading class. The study explores students' discussions and works during reciprocal teaching activities in a group setting or individually to examine the students' application of the reciprocal teaching strategies of predicting, clarifying, questioning, and summarizing.

The findings suggest that the implementation of reciprocal teaching could positively influence students' application of reading strategies and enhance students' reading comprehension. The findings also suggest that the design of student-led discussion in reciprocal teaching could lead to students' engagement in reading activities and build up students' confidence in reading independently.

### **Acknowledgements**

First, I thank all students in my CHIN195 class for their willingness to participate in this study and their strength to overcome their weakness in Chinese reading. I really enjoyed this incredible journey with them. During the research process, I believe I learned more from my students than they learned from me.

I would also like to thank Dr. Yozell, chair of Department of Modern Language and Literature at Moravian College, for supporting my study. She was the first one who welcomed me to the lovely department and has always been supportive and encouraging to me for these two years.

I would like to offer sincere thanks to all my professors at Moravian College for pushing me to do the best I can. As an ESL student, I appreciated their kindness and all the supports they gave. Thank Mrs. Modjadidi for her warm encouragement when I first attended this program. Thank Dr. Shosh for all of his support and positive energy in the two years. And of course thank Dr. Dilendik for his guidance and suggestions throughout the process of writing the thesis.

Besides, I thank my lovely classmates in the M.Ed. program for their advice and accompany. Many thanks go to each one of them for their kindness and useful suggestions throughout the challenging process. All

the people I met at Moravian College in these two years helped me become a better teacher.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my parents and my boyfriend. Thank my parents for encouraging me to study abroad and to get out of my comfort zone. They are also the ones that always believe in me. I also thank my boyfriend for all the supports he gave and his sweet blindness of always seeing me as a better person than I truly am.

Finally, I want to quote a sentence from “謝天”, an article I love, written by a famous Chinese writer Chen Zhifan:

因為需要感謝的人太多了，就感謝天吧！

*Since there are too many people I have to express gratitude to, let thank heaven then.*

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### **Research Stance**

My reading journey started at a book rental store in the neighborhood of Taiwan. As the name implies, book rental stores allow reading of a wide array of books for short periods of time and a small fee, of course. Because I was born in a dual-earner family, my parents didn't have much time to accompany me in my childhood. From the time I was in third grade, my mom asked me to stay in the book rental store each day after school, so almost every day I spent approximately two hours there exploring the beauty under the covers of books in the store, renting my favorites to take with me. I thank my parents for placing no restrictions at all on my selection of books. From banal romance novels to thrilling Gongfu fiction and from exquisite poetry to abstruse classics, I got to open any world I was attracted to at the time. These numerous books became my many nannies. I spent lots of time living vicariously through them in my childhood, even though some of them were really hard to understand. This immersion in reading led me to study Chinese literature in college and finally to become a senior high school Chinese literature teacher for the sake of sharing the beauty with my students that I had experienced in the literature I read.

However, the realities of teaching broke my innocence quickly. After graduation, I began my teaching career at Taipei Municipal Zhong-

Zheng Senior High School, where I taught twenty-two hours per week and was responsible for nearly 130 students. The school urged students to take quizzes every day in order to make sure students reached the objectives of the curriculum and I, unfortunately, became the reluctant administrator. The emphasis placed on scores led to many students' passive attitude toward reading. Viewing literature as nothing more than a test preparation reading task, students often refused to engage deeply or to talk about the literature enthusiastically. In our classroom, reading unfortunately became a unidirectional infusion where I as the teacher conveyed my understanding of literature to students, whose job was simply to take notes and memorize them. In my second year of teaching, I tried to flip the classroom and make some changes. I redesigned my lesson plans, aiming at connecting students to the literature, engaging them in their reading, eliciting their independent thinking, and encouraging them to share their opinions on literature. However, under the oppressive pressure of getting into top colleges, lots of students were unwilling to change. They preferred the traditional classroom paradigm. To be honest, memorizing was much easier for them than was thinking on their own. Sometimes I even got phone calls from parents requesting, "Be traditional! Just help my kids get in good colleges!" My implementation of a flipped classroom

model did not go well in the end. Or, thinking from another perspective, as a naïve teacher, I was not fully prepared to make this innovation.

There's a Chinese proverb known to most English speakers that goes, "Give a man a fish and you have fed him for today. Teach a man to fish and you have fed him for a lifetime." However, the predicament that I encountered was that this school and even the larger society's educational philosophy required teachers to feed students fish as much as possible. Whether they could digest or not was an issue that teachers were not to worry about. In order to prove to the principal and parents that I was a diligent teacher, I had no choice but to provide a feast in the form of well-designed lecture notes and endless supplementary materials, which ironically spoiled students' appetite for reading instead. In my belief system, reading should be an interactive meaning-making process. However, while standing at the front of the room in a traditional classroom, I felt as though I was cultivating compliant students—not real readers.

To shake off the feeling of helplessness, I realized that I would need to think outside the box. After three years of teaching, I decided to go outside the box physically, teaching Chinese as a foreign language and pursuing my Master of Arts in Teaching degree in the United States. While taking graduate courses at Moravian College, I experienced a

completely different teaching philosophy and expectation in the classroom. When a professor assigns reading tasks, he/she did not expect you to memorize the contents of texts. Instead, he/she wanted you to comprehend and make arguments. By contrast in Taiwan, students were usually rewarded on how much they could memorize. Here in the United States, on the contrary, to what degree students interacted with those texts was the main concern. Of course, there are invariably many differences between graduate school and the high school classroom, but I'm glad that I had the opportunity firsthand to observe and experience the intrinsic difference between two disparate teaching philosophies.

When it comes to teaching, I believe that without the chains of endless examinations, students show a lot of interest in learning Chinese. They are curious, motivated and willing to participate in challenging tasks in class. Their positive learning attitude is beyond question. However, in my experience they have shown poor capacity for reading Chinese characters simultaneously. For students whose native language is English, a phonetic language, Chinese provides the challenge of a completely different logographic language system. In logographic systems, symbols represent the words themselves. Reading Chinese requires processing and connecting three components simultaneously: sound, shape and meaning. Without any prior knowledge in characters, my CFL (learning Chinese as

a foreign language) students face huge difficulties in the initial stage of reading Chinese. In reading class, they can only pronounce each character but fail to read paragraphs fluently and to understand the main points of paragraphs on their own. There is such a difference between students' performance in speaking class and reading class. Unlike the active participation they demonstrate in speaking class, they are inclined to wait for me to read and clarify for them. Hence, I identified reading comprehension as the biggest problem that needed to be resolved in my class designed to introduce Chinese language and culture to American students.

After identifying the problem, what is the next step? It would be irresponsible and ridiculous to attribute the poor outcomes of my reading class to external factors because I have a broad educational environment and my students are excellent. With no excuse, I need to take action now! As a result, I started to think about what else I could do for my students and what action I could take to improve their reading comprehension. Since the CSL learners in my class are at college level, I realized that they were absolutely capable of applying reading strategies to improve their reading comprehension and monitoring their own reading behaviors even though they are naïve Chinese language learners. After reviewing

literature, I found out that Palincsar and Brown's reading theory of "reciprocal teaching" (1984) might be suitable for my objectives.

My research question is *what are the observed and reported experiences of American college students when they apply specific reading strategies in the classroom to improve their reading comprehension?* I'm confident that my students are all capable of doing much better than just cramming those complicated strokes and radicals, even though they are just beginners with the Chinese language. I hope through the implementation of my study, students will learn how to apply reading strategies and monitor their reading process. My ideal outcome is that the students are able to not only recognize and read each character, but also apply reading strategies in reading Chinese characters and comprehend short paragraphs. Moreover, I hope when students walk outside my classroom, they will be able to read independently in the real world.

The results of my research might not match my anticipated outcomes, and I'm aware that I must remain open to any possible results. I realize that the subject pool of my study is so small that results may not be generalizable beyond my teaching context. Knowing that one of my students seriously falls behind in class, I'm not sure how much he would benefit from this approach since it requires much peer discussions. Lack of basic character knowledge might exclude him from those discussions.

However, whether the inquiry ends as anticipated or not, I intend in my future career journey to be a fishing coach – not a fishmonger!

### **Literature Review**

In recent years, there has been a flourish of interest in learning Chinese as a foreign language (CFL) at both high schools and colleges throughout the United States. According to the Modern Language Association, the number of institutions reporting enrollments in Chinese has more than doubled, from 412 in 1990 to 866 in 2013, and the enrollments in Chinese have more than tripled, from 19,427 in 1990 to 61,055 in 2013 (Goldberg, Looney, & Lusin, 2015). Ye indicated this flourish of interest was motivated by two important factors. One is China's expanding influence in international business. The other is that since 2006, the U.S. government has developed the National Security Language Initiative to broaden "critical-need" foreign language education in Chinese, Arabic and Russian, among others, for the purpose of national security. (Ye, 2011)

### **Chinese Writing System**

Catching up to the trend of learning Chinese, there have been increasing demands for educational research related to learning Chinese as a foreign language. Despite having enthusiasm about Chinese language, learning Chinese as a Foreign Language in the U.S. often encounters huge and unique challenges, especially in reading and writing. The basic reason is that English and Chinese writing systems are fundamentally different.

“While the writing system of English is alphabetic, in which symbols reflect the pronunciation of the words, Chinese has a logographic writing system in which each character represents a morpheme, or minimal unit of meaning, and corresponds to one syllable” (Wu & Anderson, 2007). In order to read Chinese for meaning, readers need to connect a character’s sound, shape and meaning all together at the same time, a challenge for which American students have likely been ill prepared in their language learning journey. Therefore, Thompson asserts that becoming proficient in reading Chinese as a foreign language can be a long and arduous process for American students because they need to read a language that shares few common features with their own language (Thompson, 2008). Shen and Jiang illustrate the reasons why American CFL learners often struggle in reading Chinese:

Unlike English, Chinese has a character-based orthography and lacks of sound-to-script correspondence. In addition, in reading texts, characters representing lexical morphemes and word boundaries are not indicated by a space, which introduces additional complications for lower-level linguistic processing during reading compared to an alphabetic language. Due to its unique orthographic system, students whose native language is alphabetic encounter

great challenges when reading Chinese (Shen & Jiang, 2013).

Given that CFL learners at beginning-level may be easily scared away from classrooms by obscure Chinese characters, some CFL scholars suggest that for beginning-level learners, teachers could postpone character learning until students have basic communication skill as well as some vocabulary and grammar knowledge. Walker indicates two main reasons that CFL students may benefit from delayed character learning. First of all, it follows the pattern of native/first language acquisition, speaking and listening before reading and writing; and secondly, it allows students to focus on orthography without worry about grammar and vocabulary (Walker, 1984). Packard's study in 1990 also indicated that the students who were provided with a three-week time lag prior to the introduction of characters into their elementary Chinese curriculum were better able to discriminate phonetically and transcribe unfamiliar Mandarin Syllables and were also more fluent in speaking Mandarin than were the students who were not provided such a lag (Packard, 1990).

Delaying characters learning, though, may not be enough by itself. Many naïve CFL learners still struggle at the decoding level of reading and often fail to capture the main idea of the text. The cognitive process of CFL students while reading is limited to bottom-up model, taking in

stimuli from the outside world — letters and words, for reading — and dealing with that information often with little recourse to higher-level knowledge (Treiman, 2001). However, Christensen and Warnick indicate that knowledge of characters for their own sake is not particularly helpful; the purpose of knowing characters is to read and write texts, not to be able to identify single characters. Learning the writing system is more effective when characters are contextualized (Christensen & Warnick, 2006). Since the bottom-up model traditionally has not accounted for the role of background knowledge and contextual information, it would be helpful to include more high-level processes, which direct the flow of information through low-level processes in the classroom. Therefore, top-down model, the uptake of information is guided by an individual's prior knowledge and expectation, is indispensable in the reading classroom. Reciprocal teaching, summing up, is an interactive approach that incorporated the features of both bottom-up and top-down models, and there are lots of practices that showed RT has succeed in eliciting interactions between readers and texts.

### **Zone of Proximal Development & Scaffolding**

Vygotsky (1978) introduced a concept he calls the zone of proximal development (ZPD):

It is the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers (Vygotsky, 1978, p.86).

According to Vygotsky's theory, learners should be able to complete challenging tasks within their respective ZPD when they have sufficient support from more capable others. Beyond doubt, one of the teacher's key roles is to serve as a more knowledgeable other to support language acquisition. Wood, Bruner and Ross (1976) also presented the concept of scaffolding, which they defined as:

A process that enables a child or novice to solve a problem, carry out the task or achieve a goal, which would be beyond his unassisted efforts. This scaffolding consists essentially of the adult "controlling" those elements of the tasks that are initially beyond learners' capacity, thus permitting to concentrate upon and complete only those elements that are within his range of competence. (Wood, Bruner & Ross, 1976, p. 90)

Reciprocal teaching, introduced by Palincsar and Brown in 1984, was influenced by Vygotsky's developmental theory. While Vygotsky

believed that a great deal of development was mediated by expert scaffolding, in the context of RT instruction where a novice is encouraged to participate in group activities, “a novice carries out simple aspects of the task while observing and learning from an expert, who serves as a model for higher level involvement” (Palincsar and Brown, 1984, p.123). In other words, with appropriate scaffolding in the context of RT instruction, a novice can reach higher-level learning, which is within his/her zone of proximal development.

### **Reciprocal Teaching**

Reciprocal teaching (RT) is an instructional approach developed by Palincsar and Brown (1984) for the purpose of enhancing reading comprehension and overcoming comprehension failure. In order to teach poor readers how to approach texts the way that successful readers do, the RT procedure is designed for students and teachers to “talk to one another about text, taking turns leading the dialogue, which is structured to incorporate four strategies: *generating questions* about the content, *summarizing* the content, *clarifying* points, and *predicting* upcoming content from clues in the text or from prior knowledge of the topic” (Palincsar, Ransom & Derber, 1988, p. 37). According to Gruenbaum (2012), “the reciprocal teaching technique involves a group effort between instructors and students, and among students with their peers, focused on

bringing meaning to text” (p. 110). During reciprocal teaching procedure, teachers begin by introducing the purpose of RT and modeling the use of reading strategies to students. Next, students “predict before reading and then check their prediction during reading. They stop to clarify unknown words or ideas during reading. They ask ‘teacher questions’ during or after reading to check for their understanding. And they summarize either a page or the entire text selection after reading” (Stricklin, 2011, p. 620).

Four reading strategies are included in reciprocal teaching. For successful readers, strategies are applied unconsciously while reading. Palincsar and Brown indicated that “the well-practiced decoding and comprehension skills of expert readers permit them to proceed relatively automatically, until a triggering event alerts them to a comprehension failure” (p.118). However, for a struggling reader lacking of ability to comprehend texts automatically, clear instruction to the use of reading strategies may be a good way to encourage them to imitate expert readers’ cognitive process.

### **Predicting.**

By using headline, genre, prior paragraph, or graphic of the text, students can predict what is happening in the text. The strategy of predicting allows students to “draw inferences and use schemes” (Takala, 2006). Getting students involved in making predictions can focus their

attention on the content to be read, thereby improving their understanding of the key concepts (Cooper, 2000). Moreover, applying this reading strategy can motivate students to imagine the content of texts. Wood & Endres (2004) pointed out the benefits of this imagination: “By closing their eyes and using their senses to imagine a scene, character, event, or subject, students have the potential to become active, eager, and engaged participants in a reading lesson” (p.346).

### **Clarifying.**

After reading the text aloud with peers, students conduct clarifying strategies to continue comprehending the text. Students look for unfamiliar words and concepts and try to find out what they meant by themselves (Takala, 2006). Palincsar and Brown (1984) describe clarification as “students slow down their rate of processing, allocating time and effort to the task of cleaning up any the comprehension failure” (p. 118). “Clarifying helps students monitor their own comprehension as they identify problems they are having in comprehending portions of the text or figuring out difficult words” (Oczkus, 2010, p. 20). In order to apply the clarification strategy in reading, students need to concentrate completely on reading text beforehand. “Asking students to clarify requires that they engage in critical evaluation as they read” (Palincsar and Brown, 1984, p.120). To encourage students use the clarifying strategy, Hacker and

Tenent (2002) suggest teachers to ask their students to circle any words or sentences that did not make sense while reading.

### **Questioning.**

Generating questions on their own makes students more active learners. After reading, students are encouraged to raise questions they have about the text and then answer their own questions through peer discussion. While applying this strategy, students are “actively processing text information and monitoring their understanding of that information” (Simpson, Michele, & Nist, 2000). Bug and McDanel (2012) indicate students self-generating as well as self-answering questions would generally display better memory for the content of the text than students who just reread the text. Coates’ study (1993) also shows that “questions were important to the successful continuation of the exploration, extending knowledge and facilitating understanding” (p. 9)

However, many teachers implementing RT in their classrooms complain that questions of the texts students raise are often “superficial and literal and expanded only on propositional or sentential levels of the texts rather than more global understanding of them” (Hacker & Tenent, 2002). To elicit meaningful, teacher-like, questions from students, teachers may start by helping students scrutinize WH-questions (who, what, where,

when, why, and how) because students are likely to be most familiar with them (Miciano, 2004).

### **Summarizing.**

At the end of reading, students work together to summarize the main idea of the text according to information they just collected from reading. “Summarizing helps students to concentrate on the main idea and supporting details of the text” (Stricklin, 2011). Summarizing, which requires the ability to identify key words, narrow down information, and reorganize ideas is challenging for many readers. But Hacker and Tenent’s study (2002) shows that both students’ answers to their self-generated questions and their written summaries provided good approximations of students’ progress.

While implementing reciprocal teaching in classroom, students need to read on their own, participate in dialogue, and apply four reading strategies to comprehend the text. The responsibility of constructing meaning from the text is shifted from teachers to students themselves. “Reciprocal teaching is characterized as a dialogue between the teacher and students (or student leader and members of the group) that results in students’ learning how to construct meaning when they are placed in must-read situation” (Carter, 1997, p. 66).

### **Teacher's Role**

All four strategies are essential for reciprocal teaching to occur. However, only a precious few students are likely to facilitate these strategies automatically. Hence, a successful RT intervention requires the teacher to providing clarifying questions, model the use of reading strategies, give concrete examples of good reading behaviors, and engage students in activities (Gruenbaum, 2012). Oczkus (2012) indicated that scaffolding is one of the foundations of successful reciprocal teaching. He described the importance of scaffolding in reciprocal teaching:

During reciprocal teaching, the instruction is scaffolded, or supported. The students can see models of the four strategies, experience some “seat holding” as they try our reciprocal teaching in a supported environment, and, finally, work independently as they read while using reciprocal teaching strategies to help them comprehend the text (p. 29).

Therefore, teacher's clear modeling of strategy use is important, especially for elementary language learners. Eilers and Pinkly (2006) conducted research on developing metacognitive strategies for comprehending texts in the first grade classroom. The findings of their study suggest that explicit instruction of reading comprehension strategies

should begin at an earlier stage in students' reading development. Since students at the elementary language level already struggle with decoding texts with so much unfamiliar vocabulary and unfamiliar sentence structures, reading for meaning is likely to be difficult without appropriate scaffolding. Therefore, explicit teaching and modeling of the strategies must take place.

However, Palincsar and Brown (1984) stated that the majority of the "runs" are student controlled, with the teacher interspersing praise and encouragement and some management. Teacher's role is transforming during reciprocal teaching.

"The teacher has moved from the pivotal role of responding individually to each child, to a coach who sits in the background, offer encouragement, and occasionally push for a better interpretation of the text. The expert provides just the degree of scaffolding necessary for the dialogues to remain on track, leaving the students to take as much responsibility as they can. (Palincsar and Brown, 1984, p.163).

### **Think-aloud**

Oczkus (2010) indicated that think-aloud plays an integral part in reciprocal teaching:

Reciprocal teaching is not a pencil-and-paper activity. It was designed as a discussion technique in which think-alouds play an integral part. During a reciprocal teaching think-aloud, the reader talks aloud about each of the four strategies. Think-alouds show students what a good reader is thinking while reading, which again provides scaffolding toward developing good reading comprehension (Oczkus, 2010, p. 30-31).

In the 1950s, the psychologists shifted their focus on observable responses to stimuli, or a behaviorist perspective, to cognitive puzzles of the human mind. Kucan and Beck (1997) indicated “the cognitive revolution initiated a new era of thinking about thinking by addressing fundamental questions about the human mind and by creating perspectives and tools to pursue the answers to those questions” (p. 271). Think-aloud, verbal reports and produced by subjects who express their thoughts while engaged in some activities (Kucan & Beck, 1997), is a key metacognitive tool, allows psychologists as well as researchers to explore the domain of cognitive processing, which was previous inaccessible, by recording one’s expression of thoughts.

Someren, Barnard and Sanderberg described the practical procedures of think-aloud protocol in their book published in 1994:

1. Setting: providing the subject comfortable environment.
2. Instructions: The essence of the instruction is “Perform the task and say out loud what comes to your mind”.
3. Warming up: Providing students opportunities to practice thinking aloud.
4. Behavior of the experimenter and prompting: The researcher steps out. Interference should only occur to keep the subject talking.
5. Recording: Recording the whole session including instructions and practicing phrase.
6. Transcription of the protocol: Transcribing the protocol as verbatim as possible without interpretation.
7. Review: Reviewing the protocol with the subject.

Educational researchers also embrace the concept of think-aloud. It could be a method of instruction in reading comprehension. Kucan and Beck (1997) identified the merit of applying thinking aloud protocol to reading comprehension instruction is the potential to reveal what readers do while reading. Oczkus (2010) also indicates that thinking aloud is so powerful because it shows what the brain process of a good reader to other students. Through think-aloud strategy, the model of cognitive apprenticeship, which provides a framework for all the activities that

occurs during reciprocal teaching session, is presented in the classroom (Seymour & Osana, 2003, p.328).

### **Cooperative learning**

Peer work is an indispensable element in reciprocal teaching. Teachers foster reciprocal teaching through their belief that collaborative construction of meaning between themselves and students leads to a higher quality of learning (Allen, 2003).

According to Roger and David Johnson (2006), cooperative learning is the “instructional use of small groups so that students’ work together to maximize their own and each other’s learning”. But how can teachers maximize students’ learning through a cooperative learning approach? There are several key elements teachers may want to focus on in within their professional practices. First of all, students should work together to achieve shared goals. Second, “Every student in a cooperative learning group should have a role or part in order to accomplish the task” (Keyser, 2000). Finally, within cooperative situations, individuals seek outcomes that are beneficial to themselves and beneficial to all other group member (Johnson & Johnson, 2006).

Bolukbas, Kskin, and Polat’s study (2011) showed that cooperative learning is more effective in improving reading comprehensive skills of learners who study Turkish as a second language. Why is cooperative

learning profitable to L2 classrooms? One explanation is that, while cooperative learning is theoretically based on viewing learning as construction of knowledge within social context (Oxford, 1997), it provides students with the opportunity to comprehend reading texts as well as construct knowledge cooperatively. Many studies have been conducted to suggest positive results from cooperative learning. Johnson and Johnson (1989), for example, indicated that compared with competitive and individualistic learning, cooperation learning tends to promote higher achievement, and have been found to promote more positive attitudes toward the task and the experience of working on the task.

### **Practices of Reciprocal Teaching**

Palincsar and Brown (1984) conducted two instructional studies to test the effectiveness of reciprocal teaching in helping 7<sup>th</sup> grade poor readers improve reading comprehension. In the first study, the experiment group (RT) resulted in greater gains than the control group (typical classroom practice). Students in the experiment group made a significant improvement in the abilities of summarizing and questioning. There was also a sizable gain on students' criterion tests of comprehension (both on formative tests and standardized tests). Moreover, students in the experiment group showed a reliable maintenance over time for reciprocal

procedure. The intervention in the experiment group was conducted by volunteer teachers, in contrast to study 1, which was conducted by an experimenter. The results were similar to the ones in the first study.

While the initial studies on reciprocal teaching focused on 7<sup>th</sup> grade students, the results of later studies generalized the success to all age groups. Weedman (2003) used reciprocal teaching with 9<sup>th</sup> grade students to foster their reading comprehension. The results showed that students who received all four key strategies instruction benefitted more than students who only received one strategy instruction. At university level, Hart and Speece (1998) examined the effects of reciprocal teaching for postsecondary students at risk for academic failure. The results showed that the experiment group, receiving reciprocal teaching approach, performed much better on reading comprehension and strategies acquisition than the control group, receiving regular instruction. Besides, poorer readers in the experiment group benefitted more from reciprocal teaching than poorer readers in the control group. In short, the results from these empirical studies on reciprocal teaching in first language context were positive for all age groups.

In addition, reciprocal teaching was successfully applied to students for whom the target language in class is their second language (e.g. ELL). The Education Alliance at Brown University believes that

English language learners benefit from approaches, such as reciprocal teaching, that engage conversations where explicit connections are made between readers and texts: “Listening to their classmates' questions and comments in English and/or in a shared primary language can support ELLs' efforts to comprehend difficult texts.” Studies that were conducted in ELL context are mostly focused on university level because students at this educational level are mature enough to decode words.

Soonthornmanee (2002) implemented reciprocal teaching in Thailand. The results of his study indicated that the participants receiving RT approach had greater gains than the ones receiving skill-based instruction. Also, the participants in the experiment group reported a positive attitude toward reciprocal teaching. Besides, the findings of Fung, Wilkinson, and Moore's study (2003) indicated that not only could reciprocal teaching foster ESL's reading comprehension, but also the participants' comprehension processes changed in quality when reading both L1 (Chinese) and L2 (English).

### **Conclusion**

Reciprocal teaching involves extensive modeling and practice for the four strategies that are deemed to be ideal comprehension-fostering and comprehension- monitoring activities (Palincsar & Brown, 1984). Many researchers also agree that the implementation of reciprocal

teaching can increase students' reading comprehension (Alfassi, 1998; Gruenbaum, 2012; Oczkus, 2010; Takala, 2006). Additionally, during reciprocal teaching sessions, students' oral language and fluency improve as well (Klingner & Vaughn, 1996).

Palincsar and Brown's research (1984) has established the effectiveness of reading comprehension strategies instruction for students who are adequate decoders but poor comprehenders. Many empirical studies were conducted to generalize the effectiveness to all-age groups. Besides, reciprocal teaching has been recommended for second-language learners by researchers in the field (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990), and there are findings of several studies that showed the success of reciprocal teaching on students who learn English as a second language (ELL). However, further empirical research is needed to examine the effect of reciprocal teaching on students who learn Chinese as a second language. Therefore, I would like to focus my research on the observed behaviors and reported experience of CSL students when implementing Reciprocal Teaching in the reading classroom.

## **Methodology**

### **Introduction**

As a Chinese lecturer who teaches Chinese as a foreign language in the U.S., I'm more than eager to share the beauty of Chinese characters with my students. Unfortunately, as much as I wanted to engage students in and develop their confidence in reading Chinese characters, students were reluctant, sometimes even afraid, to read Chinese characters. It was obvious that my students preferred speaking class much more to reading class.

After I discovered the concept of reciprocal teaching, I determined it to be an appropriate approach for my students to build up useful reading strategies and then to apply these strategies to reading Chinese characters. While the majority of reciprocal teaching practices were conducted to help at-risk younger English readers, I hope through my study, investigating the effects of implementing reciprocal teaching in Chinese reading class at college level, I could provide a practice of reciprocal teaching both in college-level field and in second language education field. Most of all, I want to reconstruct my students' confidence and enthusiasm for reading Chinese characters.

## **Setting**

The college that I teach at is a liberal art college in eastern Pennsylvania. Approximately, this college has a total undergraduate enrollment of 1600. Studying in the sixth-oldest college in the country, students surprisingly have little exposure to East Asian culture as well as any East Asian languages. Instead of an independent department of East Asian studies, East Asian related courses are allocated under different departments at college. In 2014 fall, Chinese language program was started under the Modern language department and I was the first Chinese lecturer at the college. The participants for my study were the first batch of students in the Chinese program.

I met my students for 70 minutes per class and three times a week. During the 10-week research process, I embedded reciprocal teaching into my Level 2 Chinese reading class. The frequency of the implementation was approximate twice a week. During each implementation, participants were provided a reading text and worked as a cooperative group to comprehend the text using four reading strategies: predicting, clarifying, questioning, and summarizing. After this process, participants filled a checklist to self-evaluate their performances in class.

## **Participants**

All students in the Level 2 Chinese class I taught were included in the study. The class had four students between the ages of 19 to 25 years old. All participants are male, coming from various backgrounds. One participant is an international student who already acquired his bachelor degree. Among the other three participants, two are freshmen and one is a senior student at college.

These participants had taken my Level 1 Chinese class in the last semester. Therefore, they were roughly premised to have the same prior knowledge about Chinese characters. In the meantime, they felt familiar and comfortable to discuss and work cooperatively with peers in my Chinese class.

## **Methods of data collection**

In order to answer my research question and maintain the credibility of my study as well, I collected multiple forms of data for the duration of the implementation and engaged in ongoing reflection upon the data collected:

### **Observational Data.**

In the form of field log, I recorded all students' interactions and conversations which showed the way they process texts. After each class of the research process, I reviewed my notes and documented my

reflections for the classroom activities. The field log serves as a good method to thoroughly capture students' words in the classroom and their responses to peers or to my prompts.

As I facilitated reciprocal teaching throughout the classroom, not only did I take notes of the actions and words of participants, but also I observed my own instant responses to students and then recorded them in words after class immediately.

#### **Teacher/Student Checklist.**

After each day of the research process, the teacher and students were required to fill a checklist (Appendix E) for the sake of examining whether students applied four target reading strategies or not. Through the comparison between my observational data and these students' self-checklists, I could know more about students' self-perception of their applications to the target reading strategies.

#### **Quiz.**

Participants were required to take a quiz after each study unit in an attempt to monitor their learning outcomes. The quizzes were designed into four sections in which I evaluated four basic Chinese reading-related skills: phonological skills, rapid naming, orthographic skills and morphological awareness. Ten quizzes were administrated during the research process. By observing the participants' performances on the

quizzes, I could monitor the development of their reading comprehension and Chinese literacy.

### **Survey.**

The purpose of pre-survey (Appendix C) is to understand the initial climate of the participants' self-perceived Chinese reading attitudes and habits. To validate whether or not the intervention provided had positive effects of the participants involved, after the research process, I compared the information with the response from the final interview conducted after the implementation.

### **Interview.**

After each day of the research process, I would have a short interview with all participants. The intention of the group interviews was to timely track the effects of students' application of the target reading strategies and to collect students' feedbacks. Besides, an open-ended student interview was conducted to every participant at the end of the implementation. I met every participant separately in order to collect their thoughts and suggestions about reciprocal teaching as well as the implementation during the research process.

### **Student Work.**

For the duration of this study, while all participants worked in a cooperative group to comprehend the texts provided, individual reading

sheets were provided and required to turn in after class for me to make copies. I collected these sheets for the sake of examining their comprehension of the texts individually. Sometimes, participants were asked to conduct and present projects in the classroom. I took photographs of these works and used these to observe participants' reading comprehension and character development.

### **Trustworthiness Statement**

Historically, individuals engaging in academic educational research have been bound by ethical guidelines that protect the right of human subjects/participants (Hendricks, 2016). In order to maintain research ethics in my study, I followed a series of ethical guidelines to ensure all subjects' rights, both to education and to privacy, were preserved. First of all, I informed and received permission from both the chairperson of my department (Appendix A) and my students before I added reciprocal teaching to my regular beginner Chinese reading class. Students understood why I was adopting this teaching approach as well as the purpose of the research. After the end of the course, I obtained approval from Moravian College's HSIRB, Human Subjects Internal Review Board, to seek consent from the students enrolled in the course to use the archival data I collected in my classroom (Hendricks, 2016). I acquired students' permission via a written consent form (Appendix B)

explaining the purpose of the study, the nature of participation in the study, and that confidentiality will be maintained, and that participation is voluntary (Hendricks, 2006).

In order to enhance the accuracy and credibility of my study, I used triangulation to ensure that I saw as many sides of each situation as possible (Johnson, 2012). To start with, I collected various types of data, maintaining a teacher research field log, including students' artifacts, checklists, surveys, and interview data to ensure the diversity of my data sources. In class, students were allowed to demonstrate their understanding of texts via multiple forms (e.g., words, painting, writing a letter). Furthermore, I conducted multiple measures to determine outcomes of the implementation. I administered a series of quizzes to track student improvement. In each quiz, there were four sections designed to examine students' reading capabilities, including vocabulary, orthography awareness, sentence segmentation, and reading comprehension. I hoped through recording students' learning outcomes systematically, results of my study would be more credible. Finally, realizing that the pool of subjects in my study is very small, I maintained trustworthiness by detailed observational journals and persistent data collection procedures. I kept field notes throughout the study and included detailed information

about implementation of the intervention, participant responses, and surprising events (Hendricks, 2006).

When interpreting the data, the attitude I held was remaining open to any possible study results and maintaining objectivity as well as I possible could. I used peer debriefing and member check to achieve this goal. I periodically discussed daily implementations in class and my interpretation of the data with my colleagues and other teacher-researchers for the sake of getting fresh viewpoints. Peer debriefing was useful for checking biases and getting a second opinion about what the observations indicated (Hendricks, 2006). I also used member checks to include students' respective points of view in my research. In every reading class, students were required to self-check their application of four target reading strategies. I compared their checklists to my observation before making any judgmental interpretation. This method prevented me from being prejudiced by students' performance based on their prior achievement. I also appreciated observing students' perception of their learning. Outside the classroom, students were welcome to provide feedback through informal conversations as well as more formal surveys and interviews. Through those valuable forms of feedback from peers as well as study participants, not only was I able to maintain the trustworthiness in my

study, but I also was able to adjust my instruction to suit the practical needs of my students in a timely fashion.

Finally, while realizing that it is impossible to be totally impartial, I, as an action researcher have attempted to present my data fairly and have avoided using value statements in this report of my research (Johnson, 2012). Hence, when I present the results of my study to larger audiences as I have attempted to do here, I make sure that I illustrate the setting, subjects, and methodology of my research thoroughly so that audiences will have enough information to determine whether or not they can generalize the outcomes and implement the same approach in their own classrooms. To sum up, in order to ensure the trustworthiness of my research, before, during, and after the implementation, I tried my best to be thorough in every procedure, be flexible to my practical instruction, and be open minded to any unexpected findings.

## Research Story

### Getting Started

Since I was exposed to the concept of “action research”, I have paid much more attention to reflecting on my instruction in the classroom. Looking at the students in my Level 1 Chinese class, I kept wondering “what do they think about my class”, “what do they actually take back from my class”, “what are students’ strength and weakness in learning Chinese”...etc. I came up with so many inquiries yet was not sure how to answer them. Finally, before the new semester came, I put myself in students’ shoes and asked the most important question: “what would students consider themselves as a Chinese language learner?” It was not that hard to answer the question: “I have no problem with speaking, but please, when I read and write, can I use Pinyin (an official system for transcribing Chinese with Latin alphabet) instead of actual Chinese characters?” Hence, I set up my research goal, enhancing students’ reading comprehension and building up their reading confidence in Chinese.

After clarifying my specific research goal, I started to think about how to fulfill this goal. Given that my students were at college level, I thought I might take advantage of it and implement an approach that incorporates characteristics of my students. Specifically, my students were very connected in the classroom. They liked to share ideas and never said

no to helping their peers. Besides, as college students, It is more possible that they could think critically and convey their thoughts through structured words. Therefore, I decided to implement reciprocal teaching, an approach that promotes meaningful dialogues between readers and develops students' ability of applying reading strategies, to my Level 2 Chinese reading class.

### **Developing reading texts and quizzes**

I spent the first few weeks of the new semester designing my research. In the process of the ten-week research, I decided to develop all reading materials by myself so that these materials could best suit my students' needs. For example, In Level 1 Chinese class, students learned, yet not successfully, 132 characters. And at the end of Level 2 Chinese class, students were expected to recognize 216 characters. Given that the vocabulary students had is very limited, it would be overwhelming for students to read authentic texts. Therefore, I decided to self-develop 12 reading passages that were appropriate for students' reading proficiency. Besides, in order to monitor students' learning outcomes efficiently and timely, I arranged quizzes after each study unit.

### **Introducing the research**

Before implementing the reciprocal teaching approach, I described to my students the purpose of my study and what merits I expected they

acquire. The students' responses were very positive. Although they were not quite clear about the concept of reciprocal teaching, the consensus that we should definitely make some changes to the reading class was reached. The only concern they had was their grades might decline due to the increase of reading activities, which they were not confident in. I comforted them by clarifying that they would be evaluated according to how much effort they put and how much progress they accomplish in this semester. "You won't be and shouldn't be punished by what you did last semester!" Finally, all four students agreed to participate in the research.

### **Pre-Survey**

After acquiring students' written consent (Appendix B), I started my research from a pre-survey. A pre-survey (Appendix C) to understand the initial climate of the participants' self-perceived Chinese reading attitudes and habits was administrated. Through the pre-survey, I also wanted to know that before the implementation, what kind of reading strategies they already used to comprehend Chinese texts.

First of all, although none of my students have ever heard about "reciprocal teaching", I was glad to see that they often, or at least sometimes, applied reading strategies when reading Chinese. An interesting result is that while other students claimed they applied those strategies consciously, Baowei, the most capable reader last semester,

stated that he was “seldom” aware of using any strategies when reading Chinese. A possible explanation is that Baowei might already internalize the strategies without instruction. I looked forward to the time when he read Chinese later during the research process, he could verbalize his thoughts via think-aloud strategy and model his thinking process to other students.

When it came to students’ self-perception as a Chinese reader, students’ responses were diverse. Baowei thought it wasn’t that hard to read Chinese. For Sulining, although Chinese characters sometimes bothered him, he still had a great attitude: “It’s difficult to read characters but eventually I can figure it out.” However, Yangling and Kebinnuo both claimed that it was difficult to learn Chinese characters. “I forget many characters as days passes.” said Kebinnuo. Yangling even wrote: “I’m a weak Chinese character reader. No, I am very bad!” It really hurt my heart when I saw Yangling using the word “bad” to describe himself. Too many times in the classroom I was upset about his poor performance but he acted like he did not care about his learning at all. Through this survey, I knew that actually he was aware of the obstacle he faced in class. He just needed somebody to give him a hand to overcome it. Students’ responses in this survey really strengthened my motivation to help my students succeed in reading Chinese characters as a second language.

### Teacher modeling

Figure 1 is the text I used to do teacher modeling. I used the think-aloud method to model the key reading strategies of reciprocal teaching: predicting, questioning, clarifying, and summarizing. I tried my best to verbalize every step of my thinking process, and expected students would be able to comprehend the thinking process and then finish it with appropriate information. For example, in “predicting” section:

*Teacher: The headline is “Taiwan University, here I am!” I think the passage might include information about Taiwan University, so the content of this passage might be.....*

*Baowei: **Where** the university is.*

*Yangling: His **first experience** in college.*

*Sulining: Yeah! It might be **what he saw or what he did in the university**.*

The application of predicting strategy went great. However, the smoothness didn’t last in the application of the other three strategies. While modeling the other three reading strategies, students couldn’t follow my thinking process. They seemed lost and failed to finish my sentences like they did in the predicting part.

After class, I had a short discussion with my students to see if they fully understood what the reciprocal teaching is and how to apply the four

reading strategies or not. Students reported that while they had no difficulty comprehending the strategies, with poor comprehension about the text, it was hard to participate in the RT activity. “I know we read it before, but I didn’t think (about the content) when I read! I just focused on pronouncing every word right” said Kebinnuo. As a result, in addition to modeling the four reading strategies to students, this very first implementation served as a pre-test that helped me determine students’ actual reading proficiency. With the information, I could adjust the difficulty of my reading texts and develop appropriate scaffoldings for students. I reminded myself not to expect that students could reach the sky with a single bound. Even though my students’ thinking processes were at college level, their proficiency in Chinese language was still on primary stage. More scaffolding aimed at word identification was definitely necessary.

**台大，我来了！**

我是台湾大学的学生，台湾大学在台北，你也可以叫他台大。台大很大，老师也很多，找好老师不难，食堂的饭也很好吃，是一个很好的大学。你知道吗？我是我们家第一个上台大的儿子，我上台大我们家人都很高兴。

**Taiwan University, here I am**

I study in Taiwan University. Taiwan University is in Taipei. You can also call it “Taida”. Taiwan University is a very big University. There are lots of teachers in it, so it’s not hard to find a good teacher. Also, the food in the dining hall is tasty. It’s a very good university. Do you know? I’m the first one who goes to Taida in my family. People in my family are very happy for me.

Figure 1: Reading text “Taiwan University, here I am”

### **Scaffolding**

In order to build up students' ability of word identification, I decided to hold a mini lesson before implementing reciprocal teaching in each research process. First, I created a set of character cards. When the teacher or a student spoke a sentence in Chinese, other students collaboratively pieced the sentence together using the card set. Students only needed to concentrate on connecting the character's sound and shape, without worrying about the complex meaning of the sentence. During the process of assembling word cards, students had chances to get familiar with the patterns of character order. For example, putting 知(know) and 道 (road) together means "to know", and putting 明(bright) and 天(sky) together means "tomorrow". More over, it's a good strategy to build up students' confidence in reading Chinese because every one could contribute to this project. Even Yangling, with an image of poor reader, participated in this project actively, trying his best to grab the character cards that he recognized. Briefly, students liked this project and it did help build up their ability of word identification.

Another scaffolding project I often used is role-play. In the mini lesson, I created one or two short plays and showed the scripts via power point. The new characters students just learned would appear in the scripts repeatedly. Students who were assigned roles read aloud the scripts alone,

and students who were not assigned roles needed to briefly summarize the play at the end. Figure 2 and 3 are samples of role-play activity. The benefit of this project was to push students to study before the class and to make sure they were well prepared for the RT implementation. However, because this project required students to read alone, which is a heavy burden for Yangling, I noticed that this activity made him uncomfortable. Although to prevent him from embarrassment, I usually assigned him to do the second role-play so that he could observe his peers' model before performing.

Finally, the scaffolding activities worked for students who fell behind a little such as Sulining and Kebinnuo, but Yangling did not benefit from these activities. As times went by and the reading texts got harder, Yangling started to be late in class, sometimes even miss the class. I felt as much frustrated as he.



Figure 2: Slide for scaffolding activity (role-play)  
(The picture was retrieved from [here](#).)



Figure 3: Slide for scaffolding activity (role-play)  
(The picture was retrieved from [here](#).)

### Read aloud

At the beginning of my research process, I was faced with two alternative reading strategies, Read aloud or silent reading: which one is more suitable for my students? Initially, I asked them to read silently first when they had a new text and then read aloud together to check their reading. The reason for this arrangement is that I wanted to urge students to read independently. Besides, research showed that students, especially secondary students, typically read silently when read for comprehension (Skinner, Nedderniep, Bradley-Klug, & Ziemann, 2002). Therefore, I assumed that silent reading might be an authentic format for my college-level students. I hoped when students engage in reading activities in the classroom, they could read under an authentic context, which means read independently and silently.

However, after a few classes of implementation, I found out quickly that silent reading was only of limited help to the poor readers. The original design of this project is that each participant had a copy of the text and was told to mark the character he was unsure about while silent reading. However, what happened was that students didn't even pick up their pencils because there were too many characters that they did not know. Unable to identify most characters, silent reading was just a waste of time. When they got to “read aloud” part, they still performed like they saw the text for the first time. Hence, I changed the strategy and let students work together to read aloud first when they had a new text. After reading aloud together, students would have a couple minutes to conduct silent reading individually.

I began the implementation in early March, and to be honest, students' performances of reading aloud were basically a mess in the first two weeks. After the winter break, students seemed to throw away all characters they learned last semester. Their reading level was lower than I expected. To start with, none of them was able to read even just a simple sentence fluently. They struggled with characters that are similar in shape (e.g., 他/也, 我/找, 知/可). Second, after they read aloud, students failed to briefly talk about what they know from the text. I was confused about students' failure. One of my students Kebinnuo responded my inquiry: “I

know we read it before, but I didn't think (about the content) at all when I read! I just focused on pronouncing every word right." Last but not least, when students met difficult characters in texts, instead of taking a guess at least, they always stopped and waited for me to clarify the meaning or the sound of those characters.

I was very frustrated at that moment because what students displayed in the reading-aloud process proved exactly my failure of reading instruction in the last semester. But when I reflected my observational notes at the end of the day, I calmed down and tried to process this frustration from another perspective: Even though my reading instruction failed in Level 1 reading classroom, I still got students who were willing to challenge Level 2 Chinese, who did not refuse to read yet, and most importantly, who were ready to make changes! With these participants, I should have nothing to complain about.

Students accumulated read aloud experiences during the research process as time goes by, and I was glad to see students reading performance improved gradually. At the end of March, I replaced group reading by pair reading in order to start them off on the path of being an independent reader. Close to the end of my study, students were already able to read the texts individually though sometimes prompts from peer or me were needed.

## Predicting

Prior to reading aloud the texts, I wanted students to make some predictions about the texts according to the headlines of texts. I was impressed with students' active participation in this strategy. Not only could students make predictions about the contents of texts (Example 1), but also they were able to predict the format of texts (Example 2). The following dialogues showed how they conducted prediction strategy in the research process.

### *Example 1:*

*(Headline: 台大，我来了! Taiwan University, here I am! )*

*Baowei: 台大...Taiwan University!*

*Sulining: Oh... so a college.*

*Yangling: Well...maybe it talks about first experience in college.*

*Kebinnuo: Hum...facilities, faculty, or the course?*

### *Example 2:*

*(Headline: 万安饭店太好了! Wan'an Hotel is awesome!)*

*Kebinnuo: It's could be an advertisement for the hotel.*

*Sulining: Or a review about the hotel.*

In example 2, I noticed that although students make good predictions about the format of the text, their thinking was superficial,

failing to dig deeper into the information the text might include. In order to help them utilize the predicting strategy in depth, I stepped in as an expert, who serves as a model of higher-level involvement (Palincsar & Brown, 1984).

*Teacher: Well...hotel advertisement and hotel review are both possible answers. Good guess! If this is an ad or a review, what information you think might appear in the text?*

*Kebinnuo: The good things in the hotel? Like the people...I means staff, or the room.*

*Baowei: Where the hotel is?*

*Sulining: There experience...satisfied or not.*

As time went by, students got familiar with utilizing the predicting strategy before read aloud process. All students were willing to participate in the activity, and through group discussion, most of time they could combine their ideas and integrate into a clear thinking direction (Example 3). In example 4, students even connected their predictions to the prior knowledge they learned in oral language classes, and then tried to anticipate what vocabularies might appear in the texts.

*Example 3:*

*(Headline: 对不起，我不能去。Sorry, I can't go.)*

*Baowei: 对不起 is sorry..., sorry, I can't go.*

*Sulining: Maybe he's busy for work.*

*(Kebinnuo is a mature thinker. His words often maintain the discussion to the point.)*

*Kebinnuo: So he explains the **reason** why he can't go.*

*Baowei: Right...maybe family issue?*

*Kebinnuo: Yeah...and he might make an apology in the text.*

*Example 4:*

*(Headline: 学中文 Learning Chinese)*

*Baowei: 学中文...learning Chinese!*

*Sulining: How well they speak and write.*

*Baowei: Where they learn Chinese*

*Yangling: Their teacher or classmate...*

*(Students tried to connect their predictions to the vocabularies they learned previously.)*

*Baowei: so it could be 说中国话 (speak Chinese) or 写中国字 (read Chinese)*

*Sulining: Yeah...and there are also 老师 (teacher) and 同学 (classmate).*

Learning to read Chinese characters is difficult for American students because every character contains three types of information: shape, sound, and meaning. Reading Chinese requires readers to integrate three types of information quickly and precisely while reading. I was amazed by the fact that while applying predicting strategy, students, not out of my instruction, automatically predicted the words that might appear in texts, practice the sounds of these words, and get ready to connect the sounds to the characters (shape) in texts. Figure 4 shows how students' ability of applying prediction strategy progressed during the research process, and Figure 5 showed performances of predicting strategy by individual student:

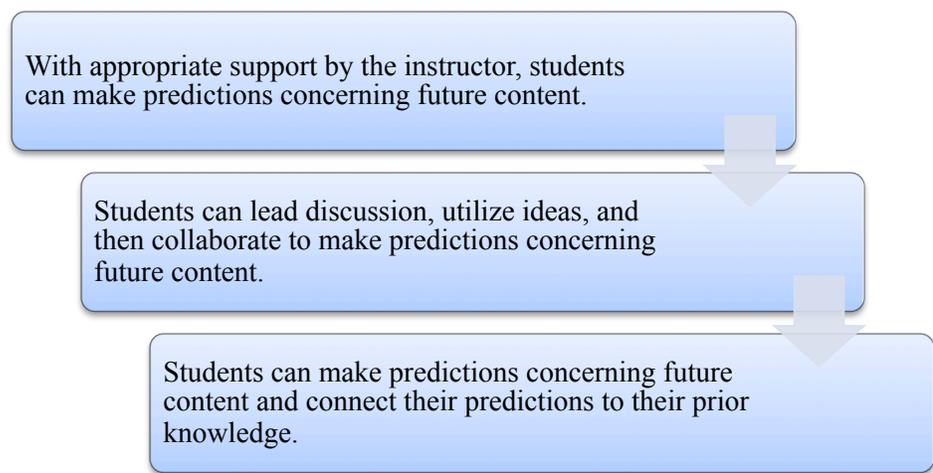


Figure 4: Students' progress of applying predicting strategy

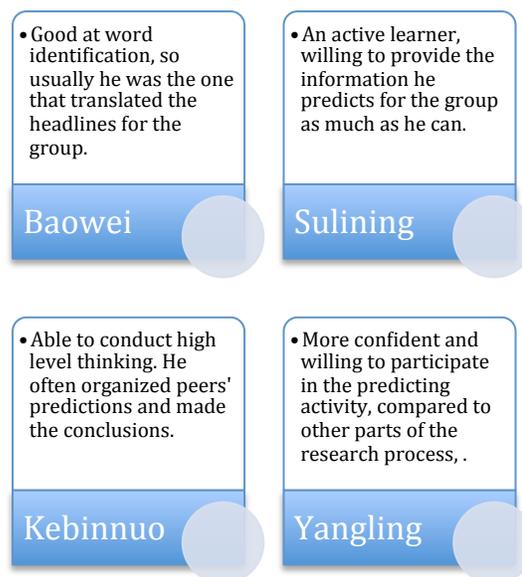


Figure 5: Students' individual application of predicting strategy

### Clarifying

Initially, students always paused when unfamiliar characters were encountered because they were not confident in their reading ability and looking forward to a clear and absolute answer from me. However, I told them that while they would learn 228 characters at the end of the course, there are tens of thousands of characters in Chinese language. And to be considered “literate”, one needs to recognize about 3500 high frequency simplified characters. “In a real world, you would definitely encounter characters you never learned before, and you still have to read all by yourself!” I expressed to them my expectation that through the

implementation, they could become independent Chinese readers who are capable to perform in a Chinese-authentic environment.

In order to cultivate their ability of applying the clarifying strategy for unknown characters, I intentionally embedded in each text some new words, which were bolded and underlined. Among those new words, some are composed of characters they already learned (Example 1), and some are made up of characters they never met before (Example 2), which means that students need to clarify the meanings according to the context of the text or the radical of the character. At first, it took too much effort for them to conduct critical thinking to clarify unknown words as they read. I needed to step in and lead the discussions. In example 1, I guided them to clarify the part-of-speech of the new word “一起” and modeled the use of this word by making sentences. In example 2, I helped students to clarify the word “结婚” by making out the context of the text: who said this word, whom did he speak to, and what is the relationship the two people?

*Example 1:*

*(Line: 我们家要一起去饭店吃饭 Our family plans to have a meal together.)*

*Sulining: The first word (一) is “yi”.*

Baowei: And then is “qi” (起), from the word “kanqilai”.

(A brief silence, students couldn't figure out the meaning even though they know the meanings of the characters separately.)

Teacher: What part of speech you think 一起 may be?

Kebinnuo: It's before 去 (to go), the verb, so...an adverb?

Teacher: Yes! And let me make sentences.

我们一起去食堂。 We go to the dining hall **together**.

我们一起学中文。 We learn Chinese **together**.

.....

Sulining: Together! 一起!

Example 2:

(Line: 你可以和我的女儿结婚了。 You can **marry** my daughter now.)

Kebinnuo: Well...there is the radical for female (女), I guess it's something about women.

Teachers: Good guess! Now let's see the context. Who said this sentence?

Baowei: The prince...no, the king. The king said to the prince.

Teachers: Very good. What does the king think of the prince?

Kebinnuo: 努力...hard working.

*Baowei: So...you can date my daughter?*

*Teacher: I thought they have already dated for a year!*

*Kebinnuo: Yeah...they went out for dinner already.*

*Baowei: Umm...so “jiehun”, marry!*

*Teachers: Yes! Congratulation!*

*Kebinnuo: But why is “jiehun” a woman-stuff?*

*Teacher: Well...the character “婚” is composed of “女”, female, and “昏”, giddy.*

*Students: Noooo...(laugh)*

With abundant scaffoldings in the first few weeks, students gradually developed the ability of clarifying unfamiliar words. They tried to remain critical thinking as they read. When they encountered an unknown word, they would stop and then work together to arrive at a conclusion. In example 3, students, on their own, comprehended one of the principals of building new words in Chinese language system: combining two characters to create a new word. In example 4, Kebinnuo figured out the meaning of the new character “妈妈” and shared the joy with me and his peers with excitement. As students were getting familiar with the utilization of clarifying strategy, I could sense that they were developing reading confidence as well. When they encountered a new

word, they would stop and hesitate, of course, but instead of turning to me right away, they collaborated to figure it out and then turn to me just for confirmation. The reading attitude is just exactly what I was looking for as I designed this research project.

*Example 3:*

*(Line: 她走的时候我很难过 I was sad when she left.)*

*Baowei: 难 is difficult...and 过 is...*

*Kebinnuo: 过 is past experience...and to pass.*

*Sulining: Ok, when she left I was “hard to pass” ...ohhh! Sad?*

*Example: 4*

*(Line: 星期六是我妈妈的生日 Saturday is my mom's birthday.)*

*Kebinnuo: That's 妈妈, mother!*

*Teacher: Wow.....*

*Kebinnuo: Do you want to know why I knew it's mom?*

*Teacher: Of course I do!*

*Kebinnuo: Because I know it's somebody's birthday. You told us before that Chinese often use reduplication to address family member, and I saw a female radical (女), so I guessed it's 妈妈.*

While I was more than happy to see students building up their confidence in clarifying new words, my observational notes told me that

they barely used this reading strategy to clarify misleading or complex sections of the texts, which required students to critically evaluate their reading as they read timely. Too often that students thought they already comprehend the contents of the texts, yet by the parts of questioning or summarizing, misleading of the texts were discovered, and we needed to pause and go back to clarify the precise ideas the texts convey. Figure 6 shows how students' ability of applying clarifying strategy progressed during the research process, and Figure 7 showed performances of clarifying strategy by individual student:

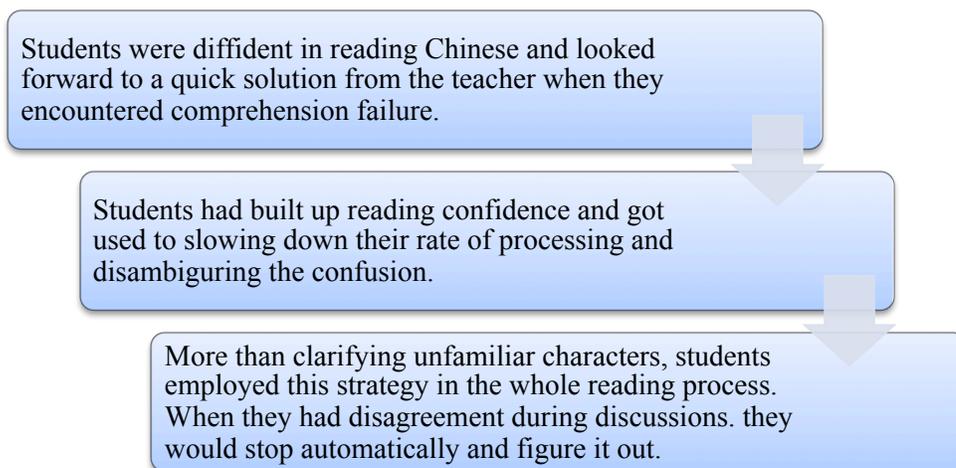


Figure 6: Students' progress of applying clarifying strategy

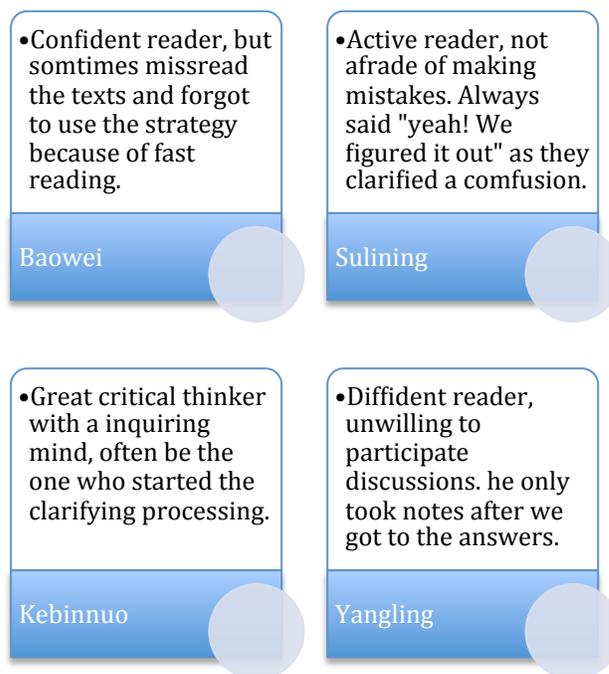


Figure 7: Students' individual application of clarifying strategy

### Questioning

At the beginning of the research process, although students were encouraged to raise questions in class, because of their diffidence in reading ability, they were hesitating to do so and did not know how to start. Therefore I introduced them “5W1H” strategy, suggesting that they employ the six question words (what, where, when, who, why, and how) to guide their thinking. Students, using these question words, worked together to raise questions that might help them better comprehend the texts. Example 1 demonstrated how students learned to generate questions using “5W1H” strategy.

## Example 1:

<p><b>万安饭店太好了</b></p> <p>我来北京大学找我的同事小高，北大在中国很有名，那里面有很多学生，也有不少学中文的美国人。这是我第二次去北京，上一次我住在金川饭店，可是<u>因为</u>住在金川饭店太贵了，<u>所以</u>这回我住在万安饭店。住在万安饭店不太贵，饭店右边有个小地方，那儿有很多中国饭，万安饭店的南边就是北大了，太好了！下回来北京我也要住这儿。</p>
<p>Wan'an Hotel is great!</p> <p>I came to Beijing University to meet my friend, Xiao Gao. Beijing University is a famous University in China. There are lots of students and lots of Americans who learn Chinese. This is my second time going to Beijing. Last time I stayed at Jinchuan Hotel. But because of staying at Jinchuan Hotel is too expensive, I stay at Wan'an Hotel this time. It's not that expensive. And Beijing University is to the south of Wan'an Hotel. It's great! I will stay at this hotel next time I come to Beijing.</p>

Figure 8: Reading text "Wan'an Hotel is great"

*Kebinnuo: To what college did he come?*

*Sulining: Beijing University. Well...how many times has visited  
Wan'an Hotel?*

*Yangling: It's his first time.*

*Kebinnuo: Is this his 4<sup>th</sup> time to go to Beijing?*

*Sulining: No, it's his second time.*

*(Students paused, feeling that they have already finished the questioning process. Then I stepped in and threw more questions to elicit their thinking.)*

*Teacher: Why did he stay at Wan'an Hotel this time, instead of  
Jinchuan Hotel?*

*Kebinnuo: Too expensive? Too expensive to stay at Jinchuan hotel.*

*Teacher: Ok, great. Then let's see the headline. He said Wan'an*

*Hotel is great! Why did he say that?*

*Sulining: Because it's cheap?*

*Teacher: That is one of the reasons. How about the others reasons?*

*(Students pondered for a while and then realized that they haven't fully comprehended the text.)*

Students learned how to generate questions quickly. However, I found out that without teacher model or appropriate elicitation, students' self-generating questions were mostly superficial. While students were able to tell what happened in the texts by employing "questioning" strategy, they failed to generate questions that promote higher-involvement of texts such as why it happened and what the consequence was. As example 1 showed, students could clarify some key information such as where and how many times the author came. But they weren't able to describe Wan'an hotel in detail or to tell why the author decided to stay at Wan'an Hotel. An obvious sign in the discussions is that students seldom ask "weishemme" (why) question. A possible reason was that students might not even know what information is important in text.

Hence, I decided to hold a mini lesson to scaffold my students' ability to stress the essentials of texts. First, I asked students to think about what phrases we had learned before serve as a signal to indicate that an

important message might appear. After discussion, students came up with 因为(because), 所以(so), 不过(however), 可是(but), 原来(originally), and 现在(now). I then told them next time when they read, try to pay attention to sentences lead by these phrases, and they can ask questions about these sentences to check their comprehension to the texts. Beside, we discussed that which part of a text might contain important messages about the text. The students responded:

*Sulining: The title?*

*Teacher: Yes. That's exactly why we used "predicting" strategy to guide our reading. For example, if you read the title "Wan'an Hotel is great", they you would expect to answer the questions such as "why is this hotel great" and "why did the author like it so much". What else?*

*Baowei: The first sentence?*

*Teacher: That makes sense. In English, we expect the first sentence to be a topic sentence, right? However, in a lot, at least many of Chinese texts, the first sentence only serves as an introduction and we save the most important sentence at the ending sentence.*

*(Students were a kind of surprised and reported that they didn't know this writing style before.)*

*Teacher: So take this text as an example, the ending sentence is “I will stay at this hotel next time I come to Beijing.” That means we need to explore why he make this decision. Does that make sense?*

*(Students agreed and admitted that during the research process, they never pay attention to the ending sentence so far.)*

We then used another text “Learning Chinese” to practice the skills students learned from the mini lesson. Example 2 demonstrates students’ progressing on using questioning strategy to comprehend the text in depth.

学中文
<p>大金: 小明, 你的中文很好, 是在哪学的?</p> <p>小明: 我原来在高中学过一点, 现在在北京大学学中文。</p> <p>大金: 学中文难吗?</p> <p>小明: 不太难, 可是, 中国字很难。</p> <p>大金: 你知道吗? 中国字有两万多个。</p> <p>小明: 什么? 我不要学了!</p>
Learning Chinese
<p>Dajin: Xiaoming, your Chinese is very good. Where did learn it?</p> <p>Xiaoming: I originally leaned a little bit at high school, now I study Chinese at Beijing University.</p> <p>Dajin: Is learning Chinese hard?</p> <p>Xiaoming: Not really. But Chinese character is hard.</p> <p>Dajin: Do you know? There are more than twenty thousands characters.</p> <p>Xiaoming: What? I don't want to learn anymore!</p>

Figure 9: Reading text “Learning Chinese”

*Sulining: There is an 可是(but), OK, so is learning Chinese hard?*

*Baowei: No, Learning characters is hard. Here it is, 中国字 (Chinese character).*

*(Baowei emphasized “characters” to clarify the information.)*

*Teacher: OK, then does the author want to learn Chinese characters?*

*Yangling: Yes? (Sounds hesitating)*

*Baowei: No, he doesn't. (He pointed at the ending sentence) 我不要学了, I don't want to learn!*

*(Kebinnuo and Sulining then explained the reason of the author's decision.)*

*Kebinnuo: Because Chinese character is hard.*

*Sulining: And there are... (He paused because he couldn't tell the number) too many characters.*

At the end of the research process, most of times meaningful questions related to high-level involvement of texts were still generated by me. Hence, there is room for improvement of students' applying “questioning” strategy. But through the abundant and mostly meaningful discussions elicited by questions, I'm glad to see students making progress at comprehending the texts in depth.

Other than students' self-generating questions, the language students chose to use in discussions was also an issue. When employing “questioning” strategy, although I told my students it's OK to speak English, they tended to use Chinese to ask questions.

*Example 3:*

*(Text: My brother comes back from America.)*

*Kebinnuo: 哥哥回来哪? Where does his brother come back to?*

*Baowei: Well...家(home)?*

*Kebinnuo: Umm...哥哥回美国*

*Baowei: Ohh...Then that's not 回. It's 从 哥哥从美国回家*

*Kebinnuo: So the question is...哥哥从哪回家?*

However, while I admired their positive learning attitude toward speaking Chinese, the discussion pattern really slowed down my class schedule. The time for practicing “summarizing” strategy was often compressed because of the delay of questioning part. Another effect of employing questioning strategy in Chinese was that students tended to ask questions following the pattern of what they just read, which might also be a reason why students were stuck with superficial questions in most of time. Therefore, I was caught in a dilemma. On the one hand, I wanted to encourage students to speak Chinese. On the other hand, I was aware that English is the most efficient language to communicate within RT approach.

Figure 10 shows how students’ ability of applying questioning strategy progressed during the research process, and Figure 11 showed performances of questioning strategy by individual student:

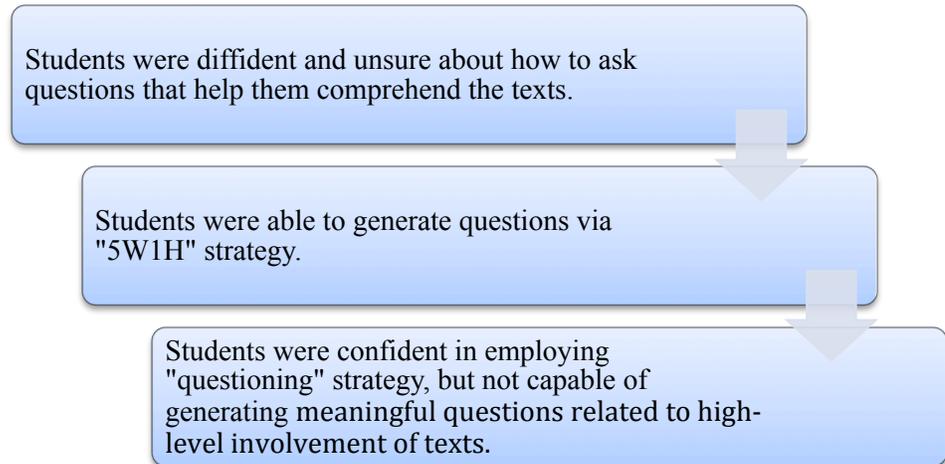


Figure 10: Students' progress of applying questioning strategy

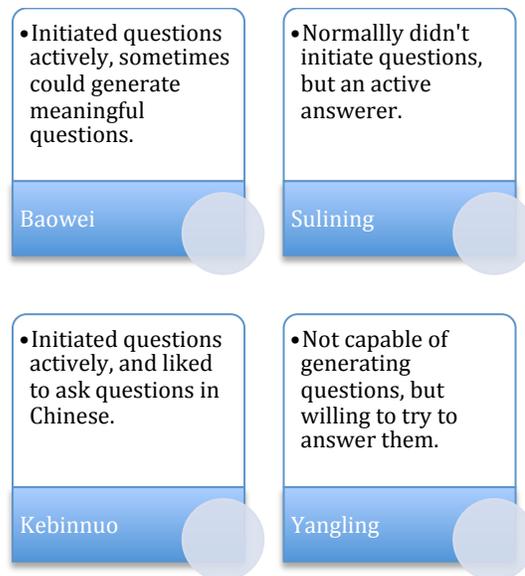


Figure 11: Students' individual application of questioning strategy

### Summarizing

Given that my students' reading capability was still at introductory level, the reading texts I developed were relatively short and unable to

include complex information. Therefore, students learned about and used summarizing strategy very quick. For them, employing summarizing strategy was no more than retelling the texts, which served as a final check on their comprehension. It was of no challenge for them to apply summarizing strategy, especially when students already comprehended the texts through the other three reading strategies. Hence, I decided soon to diversify my instruction on summarizing stage instead of just asking students to summarize the texts orally. At the end of each research process, I developed mission-based projects for students to practicing summarizing skill as well as responding the texts meaningfully.

For example, after students read the text 北京大学为什么好 (The merit of Beijing University), in which the surroundings of Beijing University was illustrated, students were required to draw a picture jointly according to the description in the text (Figure 12). To accomplish this project, students needed to identify major facilities or attractions mentioned in the text, determine the directions of them, and then summarize all the information in a drawing. Figure 12 is students' work on the whiteboard. Not only did they well organize the information in the text and present it via drawing successfully, but also they expand their discussion to the exploration of Beijing, the capital of China. In order to let their work as authentic as possible, students initiated a conversation to

clarify the features of Beijing University and Tiananmen, a famous city square in the center of Beijing city. Eventually they demonstrated their understanding through the drawing.

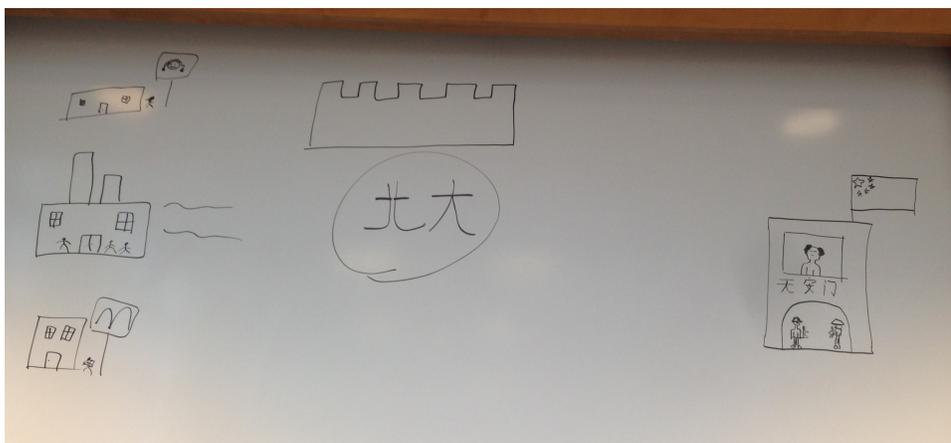


Figure 12: Students' drawing

Another example of summarizing project was writing a letter. Text “对不起，我不能去”(Sorry, I won't be able to attend) is a letter from a teacher to his principal, telling that he can't join the dinner for the faculty because it conflicts with his mom's birthday. After reading the text, students were asked to write in reply in the name of the principal.

*Baowei: Umm...he couldn't go because it's birthday..., so 你有好生日(You have a good birthday).*

*Teacher: Well, understandable but not authentic. How to say happy birthday?*

*Sulining: But it's not his birthday, his mom's birthday!*

*Kebinnuo: So...你妈妈快乐生日(Your mom happy birthday) ?*

*Teacher: Well...almost! In Chinese, the order is different. We say  
祝你妈妈生日快乐 (wish your mom birthday happy).*

*Baowei: Then...you're fired!*

*Kebinnuo: (trying to translate what baowei said into Chinese) 你  
没有工作了(You have no job now)!*

*(Students laughed and then tried to write the letter in Chinese  
according to their discussions.)*

The project was about giving response to the text students read. In order to do so, students first needed to briefly summarize the main idea of the original text. Meanwhile, because composition was involved in this project, in addition to employing summarizing strategy, students also needed to practice their writing skill and the ability of sentence structure. As the dialogues showed, students tried to express their idea in Chinese and write the letter in Chinese characters.

Besides, sometimes students had to conduct the projects alone. For example, I wrote New Year Cards in Chinese to every student (Figure 13). In the classroom, we read the card together within reciprocal teaching approach. After class, I asked students to write me a New Year Card in

reply. Figure 14 is the card student Baowei wrote to me. It was a good opportunity to examine an individual student's overall language capability.

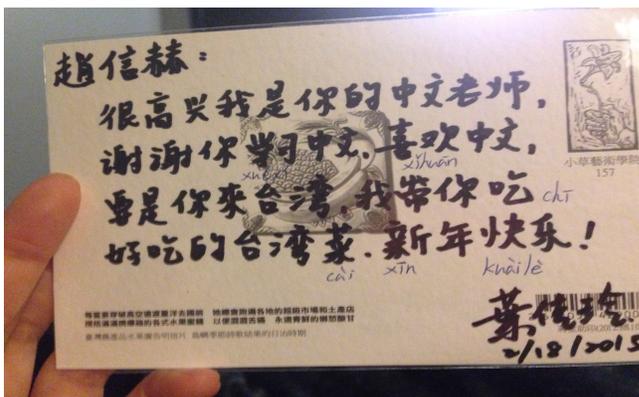


Figure 13: The New Year Card I wrote

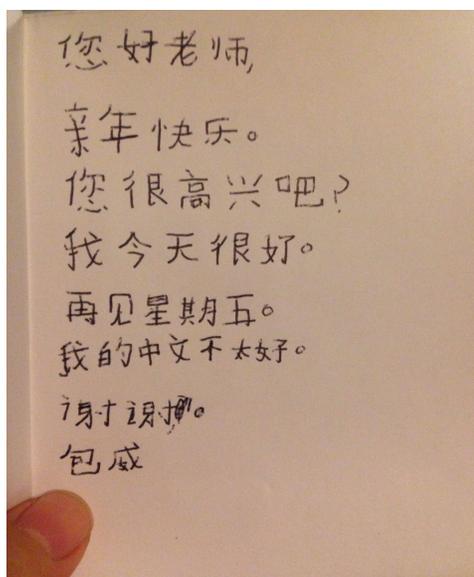


Figure 14: The New Year Card student Baowei wrote

To sum up, it was not difficult for my students to learn summarizing strategy. But the texts they read during the research process were too short to challenge students' summarizing capability. Therefore,

varying summarizing projects was a good method to elicit student's higher involvement of the texts. Figure 15 shows how students' ability of applying summarizing strategy progressed during the research process, and Figure 16 showed performances of summarizing strategy by individual student:

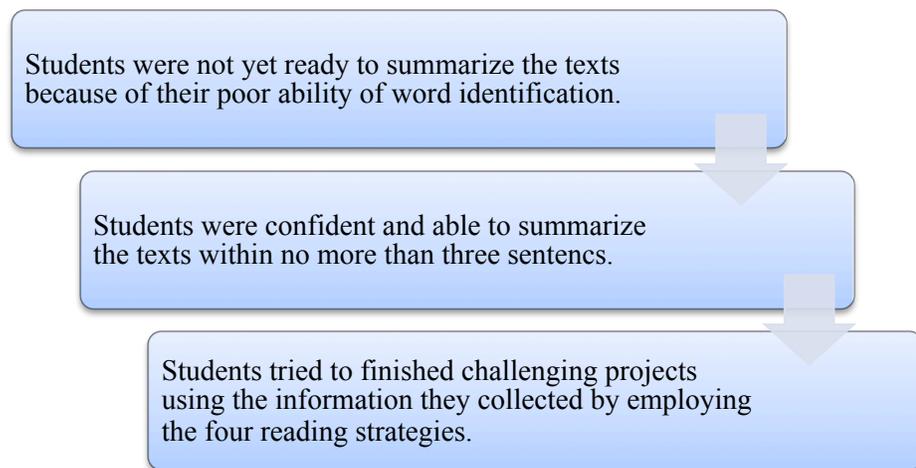


Figure 15: students' progress of applying summarizing strategy



Figure 16: performances of summarizing strategy by individual student

### **Student withdrawal**

Yangling is a positive and energetic student in my class. He was always curious about Chinese culture and the difference between Chinese and English. However, the time he spent on studying Chinese was short compared to other classmates, and he often came to class without preparation. The backwardness of Yangling's learning appeared both in speaking and reading class, and as the content we handled in class got harder, the situation just got worse and worse.

At first, when I introduced my study to students, Yangling was very supportive of it. Although he considered himself as a terrible reader, he did not express any unwillingness to the implementation. But when other students made progress and were able to deal with complex texts, Yangling still walked on a treadmill. I could see the depression on his face when he found out he was not able to participate in discussion at all. I talked to him about his learning methods in private a couple times. He started to be late or even absent for the class. In mid-March, Yangling told me he decided to withdraw Chinese class because to catch up the class, there was too much work for him to handle. Although I was upset about his decision, I knew it was a rational choice to call a time out for him.

When I approved his withdrawal, he kept stressing that the withdrawal was neither against to me nor against my study, and he would

take Level 2 Chinese again if given the chance. Actually, as the time I'm writing my thesis now, Yangling retakes the new Level 2 Chinese class I hold in this semester.

### **Assessment**

Five formative assessments and one summative assessment were administrated during the research process. I designed four sections in each unit quiz: word identification, word segmentation, radical matching, and reading comprehension. Section 1, translating Chinese characters into English, was a simple method to check students' learning about new characters. In section 2, students needed to segment given sentences properly. For example, the sentence 我喜欢北京 (I like Beijing) should be delimited as below:

我／喜欢／北京你他从伞坐

I like Beijing

Because there is no space between words in Chinese written language, word segmentation is the first step in Chinese language processing. Ambiguity often arises because a Chinese character can be considered as a word by itself or just a word component depending on the context. Students' performances in this section provided an excellent opportunity to actually see the ambiguity students faced and the confusion

they had when they read. With the data I collected in this section, I could catch students' misreading and clarify it for them.

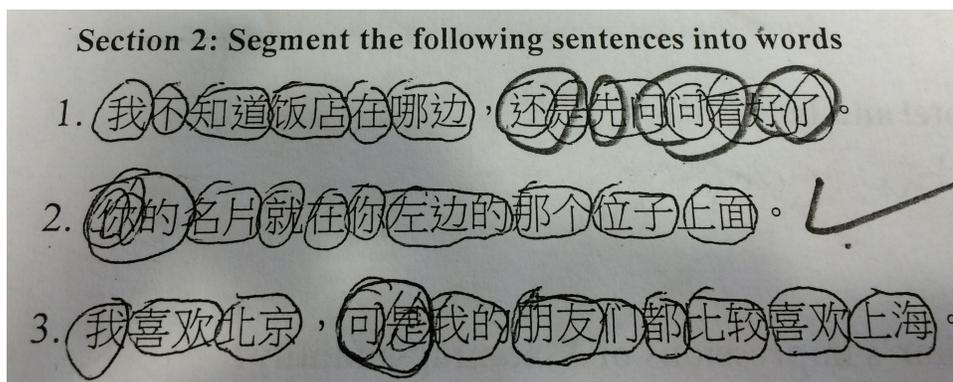


Figure 17: Example of word segmentation

Section 3 was radical matching. Students needed to match words that share the same radical. Students liked this section and performed very well. Through this opportunity, I was able to help student organize important radicals they needed to be aware of. For instance, the meaning every character that has radical “人” or “亻” must be related to people:

你 (you)

从 (follow): One person following another

伞 (umbrella): four persons under the umbrella

坐 (sit): two persons on the ground

Section 4 tested students' reading comprehension. It was a direct method to evaluate the outcomes of my study. At first, students performed poorly on this section. Two of three test-takers got a zero on it. Students

were not able to comprehend the text at all and came up with a lot of disparate answers. Hence, I decided that in this section, I should design questions that could guide students' thinking process. In Figure 18, the questions were designed according 5W1H strategy they learned in class. Also in figure 19, the design of the questions reminded students to comprehend the text step by step. As time went by, students made significant progress in this section and built up their confidence in reading alone.

Who	Who or which organization posted this wanted ad? <i>Very good factory. IT gōngchǎng</i>
What	What are the requirements of this job? <i>Have to be 20 years old; 2 years of experience be able to speak Chinese and Japanese</i>
When	Describe the working hours in this organization. <i>1 year; 8 hours shift</i>
How much	Describe the salary of this job. <i>三万六千 ≈ 30 600 \$ 36 000</i>
How	How to apply to this job position? <i>7th Month, 20th and You have to fill out the application till July</i>

Figure 18: Sample of student's answer sheet

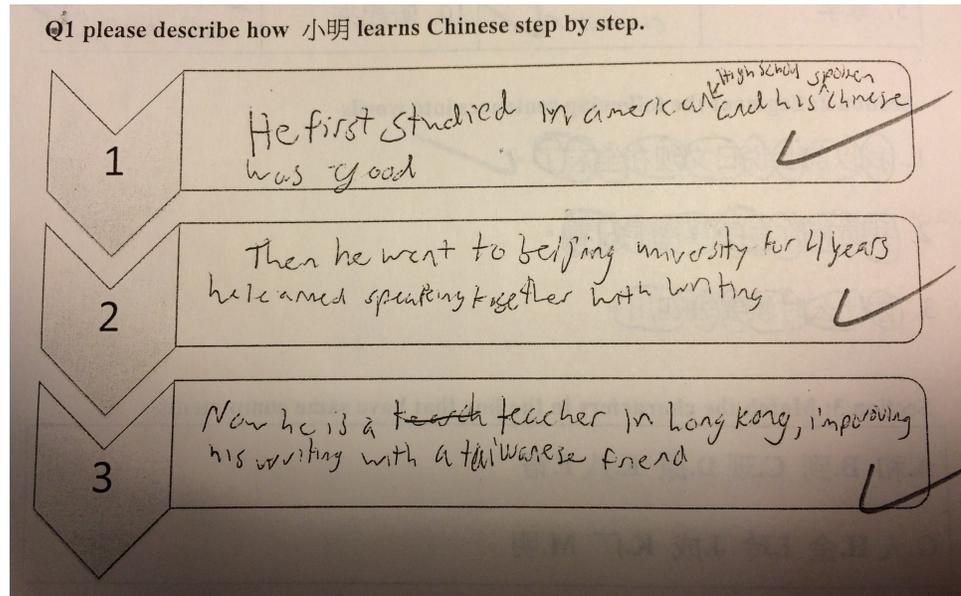


Figure 19: Sample of student's answer sheet

### Interview

I conducted a personal interview to each participant after the implementation ended. Before the interview, I made sure that students understood that both positive and negative opinions were welcome and would help refine my instruction. Also, negative opinions would affect neither the students' grades nor the outcome of my study in any way.

There were three main categories in my interview questions. First of all, I wanted to know students' feedbacks to the reading strategies they learned about and employed during the research process. Among the four strategies, students reported that "predicting" strategy was a brand new concept for them. Sulining said: "it's a new strategy for me. I think it's

useful. But honestly I always forgot to use it in the quiz.” Not able to activate “predicting” strategy when reading alone suggested that while having a positive attitude toward “predicting” strategy, students’ internalization of this strategy was not yet successful.

When it came to the strategy they thought was most useful, all students agreed “questioning” strategy is the one. “It’s helpful. I mean, to ask meaning questions and challenge other people, you have to know the passage deeply” said Sulining. Kebinnuo also reported that using “questioning” strategy provided a good opportunity to practice his oral language skill: “I like asking questions in Chinese. In order to ask questions, I need to reconstruct the sentence I read. It really helped me practice my speaking skill and review the grammar I learned.” Baowei, a comparatively capable reader in the classroom, liked the reciprocity “questioning” strategy created: “when you read alone like we did in the last semester, you’re reading for yourself. When you ask questions, you are helping other people.”

Besides, I would like to know if students’ attitude toward reading Chinese characters had changed during the research process. Sulining reported that before the implementation, he only focus on how to associate each character to its sound and meaning. But after two or three weeks of implementation, he started to think: “Wow, I’m reading!” Baowei also

indicated that this implementation helped him read a lot faster. Before, he always spent time looking up the textbook for the definitions of difficult characters while reading. These strategies help him identify and memorize the characters well. After the implementation, he became a more independent reader. I was glad to see that during the research process, students gradually advanced their reading capability and built up reading confidence through their own efforts.

Finally, I invited students to give feedback to my study and suggestions to my future reading instruction. Baowei indicated that he always felt there was not enough time to read the texts. “Usually we only have about ten minutes to read, and then we need to discuss right away. It’s not enough for me to comprehend the whole passage”. I reflected my instructions in this semester and found out what he said is true. I was always stuck with an unnecessary insistence that students should employ all four strategies in each reading activity. Therefore, students’ reading time was compressed and there was often lack of time to employ “summarizing” strategy, the final step of reciprocal teaching. It was a very feedback for me to refine my future instruction.

Besides, two students mentioned that in addition to reciprocal teaching approach, word matching, the scaffolding we did before reading text was fun and useful, helping them to get familiar with new characters

quickly. They liked to have more such scaffolding activities in reading class. “It’s easy, we only needed to take care of one sentence at a time, not a whole passage” one of the students said. Their words got me re-examine if I allocated enough time for scaffolding before students participated in reciprocal teaching.

To sum up, the interviews allowed me to have a deep conversation about students’ thoughts about my class and me as an instructor. In the interviews, the positive opinions strengthened my confidence in keeping RT instruction in my future classroom, and the suggestions let me reflect my teaching on student perspective.

### **End of my study**

During the implementation, I was both an observer and a participant. As an observer, I was glad and proud to witness my students made progress in reading ability step by step. Meanwhile, as a participant, I always felt I could have done more for my students but I didn’t. Overall, I had a positive experience implementing reciprocal teaching in my Chinese reading class. I hope the data I collected could help me reflect my instruction and determine the outcomes of my study.

## **Data Analysis**

### **Introduction**

Hendricks (2011) indicated that multiple data collection strategies must be employed to establish the credibility of research findings. My research data were also collected in a variety of ways during this study. Each type of data helps expose the true pictures of my students and myself in the classroom. Through reviewing and analyzing these data, I was able to observe the outcomes and experiences of this study and then to better understand how the reciprocal teaching implementation impacted my students.

### **Observational Data**

I collected observational data in every research process. It was very fortunate that my students were all at college level, intellectually mature enough to employ “think aloud” strategy naturally, and the design of reciprocal teaching allows students to communicate in their native language in a foreign language classroom. Hence, during the group discussions, I was able to collect the verbalized information of students’ thinking processes as much as possible. The observational data provided a great resource to understand students’ thinking processes when they read and monitor students’ progress in reading Chinese characters. Besides, in my research story, I could illustrate the features of my students more

precisely through the actual dialogues recorded in these observational data.

### Assessment

Five Unit quizzes and one final exam were administered to determine students' learning outcomes during this research process. While the five quizzes were considered as formative assessment, the final exam, conducted at the end of the research, was a summative assessment. These exams were graded on a 0 to 10 scale. During the first three quizzes, students' average score increased rapidly from 6.77/10 to 9.37/10. After quiz #3, students' average scores maintained stably around 9 points. At the final summative exam, students' average score was 8.93/10. Chart 1 showed students' performances on each exam as well as their leaning progress. (Given that student Yangling withdrew from the class before taking quiz #2, his score was not included in the chart).

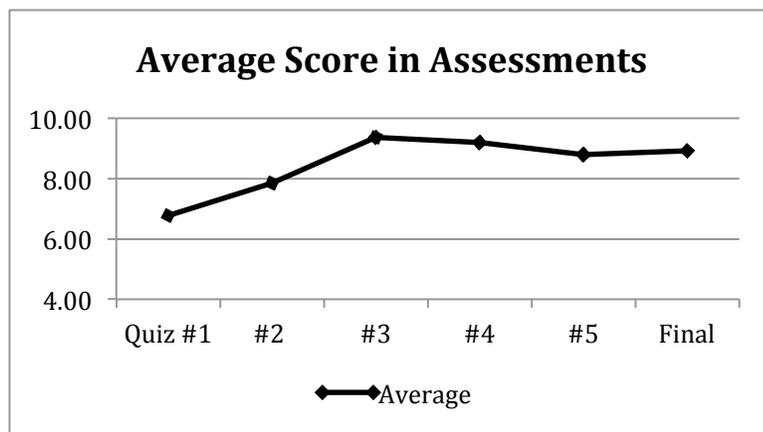


Chart1: Students' average scores in assessments

The quizzes students took included four sections: word identification, word segmentation, radical matching, and reading comprehension. Each section was graded on a 0 to 2.5 scale. Chart 2 shows students' performances of reading comprehension progressed significantly, the average score increasing approximately from 0.5 point to 2.0 points. Meanwhile, students' score of word identification made progress too but was unstable. Apart from these two sections above, students demonstrated excellent and stable performances in the rest two sections (word segmentation and radical matching).

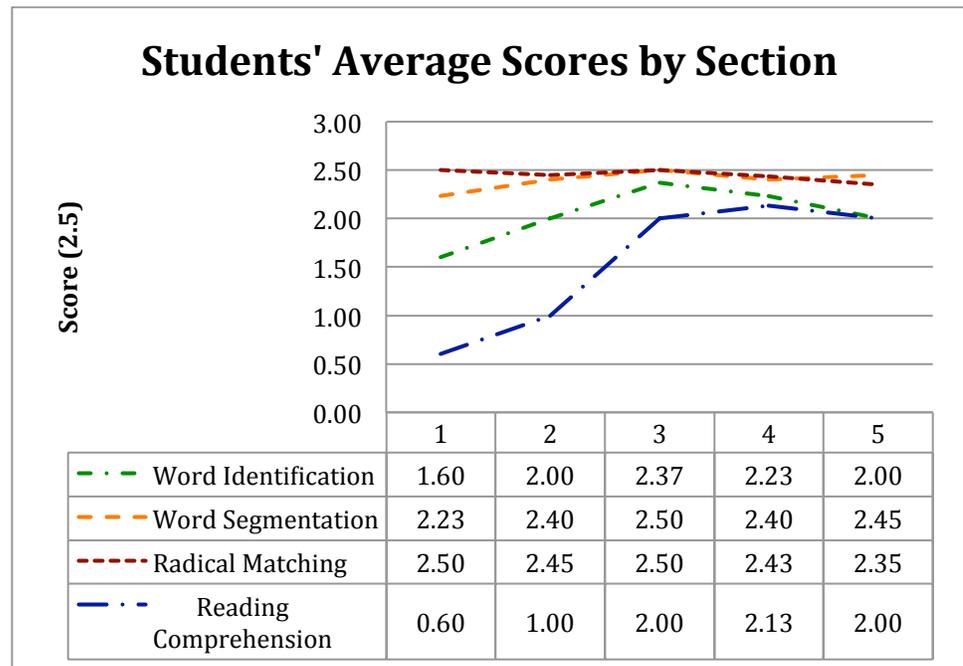


Chart 2: Students' Average Scores by Section

## Checklist

I collected both student checklists and teacher checklists to record students' reading strategy application at each research process (Figure 20). However, in the middle of my study, I reviewed the data I collected and the two sets of data did not match at all. I discussed this strange phenomenon with students and it turned out that some students checked the boxes only because they observed the strategy application during discussions, instead of actually employing on their own. Hence, due to my unclear instruction, lots of the data of student checklists were not credible enough to analyze and make comparison between teacher's perspective and students' perspective. Consequently, I decided to utilize only the data of teacher checklist in my study. Analyzing the teacher checklists helped me monitor students' use of and understanding of reciprocal teaching steps.

<p>When I'm reading, I.....</p> <p>Predict the purpose of the reading passage by its title or other clues. (P)</p> <p>Raise meaningful questions to promote comprehension. (Q)</p> <p>Promote comprehension by answering the teacher or other students' questions. (Q)</p> <p>Clarify unknown words and ideas in the passage. (C)</p> <p>Discuss with classmates to understand the content. (C)</p> <p>Paraphrase the passage in Chinese or in English. (S)</p> <p>Summarize the main idea of the passage. (S)</p>
--

Figure 20: Teacher/Student checklist

Students read twelve reading passages in total during the implementation. I analyzed all teacher checklists to see students' application in the four reading strategies. Table 1 shows how often students applied reading strategies and how well students participate in the reading activities (35 checklists were collected). Almost all students were able to employ predicting and questioning strategies at each research process. Students also performed well in employing questioning and clarifying strategies. Besides, 32/35 checklists reported that students participated in the group discussion actively. However, students' performance of utilizing the summarizing strategy was not satisfactory.

<b>Checklist</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
*Predict the purpose of the text	30	5
*Raise meaningful questions	21	14
Answer questions	29	6
*Clarify unknown words and ideas	23	12
Discuss with classmates	32	3
Paraphrase the passage	24	11
*Summarize the main idea	20	15

Table 1: Teacher checklist result

### **Interview & Survey**

I conducted a pre-survey and a post-interview with students to collect their feedback to my study. I focused on both positive and negative opinions about the study. At the same time, I made sure that students

understood that every kind of opinion was welcome and would help refine my instruction. Negative opinions would affect neither the students' grades nor the outcome of my study in any way. Besides, during the implementation, I recorded students' words and interactions in the classroom in my teaching journal. After class, if needed, I would briefly talk about what I noticed in the class with students to make sure I fully understood their thinking process when they participated in the reading activities. In brief, the data I collected during interview and survey served as a communication channel between my students and me. Analyzing this set of data helped me determine what the reported experience students actually had when participating in my study.

### **Students' artifacts**

My research included a variety of student artifacts. I collected works that students completed collaboratively to mark students' performance and to observe their progress or lack of growth in reading comprehension. Meanwhile, works that students finished individually were also collected as data to understand each student's achievement of comprehending the texts and applying reading strategies. Through student artifacts, I was able to know students' learning outcomes and then decide my next step of instruction.

## Bins

*What are the observed and reported experiences of American college students when they apply specific reading strategies in the classroom to improve their reading comprehension?*

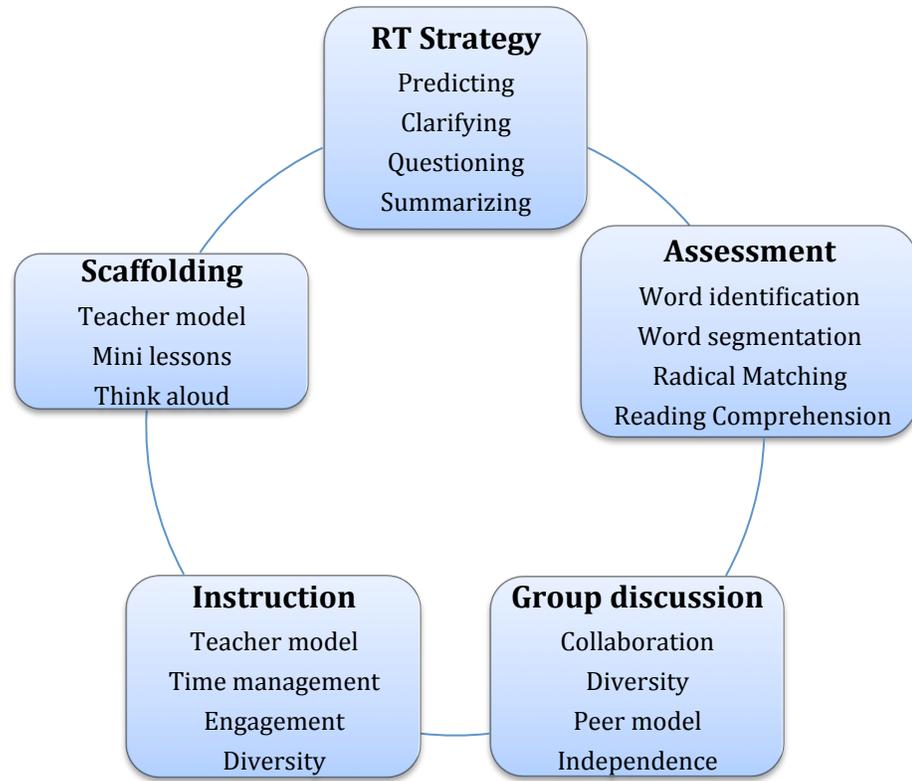


Figure 21: Bins

## Findings

The purpose of my study is to enhance students' reading comprehension and confidence in reading Chinese characters through the implementation of reciprocal teaching approach. And the implementation aimed to develop students' abilities to employ reading strategies and to be aware of strategies to apply when reading independently. The following are the findings of my study.

**The reciprocal teaching approach could positively influence students' application of reading strategies of predicting, clarifying, questioning, and summarizing.**

Reciprocal teaching provides a framework for student interaction in a group setting discussing texts they read. In a group setting, students learned about and utilize the four reading strategies together.

**Predicting.** In p.47, the examples of dialogues showed that students were not only able to make predictions concerning future content (example 1), but also able to connect their predictions to their prior knowledge (example 2). Both of the dialogues happening in the first two weeks of the research process suggested that students learned about how to employ predicting strategy very fast. Also, the results of teacher

checklists (Table 1, p.82) showed that “predicting” was the most used strategy in this implementation.

However, one student reported that he often forgot to employ “prediction” strategy while taking reading comprehension tests (p.74-75). It suggested that outside the reciprocal teaching framework, students might not use this strategy automatically. In other words, the internalization of “predicting” strategy was not yet successful in this ten-week study. Therefore, further study is needed to seek a better approach to help students internalize this strategy.

**Clarifying.** The examples of the dialogues in p.55 showed that by applying “clarifying” strategy, students could figure out new characters and words collaboratively or independently. In example 1, while students already have prior knowledge about the characters 难(hard) and 过(pass), they worked together to clarify the meaning of a new word “难过” composed of these characters. In example 2, a student demonstrated confidently his clarification about a new character “妈”. Besides, students also built up reading confidence gradually with the accumulation of experience in applying clarifying strategy (Figure 6).

However, as my observational notes indicated in p.55-p.56, when students encountered complex texts, the support from teacher, capable

reader, was necessary. Therefore, students still needed appropriate elicitation to help them critical evaluate their reading and clarify the misleading in a whole reading passage.

**Questioning.** Students reported in the interview that “questioning” was the most useful reading strategy in RT approach (p.75). Figure 10 indicated that after teacher modeling, students were able to ask questions via 5W1H strategy and then gradually built up confidence in applying questioning strategy. However, students were not yet capable to generate meaningful questions related to higher involvement of texts on their own. As my observational notes indicated (p.59), students seldom asked “why” question when using “questioning” strategy. And in order to ask a “why” question, students had to know what information might be important in text. Hence, before asking students to employ “questioning” strategy, appropriate holding mini lessons to scaffold my students’ ability to stress the essentials of texts might be helpful. The dialogue in p.60-61 was an example of the mini lessons I administrated during the research process.

**Summarizing.** For an adult reader whose capability of a foreign language is yet at introductory level, utilizing summarizing might lack of challenge because the texts are too short to include complex information (p.64-65). However, while students were able to summarize the texts within no more than three sentences (p.69), among the teacher checklists I

collected, only four-seventh of them reported that individual student applied “summarizing” strategy when comprehending text (Table 1, p.82). My observations in class told me the reason was that during each research process, normally it only took one person to fulfill the job of summarizing. Hence, not everybody could participate in “summarizing” activity at each research process.

Therefore, varying and increasing difficulty of the summarizing project is a method to challenge students’ thinking, elicit their motivation for reading, and build up their reading confidence. I designed mission-based projects for students to practicing summarizing skill as well as responding the texts meaningfully (p.65). The dialogue in p.66-67 showed students’ engagement in mission-based summarizing projects.

In sum, the implementation of the reciprocal teaching approach allowed students to learn how to employ RT strategies while reading. During the research process, students demonstrated an overall growth in applying reading strategies of predicting, clarifying, questioning, and summarizing.

**When participating in the reciprocal teaching approach and applying the RT strategies, students' reading comprehension could be positively influenced.**

The purpose of my study is to enhance students' reading comprehension through the implementation of reciprocal teaching approach. As Chart 1 (p.79) showed, students' performance in the quizzes and final exam demonstrated a significant progress, average score increasing from 6.77/10 to 9.37/10 during the research process. Chart 2 (p.80) also suggested that through the implementation, students did gradually develop their ability of independent reading. (Students' average grades in reading comprehension improved from 0.5/2.5 to 2/2.5).

During the research process, students' average grades in the word identification section made progress, yet their performance of word identification had been up-and-down depending on the difficulty of the assigned tasks (Chart 2, p.80). The fluctuating scores of word identification might mean more scaffolding activities about it are needed in my future instruction.

One student reported during the interview that applying RT strategies helped him identify and memorize characters well and became a more independent reader through this implementation (p.76), and another student stated that he started to think he is reading for real because of

participating in this study (p.75). Students' feedback suggested that the RT approach could positively influence students' reading comprehension.

**Students could be better involved in the reciprocal teaching approach when scaffolded instruction is provided. But the diversity of students' individual reading capability can be an issue that designing scaffolded instruction should focus on.**

The scaffolded instruction in my study included think-aloud strategy and mini-lessons. To start with, when teacher-modeling to students what a good reader thinks while reading, I used think-aloud method to verbalize every step of my thinking process. After students observed my thinking process, students were able to imitate the thinking process and then finish it with appropriate information (p.40). After students learned about and got familiar with the think-aloud strategy, students themselves also used it to model his thinking process to others during group discussions (Example 4, p.55). Therefore, during the research process, both the teacher and capable students could employ think-aloud strategy "show what a good reader is thinking while reading, which again provides scaffolding toward developing good reading comprehension"(Oczkus, 2010, p. 30-31).

Besides, mini scaffolding lessons were also indispensable in my study. Students reported during the interview that they thought the scaffolding before reading text was fun and useful, helping them to get familiar with new characters quickly (p.76-77). And “role-play”, the other mini scaffolding lesson, also provided an opportunity for students to practice new-learned characters (p.42-43). However, an unprepared reader could not benefit from this mini lesson. While “role-play” required each student to play a role alone, I found out that it was still a heavy burden for poor readers who was not yet ready to read alone and might discourage their reading confidence (p.43). Therefore, the diversity of students’ individual reading capability can be an issue that designing scaffolded instruction should focus on.

**The design of student-led discussion in reciprocal teaching could lead to students’ engagement in reading activities and build up students’ confidence in reading independently.**

During the research process, students were engaged in reciprocal teaching approach and participated in the group discussions actively. Table 1 showed that among 35 teacher checklists I collected, 32 checklists reported that the student discussed texts with his peers in class (p.82). Meanwhile student-led discussion provided students not only

opportunities to advance reading comprehension but also chances to help other classmates learn by modeling his thinking process or asking “teacher” questions. Students liked the reciprocity RT created and built up reading confidence through it (p.75). I was glad to see that during the research process, students gradually advanced their reading capability and built up reading confidence through their own efforts.

Overall, I felt that the implementation was successful because it led students to learn about and utilize the four strategies while reading, and students’ score of assessment also made progress during the research process. The finding suggested both strengths and needs in my study, which might help refine my reading instruction in the future.

### **Next Steps**

Throughout the whole research process, not only I learned about how to implement reciprocal teaching in my reading instruction, but also I explored deeply about the strengths and needs of me as a teacher and built up my confidence in reading instruction.

The purpose of my study was to enhance student's reading comprehension and the findings from my study suggest that continuing reciprocal teaching instruction will benefit my students. Therefore, I decide to continue holding student-led discussion group and developing student's skills of applying reading strategies in my classroom.

I also want to expand the successful instructional experience to my Level 1 Chinese class. Even though students at Level 1 are not yet ready to read a whole passage written in Chinese characters, I think the think-aloud method, clarifying strategy, and the scaffolding lessons I administrated during this implementation might still be useful for them.

Besides, I would like to diversify the reading texts used in RT classroom as possible as I can. It was a fun and brainstorming process to develop meaningful and authentic texts using only the limited characters students could recognize. Through including more types of texts in my reading class, I would like to vary and enrich students' reading experiences in my class.

I really enjoyed this research experience and the memorable journey I walked with my students. Both the positive and negative outcomes will be the nutrient for my future career path. I'm looking forward to refining my instruction of reciprocal teaching and using it in my future reading instruction.

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## Appendix A: Principal Consent Form

Dear Dr. Yozell,

I am Chialing-Yeh and, in addition to teaching Introductory Chinese, I am completing a Master of Education degree at Moravian College. One of the requirements of the program is to conduct an action research of some facets of my professional practice. This semester, I am focusing my research on how to enhance CSL (Chinese as Second Language) students' accuracy and fluency of reading Chinese characters independently by applying reading strategies of reciprocal teaching. Through my research, I am hoping to help my students conduct more meaningful reading as they learn to monitor their own reading behaviors.

My study will take place between February 27 and the end of the spring semester. As part of the study, students in CHIN195 class will apply reading strategies, discuss their reading in a small group, and comprehend texts collaboratively. The role of interpreting texts will be shifted from the instructor to students. The instructor will guide on the side and assist students to engage in meaningful reading on their own. During the study, I will collect various forms of data. Data collected will include students' work, surveys/interviews, check list/tally sheets, observation, journals, traditional assessments and self-assessments. All of the participants' names will be kept confidential in the study. Each student's participation in the study is completely voluntary, and he will not be penalized if he chooses not to participate. Regardless of whether or not a student opts to serve as a research participant, all students will receive the same instruction in the classroom.

If you should have any questions about my project, please don't hesitate to ask me or to contact my advisor, Dr. Joseph Shosh, Education Department, Moravian College, at 610-861-1482 or shoshj@moravian.edu  
Thank you so much for your support.

Sincerely,

Chialing-Yeh

*I give my permission for Chialing-Yeh to conduct this project in CHIN195 class at Moravian College. I understand that I will receive a signed copy of this consent form. I had read this form and understand it.*

---

Signature of Chair, Department of Modern Language & Literature, Moravian College

Date

## Appendix B: Student Consent Form

Dear CHIN195 students,

I am now completing a Master of Education degree at Moravian College. My research focuses on how to enhance CSL (Chinese as Second Language) students' accuracy and fluency of reading Chinese characters independently by implementing reciprocal teaching.

During the spring of 2015 when you were enrolled in CHIN195, we used reciprocal teaching. You learned to apply a number of reading strategies while reading Chinese characters, and to discuss as well as to comprehend texts collaboratively with you group members. I was amazed by your improvement in reading Chinese characters. I appreciate all the efforts you put in class and would like to ask your permission to use archival data I collected in our classroom in my thesis study.

The data I'd like to use was gathered as part of my regular teaching from February 27 to the end of the spring semester. These archival data include your class works, surveys/interviews, checklists, my classroom notes, and formative assessments you completed. Your participation in my study is completely voluntary, and your identity will be kept confidential through the use of pseudonyms.

If you should have any questions about my project, please don't hesitate to ask me or forward to my advisor, Dr. Joseph Shosh, Education Department, Moravian College, at 610-861-1482 or shoshj@moravian.edu Thank you so much for your support.

Sincerely,

Chialing, Yeh

*I had read this form and permit Ms. Yeh to use the data, which was collected in CHIN195 class, in her thesis study.*

---

Signature of Student

Date

### Appendix C: Pre-Study Survey

1. How do you feel about reading Chinese characters?
  
2. What do you feel your strengths and weaknesses as a Chinese characters reader? And do you consider yourself as a successful Chinese characters reader? Why?
  
3. What do you do when you have trouble to understand the meaning of reading passages?
  
4. Have you ever heard “Reciprocal Teaching?” If yes, please briefly describe it.
  
5. What would you hope to accomplish by the end of the reading course?

When I am reading Chinese passages.....

1. I periodically stop and think, “What does it mean?” Or “Does it makes sense?”  
 Always    Often    Sometimes    Seldom    Never
  
  2. I connect what I’m reading to my prior knowledge.  
 Always    Often    Sometimes    Seldom    Never
  
  3. I ask myself questions about the passage.  
 Always    Often    Sometimes    Seldom    Never
  
  4. I summarize the main point about the reading passage.  
 Always    Often    Sometimes    Seldom    Never
  
  5. I consciously apply reading strategies.  
 Always    Often    Sometimes    Seldom    Never  
 If yes, what reading strategies are you currently using?
-

## Appendix D: Interview Questions

### Individual Interview

Name:

1. Please describe what “reciprocal teaching” is according to your experience in this semester.
2. From your perspective, how are your applications to these four reading strategies reciprocal teaching proposes?
3. Do you think your reading capability had progressed because of this implementation?
4. Please compare your experience of learning Chinese characters last semester to the experience in this semester.
5. During the implementation, what difficulty or accomplishment you faced?
6. During the implementation, what’s your most unforgettable experience?
7. Feel free to share any opinions of this teaching approach and give your suggestions to help me improve my instruction.
8. What’s your future plan for learning Chinese?

## Appendix E: Reading Sample & Checklist

### Reading Steps

**Predicting - Reading aloud - Silent reading - Questioning - Clarifying - Summarizing**

Reading Passage #1 台大，我来了！

Date: March 2

Participant:

Reading Passage #1 台大，我来了！

我是台湾大学的学生，台湾大学在台北，你也可以叫他台大。台大很大，老师也很多，找好老师不难，食堂的饭也很好吃是一个很好的大学。你知道吗？我是我们家第一个上台大的儿子，我上台大我们家人都很高兴。

When I'm reading, I.....

- Predict the purpose of the reading passage by its title or other clues. (P)
- Raise meaningful questions to promote comprehension. (Q)
- Promote comprehension by answering the teacher or other students' questions. (Q)
- Clarify unknown words and ideas in the passage. (C)
- Discuss with classmates to understand the content. (C)
- Paraphrase the passage in Chinese or in English. (S)
- Summarize the main idea of the passage. (S)

### Appendix F: Quiz Sample

#### CHIN195-2015Spring-Quiz #1

BWC Unit 6 Part1-4

03/16/2015

NAME: (            )

#### Section 1: Translate the following words into English

1. 可以		6. 星期	
2. 知道		7. 关门	
3. 人口		8. 四月二号	
4. 比较		9. 学生	
5. 好像		10. 第一次	

#### Section 2: Segment the following sentences into words

1. 星期六中美公司不开门。
2. 他们都是工人。
3. 他的生日在七月。

#### Section 3: Match the characters in the box that have the same component.

A. 安 B. 可 C. 道 D. 月 E. 问 F. 字  
G. 次 H. 星 I. 像 J. 哪 K. 湖 M. 以

1. 日		5. 何	
2. 过		6. 子	
3. 海		7. 住	
4. 好		8. 门	

**Section 4: Reading Comprehension. Please answer Q1-Q3 as detailed as you can.**

<b>去上海了!</b>
<p>小明: 下星期一我要去上海, 我没去过中国, 这是第一次, 我很高兴。</p> <p>小美: 上海的人口很多, 公司也很多, 住上海好像很贵。</p> <p>小明: <u>没关系</u>, 我的中文老师是上海人, 他说: 「来来来, 住我这, 我带你去吃好吃的中国饭。」</p> <p>小美: 太好了!</p>
<p><b>English translation (Not accessible to students)</b></p> <p>Xiaoming: Next Monday I will go to Shanghai. I have never been to China. This is my first time. I'm very happy.</p> <p>Xiaomei: There are a lot of people and companies in Shanghai. It seems that staying in Shanghai is expensive.</p> <p>Xiaoming: It's OK! My Chinese teacher is from Shanghai. He said: "Come! Stay in my place! I could take you to have delicious Chinese food."</p> <p>Xiaomei: Great!</p>

1. Why is Xiaoming very happy?
  
2. What are Xiaomei's impressions of Shanghai?
  
3. What did Xiaoming's Chinese teacher tell Xiaoming?
  
4. What does "没关系" mean?