



Songs for the Thinking Classroom

يجب دائماً أن لا ننسى أن هدف التعليم ليس حشو عقول الطلاب بالحقائق والمعلومات، يجب أن يبني ويرتكز تعليم طلابنا على التفكير. إننا غالباً ما نلاحظ أن الطلاب يتبعون التعليمات في تنفيذ المهمات المطلوبة منهم دون استفسار. ماذا هم يعملون؟ ولماذا يعملون ذلك؟ إنهم نادراً ما يسألون أنفسهم عن إستراتيجيات تعلمهم أو تقييم كفاءة أدائهم. وحين بدأت الإعداد للقاء التربوي تحت عنوان «Thinking Classroom»، ومن خلال تصفحي لصفحات الإنترنت عثرت على أغنية «The Greatest gift» التي قررت أن أختتم بها ذلك اللقاء الذي نفذته بتاريخ 2003/9/17. لقد كانت تلك الأغنية بمثابة قطعة الحلوى التي تقدم في نهاية وجبة دسمة، وقد انعكس ذلك في بريق أعين المشاركين والابتسامة العريضة التي علت وجوههم ونحن نردد الأغنية مرات ومرات معاً.

The Greatest Gift

Who knows when the seed is planted?
Who really knows who plants the seed?
We all influence each other
As we share the air we breathe
Each drop becomes a river
Each river becomes a flow
'Till somehow the word spells water
The child understands
And the learning grows
There may not be an audience clapping
There may not be a statue tall
No extra million in the pay cheque
No gold leaf certificate on the wall
Each drop becomes a river
Each river becomes a flow
'Till somehow the word spells water
The child understands
And the learning grows
You feel it in their smile
When you see them believe

As they learn the value of learning
And start to be free
Each drop becomes a river
Each river becomes a flow
'Til somehow the word spells water
The child understands
So, thank you
For the seeds you're planting
Thank you
For the love you sow
Thank you
From all the children
You make the river's flow...

* Songs for the thinking Classroom. The Greatest Gift
Available on line:

www.glenncapelli.com/greatest-gift.html

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Basically, there are three ways that teachers can implement strategy training into their classroom lessons. The first way is known as awareness training. Students gradually become aware of the general idea of language learning strategies and the way they can help them achieve their language goals. In awareness training students are not required to use the strategies in on-the-spot language tasks. This kind of training acts as the students' introduction to learner strategies and should be fun and motivating so that the students feel encouraged to learn more.

The second kind of strategy training is known as one-time training. This involves learning and practicing one or more strategies with actual language tasks which might be taken from the curriculum or supplementary materials. This kind of training is more explicit than awareness training because it focuses specifically on the value of the strategy, when it can be used, how to use it, and how to evaluate the success of the strategy. This type of training is best used when the student is aware of how he/she learns best.

The third kind of strategy training is long-term training which is very similar to one-time training because it focuses on a particular strategy while paying particular attention to monitoring and evaluating the success of the strategy over time. This kind of strategy training should be linked to the overall goals and objectives of the curriculum.

The teaching of learner strategies assumes that teachers are familiar with their students' particular styles of learning. This is difficult if not impossible in overcrowded classrooms with limited resources. Therefore, as many strategies as possible should be introduced as frequently as possible in order to meet the learning styles of all students. The following illustration shows the steps that should be taken by teachers in strategy training:

Steps in the Strategy Training Model

- 1- Determine the learners' needs and the time available.
- 2- Select strategies well.
- 3- Consider integration of strategy training.
- 4- Consider motivational issues.
- 5- Prepare materials and activities.
- 6- Conduct 'completely informed training.'

- 7- Evaluate the strategy training.
- 8- Revise the strategy training.

(Oxford, 1990:204)

1 above: Which strategies do you think best suit your learners? How much time do you have available? Can you relate strategy training to the language tasks in the curriculum so that the strategies become immediately applied and learners can understand and practice them?

2 above: Strategies should be selected to coincide with the needs and characteristics of your learners. Choose strategies that are useful for most learners and can be applied to a number of language situations and tasks.

3 above: Strategy training should be somehow linked to what students are learning at the moment. Self-directed learning will not be possible when it seems disconnected from the general classroom learning topic and environment.

4 above: What will you do to motivate your students? Will they receive grades for implementing new strategies?

5 above: New handouts and materials are not necessary. Just try to incorporate learner strategies into the lessons you are already using.

6 above: Inform the learners as completely as possible about the importance of each strategy and how it can be used. Provide practice for each strategy with several different language tasks.

7 above: Learners should evaluate themselves and this can be coupled with teacher observation. Criteria for assessment might be task improvement, general skill improvement, maintenance of the new strategy over time, application of the strategy to other relevant tasks and improvement in learner attitudes.

8 above: A reconsideration of learner needs in light of the training that has just occurred.

The introduction of learning strategies will help produce communicatively competent students and ultimately take some of the pressure off of teachers—a welcome break!

References

Oxford, Rebecca. 1990. *Language Learning Strategies: What every teacher should know*. Boston: Heinle & Heinle.



Activities which combine a number of language learner strategies:

Making a Weekly Schedule

Purpose: to produce a generalized, weekly schedule for language learning.

Materials: notebook and pen

Time: 20 minutes

Instructions: Students are asked to make a schedule of their typical week, including school, homework, family time, television-watching time, chores, sleeping, eating etc. Students should block out all of the time they are busy and note what time is available for language learning. Learners should consider the basic principles of structured reviewing, meaning that review should occur frequently at first and then only periodically. The schedule should be revised and updated week by week.

Creating a Language Learning Notebook

Purpose: learners will create a notebook that will help them throughout their language learning.

Materials: notebook, colour pens and pencils

Time: ongoing

Instructions: Tell students that creating a language learning notebook will help them organize their learning. The notebook can be as simple or detailed as the learner wishes, incorporating his/her own creativity. The notebook can be used for the following purposes, or anything else the learner can think of:

- to record goals and objectives
- to write down homework assignments
- to keep a list of new words or expressions you have learned or would like to learn
- to write down words you have heard or read that you want to ask about or look up in the dictionary
- to write down grammar rules you have learned or figured out on your own
- to keep notes about conversations you have had in English
- to summarize what you read in English
- to keep a record of errors you want to work on
- to comment on strategies you have used successfully or unsuccessfully
- to record the amount of time you spend each week studying

(Oxford, 1990:186)

Learners may naturally incorporate some of the direct and indirect learning strategies on their own, but in general learners need to learn how to be self-directed learners. Teachers can facilitate the process of learning by training their students in learning strategies. How can teachers train their students in learning strategies? The best strategy

training “not only teaches language learning strategies but also deals with feelings and beliefs about taking on more responsibility and about the role change implied by the use of learning strategies” (Oxford, 1990: 201). If students do not change their beliefs about learning, they will not be able to take advantage of the strategies they learn.



AFFECTIVE STRATEGIES

Lowering Anxiety

1.	Using relaxation, deep-breathing and meditation techniques	Relaxing all of the major muscle groups in the body, especially the muscles in the neck and face, or breathing deeply from the diaphragm, or meditating by focusing on a mental image or sound. These techniques will calm learners' nerves and facilitate more natural communication.
2.	Using music	Listening to soothing nature-like or classical music is helpful when reviewing the target language or vocabulary notebooks.
3.	Using laughter	Laughing will help recall new vocabulary, so watching a comedy movie or reading a funny book will help learners to remember.

Self-encouragement

1.	Making positive statements	Saying or writing positive things to oneself in order to feel confident in learning the target language. Examples might be: I'm a good listener, I pay attention well, I can get the general meaning without knowing every word, I'm confident and secure about my progress.
2.	Taking risks wisely	The learner can push him/herself to take risks in learning the new language even though there is a chance of making a mistake!
3.	Self-reward	The learner should reward him/herself for a good performance in the target language.

Paying Attention to Emotions

1.	Listen to the body	Learners should be in-tune with their body so they can react appropriately to language learning situations which cause them stress.
2.	Using a checklist	The learner should use a checklist to discover feelings, attitudes, and motivations concerning language learning in general, as well as concerning specific language tasks.
3.	Keeping a journal	Writing in a journal to keep track of progress and factors affecting motivation and success in the language learning process.

SOCIAL STRATEGIES

Asking Questions

1.	Asking for clarification or verification	The learner can ask the speaker to repeat, paraphrase, explain, slow down, or give examples: Would you repeat that please?, please speak more slowly, I'm sorry I don't understand, pardon me?, what does _____ mean?
2.	Asking for correction	Asking someone (the teacher or peers) for correction when conversing.

Cooperating with Others

1.	Cooperating with peers	Learners can work with other language learners to improve their language skills. This strategy might involve a regular learning partner or frequent work in pairs or small groups.
2.	Cooperating with proficient users of the new language	Learners should take opportunities to interact with native speakers whenever possible.

Empathizing with Others

1.	Developing cultural understanding	The learner can try to empathize with another person through learning about the culture and trying to understand the other person's relation to that culture.
2.	Becoming aware of others' thoughts and feelings	The learner can observe the behaviours of others as a possible expression of their thoughts and feelings, and can ask about those thoughts and feelings.



6.	Adjusting or approximating the message	Altering the message by omitting some items of information, making ideas simpler, or saying something slightly different that means almost the same, such as pencil for pen.
7.	Coining words	Making up new words to communicate the desired idea, such as a paper holder for a notebook, or a tooth doctor for a dentist, or a water holder for a bucket.
8.	Circumlocution or synonymy	Getting the meaning across by describing the concept or using a word that means the same thing. For example, if the word seatbelt is unknown, the learner might say "I'd better tie myself in".

Indirect Learning Strategies

Indirect learning strategies can be classified as metacognitive, affective and social. Metacognitive strategies require learners to control their own cognition through activities such as arranging, planning and evaluating their learning. Affective strategies help learners regulate their emotions, motivations and attitudes so that they can be successful, while social strategies lead to learning through interaction. These three strategies are referred to as indirect because they support and promote learning without necessarily directly involving the target language. Indirect strategies work together with direct strategies to assist language learning.

METACOGNITIVE STRATEGIES		
Centering Learning		
1.	Overviewing and linking with already known material	Overviewing comprehensively a key concept, principle, or set of materials in a new language activity and associating it with what is already known. This generally happens in three stages: learning why the activity is being done, building the needed vocabulary, and making associations. Teachers should elicit the links to previous knowledge from the students themselves.
2.	Paying attention	The learner decides to pay attention to language learning and to ignore distractions.
3.	Delaying speech production to focus on listening	The learner decides to delay speaking in the target language until listening comprehension is better developed.
Arranging and Planning Learning		
1.	Finding out about language learning	The learner makes efforts to find out how language learning works by reading books and talking with other people, and then using the gathered information to help his/her own learning process.
2.	Organizing	Understanding and using conditions related to optimal learning, the learner will organize his/her schedule and create a physical environment that is conducive to learning.
3.	Setting goals and objectives	The learner sets aims for language learning, including long-term objectives such as engaging in informal conversation by the end of the year, or short-term objectives such as reading a short story by next week.
4.	Identifying the purpose of a language task	The learner will decide his/her own purpose in performing the language task.
5.	Planning for a language task	The learner will plan for the upcoming language task by: describing the task or situation, determining its requirements, checking his/her own language resources, and determining additional language elements of functions necessary for the task.
6.	Seeking practice opportunities	The learner will seek out or create opportunities to practice the new language in realistic situations. Consciously thinking in the new language also provides practice opportunities. This Week in Palestine provides lots of opportunities for reading and writing opportunities.
Evaluating Learning		
1.	Self-monitoring	Identifying errors in understanding or producing the new language, determining which ones are important, tracking the source of the important errors, and trying to eliminate such errors.
2.	Self-evaluating	The learner can evaluate his/her own progress by, for example, checking to see if he/she is reading faster, or understanding a greater percentage of English-language television programs.



5.	Practicing naturalistically	By far the most important aspect from a communicative perspective, this involves practicing the new language in natural, realistic settings such as participating in a conversation, reading a book, listening to a lecture or writing a letter. Listening comprehension exercises should be constructed around a particular task in which students are required to do something in response to what they hear. For example, express dis/agreement, take notes, mark a picture or a diagram according to instructions, or answer questions. Also using role-play.
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Receiving and Sending Messages

1.	Getting the idea quickly	Using skimming to determine the main ideas or scanning to find specific details. This helps students understand which s/he reads or hears, and is facilitated further by preview questions. Follow-up questions can be yes/no, true/false, or focused on specific information: What is the theme, what are the three main ideas, etc.
2.	Using resources	Using print or non-print resources to understand incoming messages or produce outgoing messages. Such resources might be: dictionary, thesaurus, TV, radio, internet, encyclopaedia, grammar book, etc.

Analysing and Reasoning

1.	Reasoning deductively	Using general rules and applying them to new target language situations. However this may sometimes result in over-generalization errors, for example applying –ed to all past tense verbs, or confusing word order in questions such as “I don’t know where is it”.
2.	Analysing expressions	Determining the meaning of a new expression by breaking it down into parts; using the meanings of various parts to understand the meaning of the whole expression. For example, if a student hears the term ‘pre-mediated crime’ on the news, he can break it down into pre, mediate and crime to understand that the crime was thought about before.
3.	Analysing contrastively	Comparing elements (sounds, vocabulary, grammar) of the target language with the native language to determine similarities and differences.
4.	Translating	Using one language as the basis for understanding or producing another. Obviously this will be more or less valuable depending on the phrase: ‘fil mishmesh’ doesn’t work in English!
5.	Transferring	Directly applying knowledge of words, concepts, or structures from one language to another in order to understand or produce an expression in the new language.

Creating Structure for Input and Output

1.	Taking notes	Writing down the main idea or specific points, either from reading or listening. The focus of taking notes should be on understanding, not writing. Students should be encouraged to take down only the most important information, not everything they hear.
2.	Summarizing	Making a summary or abstract of a longer passage.
3.	Highlighting	Using a variety of emphasis techniques to focus on important information.

COMPENSATION STRATEGIES

Guessing Intelligently in Listening and Reading

1.	Using linguistic clues	Seeking and using language based clues in order to guess the meaning of what is heard or read in the target language if there is unknown grammar or vocabulary. Clues may come from parts of the target language already known, or from the learner’s own language.
2.	Using other clues	Seeking and using clues that are not language based. Clues might come from knowledge of the context, situation, text structure, personal relationships, topic or general world knowledge.

Overcoming Limitations in Speaking and Writing

1.	Switching to the mother tongue	Using the native tongue for an expression without translation.
2.	Getting help	Asking for help by hesitating or explicitly asking the person to provide the missing expression.
3.	Using mime or gesture	Using physical motion in place of an expression to indicate meaning.
4.	Avoiding communication partially or totally	This involves avoiding communication when difficulties arise.
5.	Selecting the topic	The learner chooses a topic that is of interest to him/her and that he/she knows he has sufficient grammar/vocabulary for.



Direct Learning Strategies

MEMORY STRATEGIES		
Creating Mental Linkages		
1.	Grouping	Classifying language material into meaningful units, either mentally or in writing. Groups can be based on types of word (ie. noun), topic, practical function (ie. words for things that make a car work), language function (ie. demand, apology, request), sense relations (ie. synonym, antonym), or emotion. The power of this strategy can be enhanced by using colour-coded groupings.
2.	Associating/ Elaborating	Relating new language information to concepts already in memory, or relating one piece of information to another, to create associations in memory. Associations can be between two things like salt and pepper, or can take the form of a semantic map.
3.	Placing new words into context	Placing a word or phrase in a meaningful sentence, conversation or story in order to remember it.
Applying Images and Sounds		
1.	Using images	Relating new language information to concepts in memory by means of meaningful visual imagery, either in the mind or an actual drawing. This strategy is good for remembering abstract words by associating them with a visual symbol or a picture of a concrete object.
2.	Semantic mapping	Making an arrangement of words into a picture, which has a key concept at the centre or at the top, and related words and concepts linked with the key concept by means of lines or arrows. This strategy visually shows how certain groups of words relate to each other.
3.	Using keywords	Remembering a new word by using auditory and visual links. First the student identifies a familiar word in the native tongue which sounds like the new word. Then the student thinks of an image of a relationship between the English and native word. For example, 'soup' in French is 'potage'. If a French student was trying to learn the word 'pot' in English, she could associate the following: "I'm making a pot of potage!"
4.	Representing sounds in memory	Remembering new language according to its sound, by rhyme for example.
Reviewing Well		
1.	Structured reviewing	Reviewing in carefully spaced intervals, at first close together and then more widely spaced apart.
Employing Action		
1.	Using physical response or sensation	Physically acting out a new expression or meaningfully relating a new expression to a physical feeling or sensation. For example, the teacher can have the students carry out commands related to newly introduced vocabulary: "take the pencil, go to the pencil sharpener, sharpen the pencil, write your name with it, and then give it to Mohammad".
2.	Using mechanical techniques	Using creative but tangible techniques, especially involving movement, in order to remember the new target language. An excellent example is the use of flashcards which can be flipped over from side to side and sorted into piles according to topic.
COGNITIVE STRATEGIES		
Practicing		
1.	Repeating	Saying or doing something over and over. This can include listening to a tape or CD repeatedly until the entire segment is understood, or rereading a passage several times, each time for a different purpose. This can also include jazz chants for oral practice and revision of writing drafts for writing skills.
2.	Formally practicing with sounds and writing systems	Practicing sounds (ie. pronunciation, intonation, stress, etc.) in a variety of ways, but not yet in a natural setting. Also practicing repeatedly the new writing system of the target language which is incredibly important for Arabic speakers because the direction, alphabet and word order varies from English.
3.	Recognizing and using formulas and patterns	Being aware of and using routine formulas such as "I'm fine, thank you. How are you?" and unanalysed patterns which contain a gap, "It's time to ____" and "The weather ____."
4.	Recombining	Combining known elements in new ways to produce a longer sequence, as in linking one phrase with another in a whole sentence.