



## SIOP® FEATURE 13:

# Ample Opportunities Provided for Students to Use Learning Strategies

There is considerable evidence from research over the past four decades supporting the assertion that explicitly teaching a variety of self-regulating strategies improves student learning and reading (August & Shanahan, 2010; Dole, Duffy, Roehler, & Pearson, 1991; Pressley, 2000; 2002; Snow, Griffin, & Burns, 2005; Vogt & Nagano, 2003). Many of these research studies focused on highly effective readers and learners who use a variety of strategies in an interactive and recursive manner. Paris (2001, p. 89) suggests that self-regulated learning “emphasizes autonomy and control by the individual who monitors, directs, and regulates actions toward goals of information acquisition, expanding expertise, and self-improvement.” Chamot (2009, p. 57) suggests that learning strategies are important because:

- Good language learners use task-appropriate and flexible strategies.
- Students who are mentally active and strategic are better learners.
- Learning strategies are particularly effective with academic tasks.
- Learning strategies can be taught and learned.
- Learning strategies can transfer to new tasks.

As English learners develop English proficiency, it is important that their language, literacy, and content instruction include a focus on learning and practicing a variety of learning strategies (Chamot, 2009; Dymock & Nicholson, 2010; National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2000; Vogt, Echevarría, & Short, 2010). These strategies can be classified as follows:

1. **Cognitive Learning Strategies.** These strategies help students organize the information they are expected to learn through the process of self-regulated learning (Paris, 2001). Cognitive strategies are directly related to individual learning tasks and are used by learners when they mentally and/or physically manipulate material, or when they apply a specific technique to a learning task (Slater & Horstman, 2002). Examples of cognitive strategies include the following (McLaughlin, 2010; Vogt & Shearer, 2011):
  - Previewing a story or chapter before reading
  - Establishing a purpose for reading and/or learning
  - Consciously making connections between personal experiences, beliefs, and feelings and what is learned while reading
  - Using mnemonics
  - Highlighting, underlining, or using sticky notes to identify important information
  - Taking notes or outlining
  - Reading aloud for clarification

- Rereading to aid comprehension
  - Mapping information or using a graphic organizer
  - Identifying key vocabulary
  - Identifying, analyzing, and using varied text structures
2. **Metacognitive Learning Strategies.** The process of purposefully monitoring our thinking is referred to as metacognition (Baker & Brown, 1984). The use of metacognitive strategies implies awareness, reflection, and interaction; and strategies are used in an integrated, interrelated, and recursive manner (Dole, Duffy, Roehler, & Pearson, 1991). Studies have found that when metacognitive strategies are taught explicitly, reading comprehension is improved (Duffy, 2002; Snow, Griffin, & Burns, 2005; Vogt & Nagano, 2003). Examples of metacognitive learning strategies include:
- Predicting and inferring
  - Generating questions and using the questions to guide comprehension
  - Monitoring and clarifying (“Am I understanding? If not, what can I do to help myself?”)
  - Evaluating and determining importance
  - Summarizing and synthesizing
  - Making mental images (visualizing)
3. **Language Learning Strategies.** As with other aspects of learning, effective language learners consciously use a variety of strategies to increase their progress in speaking and comprehending the new language (Cohen & Macaro, 2008). Examples of language learning strategies include:
- Applying basic reading skills, such as previewing, skimming, scanning, and reviewing
  - Analyzing and using forms and patterns in English, such as the *prefix + root + suffix* pattern
  - Making logical guesses based on contextual and syntactic information
  - Breaking words into component parts
  - Purposefully grouping and labeling words
  - Drawing pictures and/or using gestures to communicate when words do not come to mind
  - Substituting a known word when unable to pronounce an unfamiliar word
  - Self-monitoring and self-correcting while speaking English
  - Paraphrasing
  - Guessing and deducing
  - Imitating behaviors of native English speaking peers to successfully complete tasks
  - Using verbal and nonverbal cues to know when to pay attention

Other language learning strategies include those described as social-affective, such as seeking out conversation partners, taking risks with the new language,

practicing English when alone, and combatting inhibition about using English by having a positive attitude. Another important social-affective strategy is asking for clarification, something that is often difficult for English learners.

Whichever sets of strategies are emphasized, learned, and used, it is generally agreed that they can be taught through explicit instruction, careful modeling, and scaffolding (Duffy, 2002). Additionally, Lipson and Wixson (2008) suggest that just teaching a variety of strategies is not enough. Rather, learners need not only *declarative* knowledge (What is the strategy?) but also *procedural* knowledge (How do I use it?) and *conditional* knowledge (When and why do I use it?). Also, it is important that students practice and apply strategies with different tasks and genres.

When teachers model strategy use (such as through think-alouds) and then provide appropriate scaffolding during practice sessions, students are more likely to become effective strategy users (Fisher, Frey, & Williams, 2002; Pressley & Woloshyn, 1995).

## Things to Remember about Teaching Learning Strategies

- Many English learners who have been well schooled in their home language probably have developed a variety of learning strategies that they can talk about once they learn the English terms for them. Therefore, it's important to know your students' educational backgrounds and their native language literacy proficiency so you can be aware of what they already know and can do regarding strategy use in their home language.
- Many strategies transfer to learning in the new language. For example, once you know how to find a main idea in a text written in your home language (L1), you can do it with a text in your target language (L2). Likewise, if you know how to make predictions in your L1, you can engage in making predictions in your L2.
- The Common Core State Standards require that students “adapt their communication in relation to audience, task, purpose, and discipline. They set and adjust purposes for reading, writing, speaking, listening, and language uses as warranted by the tasks” (© Copyright 2010. National Governors Association Center for Best Practices and Council of Chief State School Officers. All rights reserved.). This is precisely what it means to be an effective user of reading and language strategies.
- Remember that having students identify and label strategies is not the end goal (Baker, 2008). Instead, the desired outcome is for students to engage in a variety of learning strategies while they're reading, listening, writing, speaking, and working with other students.
- McKeown, Beck, and Blake (2009) found that some students spend so much time focusing on strategic actions that they seem less likely to connect key ideas in the text. “Focusing on strategies during reading may leave students less aware of the overall process of interacting with text, especially in terms of the need to connect ideas they encounter and integrate those ideas into a coherent whole” (p. 246). This can happen when teachers mistakenly focus too much attention on the identification of separate learning strategies, such as, “Today, our goal