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## Petitioning - An Elementary Staff's Unique Approach to Reading Staff Development

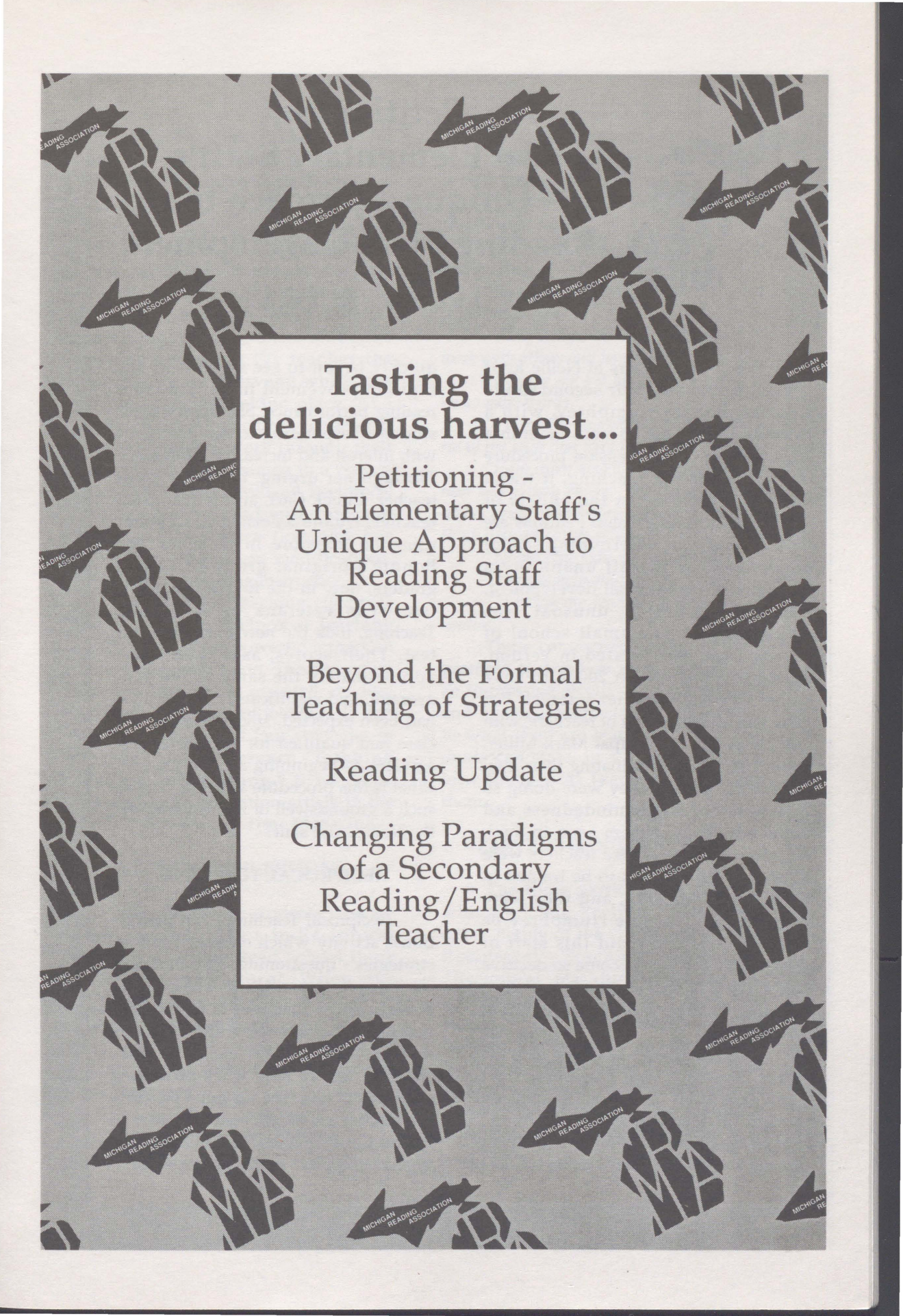
Celeste M. Crouch

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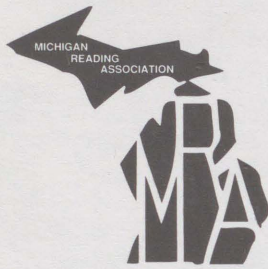
## Tasting the delicious harvest...

Petitioning -  
An Elementary Staff's  
Unique Approach to  
Reading Staff  
Development

Beyond the Formal  
Teaching of Strategies

Reading Update

Changing Paradigms  
of a Secondary  
Reading/English  
Teacher



# Petitioning - An Elementary Staff's Unique Approach to Reading Staff Development

by Celeste M. Crouch

When the teachers at Nellie Reed School presented their second grade teacher, Bonnie Humphrey, with a petition urging her to train them in a new reading comprehension procedure called Reciprocal Teaching, it was a dramatic moment in the annals of professional development. Petitions are not the norm in determining school inservices nor is staff unanimity a hallmark of professional development. Clearly, something unusual was happening in this small school of thirteen teachers located in Vernon, Michigan (population 2000), to have generated such teacher interest. For here was an entire staff of teachers, with the blessings of Principal Mark Miller, who were not only initiating their own staff development, they were doing so in a spirit of singlemindedness and determination seldom seen in such training ventures. These teachers were united in their efforts to be trained in Reciprocal Teaching, and they were adamant that Bonnie Humphrey be their trainer. How did this staff of elementary teachers become so decisive and unified in their demands to receive training in this reading instructional procedure?

This remarkable story began in the fall of 1987 when Mrs. Humphrey went through a series of training sessions on Reciprocal Teaching sponsored by the Shiawassee ISD. After initiating instruction in her own classroom, she

quickly began to see significant and rapid improvement in her students' reading performance. She observed her students responding to the procedure with interest and increasing confidence. Through her urging, the third grade teacher, Chuck Carr, and fourth grade teacher, Duane Koerner, also began using the procedure. In the fall of 1989, Bonnie's original group of second graders, now in the fourth grade and two year veterans of Reciprocal Teaching, took the new Meap Reading test. Their scores, as a class, were approximately the same as the state average, and significantly higher than had been expected, since a third of the class had qualified for special reading services as beginning second graders. What is this procedure which is causing such a groundswell of interest amongst the Nellie Reed staff?

## RECIPROCAL TEACHING

Reciprocal Teaching is an instructional activity which emphasizes four strategies - questioning, summarizing, clarifying, and predicting. The purpose of Reciprocal Teaching is to increase reading comprehension and recall by demonstrating how each of these strategies can be used when processing segments of text. The dialogue provides the teacher an established structure to model the strategies, and interject the verbal support necessary for each

student to become familiar with the procedure. They each take a turn at being the teacher and leading the discussion - hence the term Reciprocal Teaching .

As the students take over as leader, the teacher can subtly shift from demonstrator, to supportor, to evaluator and back again, all within the context of the dialogue and each student's needs. The dialogue reflects the student's thinking and gives the teacher the opportunity to intervene while this processing is still taking place. At a variety of critical junctures, the teacher can help students work through their inability to derive meaning in a powerful and yet unobtrusive way. Reciprocal Teaching can be used with informational and narrative text and has application, with slight modifications, for all levels of reading instruction.

Is Reciprocal Teaching effective? The research on Reciprocal Teaching has documented its powerful impact on reading comprehension. The procedure has been featured in research, reading and staff development journals. It was highlighted as one of four strategies in the ASCD teleconference "**Teaching Reading as Thinking.**" It was also included in an education article in the June 12, 1989 issue of *Time Magazine*.

### STUDENT PERCEPTIONS

What do the the students who are receiving instruction in Reciprocal Teaching at Nellie Reed School think about the procedure? When the students were asked to write their answers to the questions, "*What has been most useful about learning Reciprocal Teaching?*" the following are some of their responses:

*"I think it's good for children"*

*"You learn how to summarize"*

*"It helps me read better and understand what I am reading. It also helps to make the sentence make sense."*

*"You learn how to clarify and how to predict what's next."*

*"Helps me make better summaries and questions."*

*"Summarizing because then I know what's important."*

*"I know how to read better and to work with others and have more friends."*

*"It helps me get better grades and to know more words."*

*"I think the summarizing and getting rid of the stuff that isn't important."*

*"I can learn new words. I can learn to read better than before. This makes me like school better than before. Now it is better. I think than any other school."*

*"Having the kids ask a questions."*

*"You can help other people."*

*"It helps me learn all the parts of reading."*

These comments, written without prompts or direction from teachers, are an impressive record of how well third and fourth graders can give expression to what they are learning. These students can state, in a variety of ways, how Reciprocal Teaching is helping them .

### PARTICIPATING TEACHERS

The three participating teachers who are using Reciprocal Teaching, speak highly of the effectiveness of the Reciprocal Teaching procedure. "*Reciprocal teaching has given the students the tools they need to be effective readers,*" says Bonnie Humphrey, the catalyst and newly proclaimed staff teacher for this approach. Chuck Carr suggests, "*I think the students learn to cooperate with each other. They seem to do better on tests because of the questioning*

*and summarizing.*" Using Reciprocal Teaching for only a short time can still elicit positive comments. *"The students enjoy being the teacher and asking questions of the other students."* acknowledges Duane Koerner. *"They understand what they are reading."*

#### A NEW STAFF DEVELOPMENT PROVERB

When the Nellie Reed teachers were asked to what they attributed their interest in Reciprocal Teaching, their responses underscored three important factors - the three participating teachers' enthusiasm for the procedure, their willingness to share their new knowledge and the improved reading scores of the students who had received the instruction. Given the fact that this staff has observed a respected colleague's commitment to this approach for almost two years and had witnessed two other staff members gain an equally high opinion of the innovation, their responses are not too surprising.

Can educators glean any important principles regarding staff development and reading instruction from the events at Nellie Reed School? The lessons seem to be simple ones. The sustained commitment and enthusiasm of a respected colleague, with a little help from an objective measure, can favorably influence a staff's curiosity and interest regarding that innovation. Evidently, Bonnie Humphrey and her exceptional group of colleagues never subscribed to that old staff development maxim that to influence teachers' thinking and behavior you have to be an expert who lives at least fifty miles away. On the contrary, the story at Nellie Reed School beautifully confirms a new proverb which empowers teachers and can lead to important instructional reform. Yes, you can be a

prophet in your own land! Who knows, it may even be the best way to bring about positive change.

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**Celeste Crouch** is the  
Reading Consultant at  
East Lansing High School,  
East Lansing, Michigan.