Chapter 1: The Five C’s: Objectives For Foreign Language Instruction

In this chapter we provide a rationale for teaching students learning strategies and we show how, by teaching these strategies, we can help students meet the National Standards for Foreign Language Learning, i.e. the 5 Cs.

I. A Rationale for Teaching Learning Strategies

The explicit teaching of learning strategies can aid language teachers in helping students attain the goals, the 5 Cs, of the Foreign Language Learning Standards, i.e., Communication, Cultures, Connections, Comparisons, and Communities.

Learning strategies are the thoughts and actions we engage in, consciously or not, to learn new information. Teachers are urged to teach learning strategies in the Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the 21st Century (1999). They are part of the “weave of the curricular elements” (p. 33). The goal of teaching learning strategies is to help students to consciously control how they learn so that they can be efficient, motivated, and independent language learners (Chamot, Barnhardt, El-Dinary and Robbins, 1999).

Learning strategies instruction helps all students become better language learners. When students begin to understand their own learning processes and can exert some control over these processes, they take more responsibility for their own learning. This self-knowledge and skill in regulating one's own learning is a characteristic of successful learners, including successful language learners. Research with both first and second language learners reveals some of the ways of thinking that guide and assist an individual's attempts to learn more effectively (Paris & Winograd, 1990).

Students who think and work strategically are more motivated to learn (Paris, 1988) and have a higher sense of self-efficacy, or confidence in their own learning ability (Yang, 1999; Zimmerman, 1990). That is, strategic students perceive themselves as more able to succeed academically than students who do not know how to use strategies effectively. Students who expect to be successful at a learning task generally are successful, and each successful learning experience increases motivation.

In order to continue to be successful with learning tasks, students need to be aware of the strategies that led to their success. Awareness of one's own thinking processes is generally referred to as metacognition or metacognitive awareness (Pressley & Afflerbach, 1995; Rivers, 2001). The value of this type of self-knowledge is that it leads to reflection, to planning how to proceed with a learning task, to monitoring one's own performance on an ongoing basis, and to self-evaluation upon task completion. In other words, it leads to self-regulation of one’s learning. Students with greater metacognitive awareness understand the similarity between the current learning task and previous ones, know the strategies required
for successful learning, and anticipate success as a result of knowing "how to learn" (Paris and Winograd, 1990).

One study that investigated differences between more and less effective language learners focused on listening comprehension (O'Malley, Chamot, and Küpper, 1989). Significant differences in strategy use were found between effective and less effective listeners in three major areas. Effective listeners (1) monitored their comprehension by continually asking themselves if what they were hearing made sense; (2) related new information to their prior knowledge by recalling relevant personal experiences or things they had studied; and (3) made inferences about unknown words or information.

Similar research with both high school and college foreign language students found differences between more and less effective learners in the number and range of strategies used, in how the strategies were used, and in whether they were appropriate for the task (Anderson, 1991; Bruen, 2001; Chamot, 1993; Fan, 2003; Green & Oxford, 1995; Halbach, 2000).

These studies indicate that task difficulty and level of language proficiency have a major effect on the strategies that students use. For example, some strategies used by beginning level effective language learners are used less often by the same learners when they reach intermediate level classes, probably because they have had to develop new strategies to meet the requirements of more challenging language tasks. In addition, the difficulty of the task seems to be related to whether students even try to use learning strategies. For example, if a task is relatively easy, students can perform it much as they would in their native language, without conscious attention to strategies. On the other hand, if the task is much too difficult, even effective learning strategies cannot overcome the learner's lack of knowledge and/or language proficiency.

Conclusions about strategic differences between successful and unsuccessful language learners suggest that explicit knowledge about the characteristics of a task and about appropriate strategies for the task's completion are major determiners of language learning effectiveness. When students do not understand a task (what they are supposed to do) and cannot choose an appropriate strategy to help them understand and complete the task, they seem to fall back on a largely implicit approach to learning in which they use habitual or preferred strategies without analyzing the requirements of the particular task.

If successful language learners know how to use learning strategies to assist their language performance, can teachers help less effective language learners by teaching them how to use some of the same effective strategies?

In fact, researchers and teachers in native language contexts have been quite successful in improving student performance through learning strategies instruction in areas such as reading comprehension, writing, and problem-solving (see, for example, El-Dinary, Brown, and Van Meter, 1995; Gagné, Yekovitch, and Yekovitch, 1993; Harris and Graham, 1992; Wood, Woloshyn, and Willoughby, 1995).
Second-language researchers have also investigated a variety of language learning tasks, including listening, reading, speaking, and writing. While much additional research remains to be done with language learning strategies, many of the studies carried out to date report that instruction in learning strategies can, if properly conducted, help students increase their language learning ability and confidence (see, for example, Rost and Ross, 1991; Thompson and Rubin, 1993).

In one study of learners of English as a second language, high school students from various language backgrounds were randomly assigned to a control group or to one of two groups receiving different combinations of learning strategies instruction. After two weeks of classroom strategy instruction for about one hour daily, the post-test revealed significant differences favoring the students taught learning strategies for a presentational speaking task (giving a one-minute oral presentation), and significant differences on some of the daily listening comprehension tests (viewing a mini-lecture on video) (O'Malley, Chamot, Stewner-Manzanares, Russo, and Küpper, 1985).

Studies with high school and college learners of Japanese, Russian, or Spanish indicated generally strong correlations between the use of language learning strategies and students' level of confidence in their own language learning ability (Chamot, Barnhard, El-Dinary, Carbonaro, and Robbins, 1993; Chamot, Robbins, and El-Dinary, 1993). In addition, most students reported that they found the strategies helpful and teachers indicated that strategies instruction was especially beneficial for average students.

General models for language learning strategy instruction for all levels of instruction have been developed for teachers of foreign languages and English as a second or foreign language (Chamot et al, 1999; Cohen, 1998; Oxford, 1990). For an overview of language learning taxonomies, see Hsiao and Cohen (2002). By working on a number of foreign language research studies and observing foreign language and immersion classrooms, NCLRC researchers have constructed the set of learning strategies presented in this guide. Using the Resource Guide, these are strategies that teachers can actually teach and that students find useful in learning language and other subject material. We hope that this guide provides useful information, methodology and materials for you and your students.

Important reasons for teaching learning strategies in the second language classroom include the following:

- Differences in strategy use between more and less effective learners have been documented through research in both first and second language contexts. Better learners have greater metacognitive awareness, which helps them select appropriate strategies for a specific task.

- Most students can learn how to use learning strategies more effectively.

- Many strategies can be used for a variety of tasks, but most students need guidance in transferring a familiar strategy to new problems.
Learning strategies instruction can increase student motivation in two main ways: by increasing students' confidence in their own learning ability and by providing students with specific techniques for successful language learning.

Students who have learned how and when to use learning strategies become more self-reliant and better able to learn independently.

**II. A Review of the National Standards for Foreign Language Learning**

In the 1990’s the U.S. federal government provided funding to define national standards for seven subject areas, one of which was foreign language education. Through a collaborative effort spearheaded by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL), foreign language organizations developed *content standards* which illustrate the “essential skills and knowledge” students in kindergarten through twelfth grade should acquire in a foreign language.

The *Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the 21st Century* (1999) were based on three assumptions:

*Competence in more than one language and culture enables people to:*
  - Communicate with other people in other cultures in a variety of settings.
  - Look beyond their customary borders.
  - Develop insight into their own language and culture.
  - Act with greater awareness of self, of other cultures, and their own relationship to those cultures.
  - Gain direct access to additional bodies of knowledge.
  - Participate more fully in the global community and marketplace.

*All students can be successful language and culture learners, and they:*
  - Must have access to language and culture study that is integrated into the entire school experience.
  - Benefit from the development and maintenance of proficiency in more than one language.
  - Learn in a variety of ways and settings.
  - Acquire proficiency at varied rates.

*Language and culture education is part of the core curriculum, and it:*
  - Is tied to program models that incorporate effective strategies, assessment procedures, and technologies.
  - Reflects evolving standards at the national, state, and local levels.
  - Develops and enhances basic communication skills and higher order thinking skills.

(Standards, p. 7)

The Standards focus on the outcomes of foreign language learning. These outcomes center on the students' ability to communicate in authentic settings, students’
knowledge and understanding of the cultural contexts of the target language, students' ability to make connections to knowledge through the target language, students' development of insight through making comparisons across languages and cultures, and students' lifelong participation in multilingual communities.

Taking into consideration the desired outcomes, the Standards task force identified five goal areas: Communication, Cultures, Connections, Comparisons, and Communities—the five C’s of foreign language education. The diagram below shows how the C’s are interlinked.

With its “five goal areas” and “learning scenarios,” the National Standards for Foreign Language Learning (1999) document provides information and guidance to teachers, teacher educators, administrators, and others involved directly or indirectly in K-12 education. Although this document does not prescribe how students should reach the goals, it describes extensively the knowledge and abilities students should acquire and includes “sample progress indicators” for grades four, eight and twelve.

III. Connecting Learning Strategies Instruction to the Five C’s

The fundamental concept of learning strategies instruction meshes with the principal objectives of the Standards. In fact, the Standards document states that learning strategies are an integral part of the “weave” of curricular elements that help students to learn “what to say to whom and when” (Standards, p. 29). The Standards authors call for creating “rich curricular experiences” by bringing in such notions as critical thinking skills, cultural knowledge, and learning strategies.

By focusing on meaningful language in use, the Standards hone in on process rather than product, something that the learning strategies by their very nature address. Indeed, the Standards goals themselves describe what students should be able to do at different stages throughout their language education instead of specifying which specific forms or words they should know by a given time. In a similar light, learning strategies instruction focuses on learners’ thinking processes instead of language product or output, such as their sentences or answers in the target language, etc. Learning strategies instruction equips learners with techniques to aid their thinking processes.

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Sailing the 5 C’s with Learning Strategies
Like learning strategies instruction, the Standards reflect an inclusive view of language learning, that is, both are based on the assumption that “All students can be successful language and culture learners” (Standards, p. 7). The Standards statement of philosophy states that the ultimate goal is “a future in which all students will develop and maintain proficiency in English and at least one other language, modern or classical” (Standards, p. 7). This concept is integral to language strategies instruction, since learning strategies provide a way for all students to become proficient in a foreign language. According to the Standards document,

Students who use learning strategies effectively begin to see themselves as language learners and take on more responsibility for their own learning. Learning strategies benefit all students since even those who use some strategies effectively can be taught additional ones (Standards, p. 30-31).

In the following chapter you will learn more about learning strategies, in particular, about 20 specific learning strategies that you can introduce to your students to help them become better language learners.