Learner Strategies
A Guide For Teachers

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Series Editors' Preface

The RELC Portfolio Series consists of short practical resource booklets for ESL/EFL teachers. Booklets in the series have the following characteristics:

- They are practical and techniques-oriented
- They are written in an accessible, non-academic style
- They focus on both principles and procedures

Titles in the series provide teachers with practical ways of applying new ideas in their own teaching. In addition, they could be used as the basis for workshops and in-service courses and can also be combined in different ways according to needs.

Sara Cotterall and Hayo Reinders explain the roles that learner strategies play in language learning and the need to incorporate them in the language curriculum. They describe what learner strategies are, discuss why they are important, and provide guidelines for teaching them. The booklet will be a valuable resource for teachers, teacher trainers and other language professionals who are interested in helping learners become more aware of their learning process and more capable of taking charge of their own learning.

We are grateful to the contributors to the RELC Portfolios Series for sharing their expertise with other teachers and teachers in training. Their willingness to do so without compensation has made it possible to publish these booklets at a price that is affordable to language teachers in the SEAMEO countries.

Willy A Renandya
Jack C Richards

Introduction

In the last fifteen years strategies for language learning have become the focus of a great deal of interest. This interest is linked to three important ideas. Firstly, a new view of student and teacher roles in language learning emphasises what students can do to help themselves learn. Secondly, we now know that students learn in different ways so that what works for one student may not work for the next. Thirdly, if we agree that learning must continue outside the classroom, students need to know how to manage their independent learning. All these ideas point to the importance of learner strategies.

Learner strategies play a crucial role in language learning. The strategies students adopt affect the type and amount of language practice they do, the way they approach in-class tasks and the extent to which they use resources. Often students use particular strategies without knowing what effect they will have, or without knowing what alternatives exist. By focusing attention on strategies in your classes, you can become a more effective teacher and your students can be more successful in their language learning.

We start this book by explaining what the different types of learner strategies are and how they contribute to language learning (Chapter 1). We then present four main reasons for focusing on strategies in your language course (Chapter 2). Chapter 3 describes three options for incorporating strategy instruction in your language course. The next chapter discusses important issues which you need to be aware of before introducing strategies to your students (Chapter 4). Chapter 5 then presents a 5-step procedure for teaching strategies and discusses ways of finding out what your students know about strategies and which ones they use. The final

chapter (Chapter 6) suggests different kinds of material you can use for strategy instruction and includes some ideas on how to create your own materials. By focusing on strategies, you can help your students learn more effectively and make language learning more fun! So, let's get started!

~Sara Cotterall and
Hayo Reinders

1 What Are Learner Strategies?

Different writers have defined learner strategies in different ways. For example, Rebecca Oxford's (1990, p.8) definition emphasises the benefits of learner strategies:

> specific actions taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferable to new situations.

Another way of looking at strategies is to focus on what happens when students use them. This is the focus of Rebecca Oxford and Andrew Cohen's (1992, p. 1) explanation:

> Steps or actions taken by the learners to improve the development of their language skills. These strategies have the power to:
> - increase attention essential for learning a language
> - enhance rehearsal that allows linkages to be strongly forged
> - improve the encoding and integration of language material
> - increase retrieval of information when needed for use

However, strategies involve more than just actions. Anita Wenden (1987, p. 6-7) believes that strategies include three elements:
- language learning behaviours learners actually engage in to learn and regulate the learning of a second language
- what learners know about the strategies they use
- what learners know about aspects of their language learning other than the strategies they use

By talking about "what learners know", Wenden is suggesting that strategies also involve students' understanding of the language learning process, and of the strategies they use in learning. This kind of knowledge about learning is sometimes called "metacognition". Many writers believe that work on learner strategies should pay attention both to what learners know about strategies, and to how they use them. In fact, if learners don't understand the purpose of using strategies, they may not use them very well. As O'Malley et. al. comment (1985, p. 24):

> Students without metacognitive approaches are essentially learners without direction and ability to review their progress, accomplishments and future learning directions.

DIFFERENT TYPES OF STRATEGIES

Three different types of strategies are important in language learning. O'Malley and Chamot (1990) called these cognitive, metacognitive and social-affective strategies. Cognitive strategies work directly with the target language, and involve identifying, remembering, storing or retrieving words, sounds or other aspects of the target language. Some cognitive strategies are used mainly for learning the language, and others are important for using the language, as we explain below. (Metacognitive and social/affective strategies, which we describe below, tend to influence language learning indirectly.)

In this section we present some examples of each type of cognitive strategy, using the names which have been given to the strategies in books and articles. However in Chapter 5 we discuss the importance of using strategy names which are familiar to your learners.

1. Cognitive Strategies

The first group of cognitive strategies is used mainly for learning the target language. Look at the two examples described below.

a. Strategies for learning the target language

Rehearsal
The rehearsal strategy involves saying or writing something over and over again. Learners often rehearse when they are trying to learn new vocabulary, or when they are preparing to make a phone call or give a talk in the target language.

Elaboration

The elaboration strategy involves making links between new information and what you already know, or between different parts of new information. For example, when you learn how to say university in a foreign language, you will probably automatically link it with the word for a school or a kindergarten. You might also compare it with the words for a polytechnic and a teacher training college. (All of these are educational institutions and the last three are tertiary level institutions.) You may also want to find out if the word that you use to describe teachers who teach in a school can also be used to describe teaching staff at a university. In this way, the word "university" is linked both to "school" and also to other words like "lecturer", "tutor". The idea is that successful learning depends on the strength of the links between individual pieces of information.

You have probably realised by now that you already know many strategies which can be used in learning a language, and so do your students. But perhaps you know them by different names. Or maybe you don't talk about strategies with your learners? In this booklet, we suggest that talking about strategies has many benefits.

b. Strategies for using the target language

Cognitive strategies for using the target language help learners bridge "gaps" between what they know and what they want to say, when they are communicating. These strategies are often called "communication strategies". Let's imagine you are speaking Spanish, and you don't know how to say the word "hairdresser". If you switch to your first language and say "Mañana tengo que ir al hairdresser" - you are using a communication strategy! If the person you are speaking to does not speak English, this won't work. But if you use a gesture at the same time, you may well get your meaning across! Communication strategies benefit students in lots of ways, mostly because they keep them involved in the conversation.

Approximation

Students use approximation when they choose a more general word than the target word to express their meaning. A good example of this would be if a learner used the word "relative" to describe their "sister-in-law" because they did not know the word for "sister-in-law" in the target language.

Paraphrase

Students use paraphrase when they don't know a word in the target language. By using phrases such as "something you use to …" or

"something made of …" students can enjoy being creative and remain in the conversation. When a student uses paraphrase, what often happens is that the listener helps them out by telling them what the target language word is.

2. Metacognitive Strategies

The second category of strategies is called metacognitive strategies. These help language learning indirectly by helping learners to manage and monitor their learning. Metacognitive strategies are essential in successful language learning for three reasons.

Firstly, language learners often feel overwhelmed by the amount they have to learn. This can make them lose confidence or motivation. However by using a metacognitive strategy such as planning, students can prioritise their needs and focus on the most important things first. This gives students a sense of control and, by allowing them to focus on one thing at a time, increases their chances of success.

The second benefit of metacognitive strategies is that they allow learners to individualise their learning. For example, one important metacognitive strategy is goal setting. When learners analyse their needs and set goals, they find it easier to identify tasks which will help them achieve their goals. Learners who set and achieve their own goals are more motivated.

The third reason why metacognitive strategies are important is because they develop students' independence. Many language students do a lot of practice but depend on their teacher to tell them how successful they have been. By applying metacognitive strategies such as self-monitoring and self-evaluation, learners can measure for themselves the progress they have made and learn to eliminate their errors. Ultimately this speeds up the language learning process by showing students what they can do on their own.

Task 1.1

Metacognitive Strategies

Stop and think about how you are using metacognitive strategies as you read this booklet.
- How did you decide which chapter to read first?
- Have you stopped and re-read any sections?
- Why did you do that?
- What did you do when you did not understand a section of the chapter?
- How did you know that would help?

Here are two examples of common metacognitive strategies:

Planning the organisation of written or spoken language.
When your students produce a concept map or an outline before they start writing, they are using a metacognitive strategy. If they make notes while preparing a talk in the target language, this is also evidence of metacognitive activity.

Monitoring while performing a task.
Students who pay attention to their pronunciation or grammar when they are using the target language are using a metacognitive strategy. While it can be harmful to monitor too much, some monitoring is essential if learners are to notice differences between the way they use the target language and the way native speakers use it.

3. Social/Affective Strategies
    The third type of strategy is called social/affective. You and your students probably use many strategies which belong to this category already, although you may not call them by the names we use here! Social/affective strategies are things which learners do to manage their feelings or to manage their interaction with others. Some common examples of these include:

Cooperation
When students work together to solve a problem, share their resources and produce a joint response, they are using the social strategy of cooperation.

Questioning for clarification
Learners who ask questions to help them understand are using the social strategy of questioning for clarification. Since these strategies are likely to be familiar to your students, they might be good ones to talk about when you first introduce strategies – to help your students understand what you mean when you talk about "strategies".

Self-talk
The name "self-talk" refers to the way that some learners talk to themselves (either silently or very quietly) as a way of boosting their confidence and reducing their anxiety when they are in a stressful situation, for example when they have to take part in a conversation in the target language. Some people use this strategy when they have to give a speech in public – even in their first language – saying to themselves over and over "I CAN do it! I CAN do it!". The idea behind this strategy is that hearing the positive statement repeated over and over will give them confidence. Self-talk is an affective strategy.

STRATEGIES FOR LANGUAGE LEARNING

Now that we have given you some examples of the three different types of strategies, in the rest of the booklet we will show you how these strategies can be used to help learners learn effectively. Although we have presented each type of strategy separately in this chapter, these strategies overlap when students use them. In fact, combinations of strategies can be very useful in different situations. Let's imagine that you have asked your students to listen to the weather forecast on the radio (in the target language) every day. The students have told you that this task is difficult because the newsreader speaks very quickly and they often miss the forecast for their city. Which strategies would you suggest to make this task easier?

First, you could suggest they use the metacognitive strategy of "selective attention". The students could listen out for the name of the city which is mentioned just before the city where they live. This would get them ready to focus their attention on listening at the right time! They could also study the vocabulary used in weather forecasts printed in the newspaper, since this would help them recognise the vocabulary used in the radio broadcast. Rebecca Oxford calls this type of strategy "Resourcing". You could also suggest that your students tape record the weather forecast, in order to give themselves the opportunity to listen to it again. This would involve a lot of planning and organising (metacognitive strategies) – finding a tape recorder, buying a cassette tape, deciding when to record the bulletin etc. The last strategy you could suggest is self talk - an affective one: encourage them to manage their anxiety while listening to the radio by telling themselves over and over "I CAN do it". As this example shows, strategies can be combined to help students solve complex language learning problems.

In the next chapter we present four reasons for including work on strategies in your language programme.

2 Why Teach Learner Strategies?

There are five main reasons why you should consider including strategies in your language teaching. The most obvious reason is a practical one. By teaching your students about strategies, you are encouraging them to share responsibility for their learning. This makes sense because learning is done by students, not teachers. However inspirational a teacher you are, you cannot learn on behalf of your students! What you can do though is to become an expert on effective ways of learning a language, and to pass on that expertise to your students.

The other main reasons why we believe it is a good idea for language teachers to focus on strategies are because it promotes efficient and effective learning; it increases student motivation; it increases the amount of time your students actually spend using the language; and it helps students take control of their own learning. Each of these reasons is discussed in this chapter.

EFFECTIVENESS AND EFFICIENCY

The most important reason for focusing on strategies in your language programme is that students who use appropriate strategies learn more effectively. Studies have shown that effective students use strategies more frequently and know how to choose the right strategy for the right task (Ellis, 1994). Successful language students are also more aware of the strategies they use and the reasons why they use them. As a teacher, you should be trying to prepare your students for using the target language independently. If you study what effective language learners do and share this information with your students, you will help them become more efficient and successful.

Let's take the example of two students who are reading a graded reader in the target language.

The graded reader has illustrations and a glossary of new words at the back. Student A looks at the title of the story and flicks through the illustrations before he starts to read the story, so as to get an idea of what he is about to read. He notices that there is a glossary at the back of the book but decides only to look up a word if he cannot first guess its meaning, and if the word seems important in the context. Student B, on the other hand, starts reading at page one of his book without skimming the text at all, and reads every word slowly and carefully, frequently turning to the glossary to check the meaning of unfamiliar words. This happens so often that at times he loses track of the meaning of what he is reading, and has to go back to the previous page and re-read. Student A, on the other hand, has understood the gist of the story and has reinforced his knowledge of many of the words he came across.

This scenario illustrates the difference between a student whose strategies are adapted to the learning task, and one who is applying strategies which are inappropriate in the context. Strategies are not good or bad in themselves; the key is to match the strategy to the demands of the task. An important question for you as a teacher therefore is – How do I find out which strategies my students are currently using? We will discuss this question in Chapter 4. The good news is that strategies can be successfully taught to students if certain conditions are met (see Cohen, 1999; Ayaduray & Jacobs, 1997). In Chapter 5, we will discuss these conditions and a procedure for teaching strategies to your students.

Task 2.1

How do you read?

Think about the way you normally read a journal article written for teachers.
- Do you read it the same way from start to finish?
- Do you pay special attention to the abstract?
- How many times do you turn to the references?
- How has your strategy for reading articles changed over time?
- If you had to advise a new teacher on the best way to read a journal article, step by step, what would you say?

MOTIVATION

The second argument for showing students how to use strategies relates to motivation. Many students give up on language learning before they achieve the level of proficiency they were hoping for. Often their "failure" can be explained by the fact that they use inappropriate learning strategies. Unsuccessful students become demotivated, so they start putting less effort into their language learning, and experience less success, so they become disappointed. However, you can help your students break this cycle by showing them how to use strategies effectively. In this way, their motivation is likely to increase too.

Focusing on strategies allows students to experience success and boost their motivation. For example, imagine a student complains to her teacher that she has trouble memorising vocabulary. The teacher might suggest that she adopt a new strategy such as the "keyword" method, which requires the student to associate the sound of a target language word with a similar sounding word in her first language, and then make a bizarre visual association between the two words. The teacher encourages the student to try out the new strategy for a week, and then agrees to test her. Imagine the student's reaction when, a week later, she successfully recalls all 10 target words when tested. This kind of experience not only demonstrates that effective vocabulary learning is possible, but also motivates students to persist with their learning.

Some students explain their success or failure in learning by referring to 'luck' or other factors, rather than linking it to their own efforts. However, by focusing on strategies and demonstrating their positive effect on learning, you can encourage your students to see that they are responsible for the outcome of their learning. In this way, focusing on strategies can be very motivating.

INCREASING TIME-ON-TASK

The third reason for including strategies in your language programme is that it enables students to continue learning beyond the classroom. It takes a long time to acquire a high level of skill in another language. Therefore students need to spend time learning outside of class as well.

However if your students are to succeed in their out-of-class learning, they need to understand the language learning process and know how to manage it. In Chapter 1, we talked about three different types of learner strategies. Students need to understand the different roles played by the three types of strategy. This will help them know which type of strategy to choose when they are facing particular language problems.

Students who are familiar with strategies are able to continue learning beyond the classroom. They know how to make sense of input in the target language, they use a range of strategies for practising the target language, and can build their vocabulary and grammatical knowledge independently. As well as increasing the time students spend using the target language, strategies also help students identify language input and opportunities which match their needs. Therefore strategies have the potential to individualise instruction by giving students the tools to design and manage language activities which match their interests and needs.

LEARNER AUTONOMY

The final argument for including strategies in your language programme is that by learning to solve language problems for themselves, students experience the benefits of taking control of their own learning. Crabbe (1993, p. 443) identifies three arguments for promoting learner autonomy: the ideological, the psychological and the economic. The ideological argument simply states that your students have the right to decide for themselves how they will approach their language learning. Crabbe explains the psychological argument by saying that "we learn better when we are in charge of our own learning". The economic argument for learner autonomy is that few students will be able to pay for language instruction for the rest of their lives! At some point, all students need to develop the ability to manage their own learning.

A focus on learner strategies therefore, implies a shift in the model of teaching. Whereas in the past, language teachers have generally been experts in the target language, now they need to acquire a new kind of professional expertise – knowledge about learning strategies. For many language teachers this is not a new field; most can refer to their own experiences of acquiring or learning a second or other language. For others, research reports and seminar presentations offer a good way of finding out what is known about the topic. Either way, teachers who do not talk about strategies in their language classes are failing to prepare their students for using the language beyond the classroom.

3 How Do I Include Strategies?

In the previous two chapters we have looked at the rationale for teachers to focus on learner strategies and discussed the different types of strategies that learners use. The next step is to look at how to include strategies in a teaching programme. Maybe you are the teacher responsible for developing the curriculum in your school or department, or maybe you are in charge of developing materials for strategy instruction. Either way, you will probably have to make decisions that may affect your colleagues' teaching. In this chapter, we look at the best ways to go about doing this.

INTRODUCING STRATEGY INSTRUCTION: THE FIRST STEPS

Introducing a new topic like strategy instruction into a teaching programme can have an effect at many levels, including outside the classroom. It can influence the way teachers teach and assess their learners, the (types of) materials they use as well as the way learners learn.

Here are a few tips on how to be successful in introducing strategy instruction in your school or department:

1. Start Small

Below we will discuss various ways of implementing strategy instruction. As you will see, some of these are more ambitious than others. It may be best to start small, perhaps by identifying a few of your staff or colleagues who may be interested and by selecting a small range of strategies to begin with. This will give you the experience you need before undertaking larger projects.

2. Involve Colleagues

Get your colleagues involved from the early stages. You could form a strategy working group and think of

some specific goals for the group to work towards (e.g. develop a strategy instruction plan or design some lessons based on a particular strategy (see chapter 7). Have the group present its work and experiences to other teachers to get feedback and share ideas. Ask colleagues if they would like to be involved and share tasks according to interest and experience.

3. Provide Training

An important part of the preparation process is to help staff develop the necessary skills and knowledge. You could organise an introductory seminar, preferably by an experienced teacher, to encourage interest and participation. Further training could be in the form of a number of workshops built around specific areas such as those discussed in this booklet, for example "identifying students' prior knowledge and use of strategies", "dealing with student opposition to strategy
instruction", "assessing strategy use", etc.

4. Develop an Action Plan for Introducing Strategies

It is important to be clear about what you are trying to achieve, and how you plan to achieve it. One way of making sure that your strategy programme is successful is to develop a simple plan which includes a rationale for introducing strategies into your language curriculum, clear goals and a procedure for achieving them. You can make your plan as detailed as you like, for example by identifying the strategies you will teach and when. For example: "In week 6 we will cover memory strategies". You can also specify learning outcomes such as "at the end of the course/term the learners will be able to use and talk about two different strategies they use for memorizing vocabulary". We talk more about your strategy plan later in this chapter.

5. Provide good materials

It is also important that staff have access to ready-made materials which have been tried out in class. This is especially important in the beginning when your colleagues are not yet experienced in developing materials themselves. This will increase the chances of them being successful at introducing strategies to their students, and will motivate them to continue. Materials that teachers can use may be included in a materials bank which should be easily accessible to all. If your school or department has a reliable intranet, materials can be put on a shared network drive where everyone can view materials and access materials. Of course a physical folder in the staff room will often do just as well. Examples of materials to share include:

- Course outlines with a special focus on strategies.
- Lesson plans containing ideas about how to bring strategy instruction into the classroom.
- Strategy instruction materials including tasks, questionnaires, answer keys, etc.
- A shared diary where teachers can publicly record their experiences of working with strategies in the classroom.
- Background reading; information about theory and practice.
- Practical articles reporting on teachers' experiences of integrating strategies in their lessons.

THREE BASIC OPTIONS: WHICH ONE IS BEST FOR YOU?

There are three basic ways in which strategies can be taught. In this section we will call these three options: dedicated instruction, integrated instruction and adjunct instruction. Let's look at what these mean.

1. Dedicated instruction

This refers to a situation where time is made available specifically for the teaching and practice of strategies. Maybe there is a course on 'language learning strategies' or 'study skills' or something similar. At the time of instruction the focus is exclusively on the development of skills and knowledge related to the learning process.

There are advantages with this option:
- you are certain to have time for strategy instruction.
- this may also mean you have more time to develop course content and materials.
- giving it a place in the curriculum will make strategy instruction a more 'official' part of the teaching programme, so that students will probably take it more seriously.
- it may be easy for students to learn about strategies in this way as they can fully concentrate on the topic.
- it may be easier to share ideas and improve the course together with colleagues.

However, there are disadvantages with this option:
- time spent on strategy instruction may mean less time for other important areas.
- teaching strategies in isolation may be difficult as many strategies, especially metacognitive strategies (see chapter 1) such as planning and monitoring, are process-related and therefore strongly linked to actual language learning.

- for the learners this may mean that it will be difficult for them to transfer new skills and knowledge to their own language learning.
- for those students who have negative feelings about strategy instruction, an entire lesson on the topic may become boring.
- if this is your first experience with strategy instruction, designing an entire course on the topic may be daunting. It may be better to start small.

2. Integrated instruction

This is strategy instruction that forms part of a language course. This option is actually a continuum. At one end of the continuum, no specific attention is given to strategies other than in relation to actual learning problems that come up in class. At the other end, a conscious effort is made by the teacher(s) to integrate strategies as much as possible during their lessons.

There are a number of advantages with integrated strategy instruction. In fact, all the disadvantages of the dedicated option are potential advantages and vice versa. The main advantages are that:

- Integrating strategy instruction into existing courses means you probably don't have to make any changes to the curriculum.
- Students meet the strategies in context, which makes them more meaningful.
- The context is likely to be an actual learning task; therefore paying attention to the strategy is more natural and meaningful than meeting a strategy in isolation.
- Integrated instruction makes transfer to new situations more likely.
- For less experienced teachers this option is probably easier to start with.

The main disadvantages, however, are that:
- Students may not notice the strategies but instead focus only on the language.
- They may also not be able to link the various strategies to each other, or use them in a sequence (e.g. identify a language need, develop a plan, select resources, monitor progress, self-assess).
- Integrating strategies may lead to information overload and may result in students learning neither the strategies nor the language

3. Adjunct instruction

Like dedicated instruction, it focuses specifically on strategies but not as a separate course or in isolation. Usually adjunct strategy instruction takes place as part of a language course or even as a regular part of a lesson. For example, the teacher may spend a regular lesson focusing on the language and take the last 10 minutes to reflect on what has been learned and how that relates to other lessons. She may then talk about the need to plan ahead or introduce strategies for remembering what was covered in the first part of the lesson.

Adjunct instruction has some of the advantages of both integrated and dedicated instruction. The teacher may focus on the strategy quite explicitly and can return to it in a later lesson. Because the teacher focuses on a strategy covered during the preceding lesson, learners are likely to notice the strategy and remember the context. That way, some transfer may take place (although not as much as in integrated instruction). Adjunct instruction takes up less time than dedicated instruction but probably more than integrated instruction. Because of the strong link with the preceding lesson, it will probably be more difficult to share materials and lesson plans with colleagues.

Deciding which option is best for you will largely depend on your situation. If you are teaching your students full-time you will be able to allocate more time to strategy instruction, but you will still need to decide which option works best for you. If you see your students for only a couple of hours per week, then the integrated option may be the best one for you. You will also want to consider how old your students are, and how long they have been learning the language. It is easier to pay attention to language learning strategies when students have already had some experience of using the language to read or listen.

Task 3.1

Which option is best?

Look at the advantages and disadvantages of the three options and decide for yourself how these may be important in your situation. Are there any other (dis)advantages you can think of? Compare and discuss your answers with a colleague.

DEVELOPING A PLAN FOR STRATEGY INSTRUCTION

Above we mentioned how a plan can help you and your colleagues work towards the same goals. If you are working on your own as a teacher and are most interested in applying the ideas in this booklet in your own course, then you may not need to develop a complex plan. However, by reflecting on what you want to achieve and how, you are more likely to be successful.

A plan shows what you and your colleagues expect from strategy instruction. It outlines the place of strategies in the course or even in the entire school. It also shows what goals you set yourself and guides you in achieving them. Here is an example of an action plan.

Sample Action Plan

1. A statement about the role of strategy instruction in your teaching philosophy. For example:

   "We see strategy instruction as a vital way to achieve one of the main goals in this course, namely to develop in our learners the ability to work independently and to continue to learn by themselves after finishing our course".

2. A rationale for strategy instruction in your school. For example:

   "We believe strategies help learners learn more efficiently. We also believe that …"

3. Goals you want to achieve. For example, practical goals

   "At the end of this term we want to have a working group of teachers interested in strategies. We want to have developed X materials. We also want to have introduced x cognitive strategies, and x metacognitive strategies to our students."

   Or:

   "At the end of this year we want to have a good picture of our students' use of strategies and their needs. We want to…."

4. Intermediate goals, i.e. what needs to be done before your final goals can be achieved.

5. Benchmarks, i.e. what you will compare your courses with. This could be a successful course in another school that you know of. You could also use official guidelines, perhaps from your national curriculum, or from a professional organization.

   "Colleagues in the X department/school Y have been successful in using strategies to… This is the standard we want to achieve".

6. Procedures (see below)

The procedures could outline the steps you will take in introducing strategy instruction (the intermediate goals in the list above). These steps will of course depend on your situation but could include:

Step 1: identify needs; what do we need to focus on?
- explore current knowledge of staff and students
- explore how staff and students feel about strategy instruction

Step 2: set goals; what do we want to achieve?

Step 3: identify resources you have (e.g. knowledgeable staff, materials)

Step 4: choose which type of instruction (see above) suits your situation best

Step 5: make a plan for professional and materials development

Step 6: try out strategy instruction; is everything in place, does it work?

Step 7: introduce strategy instruction into your curriculum, your class, your students

Step 8: monitor instruction; how are we doing?

Step 9: revise goals and procedures; what changes do we need to make?

Task 3.2

Action Plan

Look at the action plan above. How would you complete the different parts for your school/course?

MONITORING STRATEGY INSTRUCTION: IS IT SUCCESSFUL?

Finally we come to the question of how to monitor progress. You have done the hard work and now you want to know how successful you have been. To get a true picture, you will need to include everyone involved. Below are some groups who may be involved or affected and some suggestions for ways of obtaining feedback from them.

- The students. We will look at assessing individual strategy use and development in chapter 6, but you can get general feedback about strategy instruction through questionnaires, interviews, and class discussions by asking students to tell you what they thought of the programme. This will help you get an idea not only of what students find useful, but by comparing data between groups and over time, you can also find out whether changes you have made to the programme have had an effect on this.

- Colleagues. A similar approach can be taken as with the students. In addition, you can ask colleagues for feedback and suggestions for improvement.

- Parents. If you teach in a secondary school, it can be a good idea to involve parents too. In some situations, a strong focus on certain strategies (like learning to learn by oneself) may have to be explained to parents who worry about reduced "teacher-time".

- Feedback from universities and polytechnics, and perhaps even prospective employers. Many of your students are likely to go and study or perhaps find work in a target language country. Lecturers or employers may be able to tell you whether they feel students from your course have developed some of the skills that you focused on.

- External evaluation. Some schools are regularly evaluated through external audits by government accreditation or professional bodies. You may be able to get valuable feedback from them.

- Professional organisations. By attending a conference or by joining an (online) discussion group you may be able to share experiences and get ideas and feedback from others in your country or region who are working to achieve similar goals.

Introducing strategy instruction in a school or even in a single course can be a real challenge and is a process which may take a long time. Take that time and enjoy the process. Share ideas, frustrations and solutions with colleagues. Start small and work as a team and you are most likely to be successful. Nothing builds success more than success!

4 How Do I Introduce Strategies?

In the previous chapter, we talked about introducing strategy instruction in a course or classroom. The next step is to think about how you will prepare your students for this. Even more so than with other subjects, integrating strategy instruction requires careful planning because it can lead to significant changes in teachers' and learner's roles (see chapter 3). In this chapter we look at how to manage these changes. First we look at ways of finding out what your learners' current needs and knowledge of strategies are. Next, we look at ways of introducing the concept of learner strategies for the first time. Finally, we discuss the need to take account of learners' cultural and educational backgrounds.

IDENTIFYING CURRENT KNOWLEDGE AND NEEDS

As with any new topic, it is important to find out what your students already know, and if they use this knowledge. Probably the quickest way to find out what your students know about strategies is to ask them. However, this is not as easy as it sounds, because even though they use strategies, often students don't recognise them as strategies. So the best way to ask is through examples. It is also possible that the students may have had some experience with one type of strategy but not with another. For example, they may have developed strategies for learning vocabulary but may not have spent time systematically thinking about and organising their learning. When measuring strategy knowledge you will want to be comprehensive and cover the different types of strategies we looked at in chapter 1. Here are some examples of how such questions could be framed:

You're talking with a native speaker when suddenly you realise that she did not understand what you said. What do you do?
a. I continue to speak

b. I repeat what I just said
c. I try to explain what I meant by using different words
d. I ask the person what she did not understand

You are reading a book when you meet a word that you don't know. What do you do?
a. I look the word up in a dictionary
b. I ask a native speaker
c. I try to understand what the word means by looking at the context
d. All of the above

Task 4.1

Identifying Strategies

Look at the section on different types of strategies in Chapter 1, and identify the strategies that you are most interested in. To find out if your students have difficulty with these, try to make up some questions about them with multiple choice answers like the ones above.

One questionnaire that is readily available is the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) by Rebecca Oxford (1990). This questionnaire is available on the Internet at:

http://www.professorenglish.pe.kr/Tour%20Eng/Sills.html

This questionnaire requires the student to answer 25 questions about their language learning, to calculate their score, and to draw a graph of their results. The questionnaire cannot be answered on the website but must be printed out. This is perhaps best done as an activity in class where the results can be discussed.

The disadvantage of questionnaires such as Oxford's, of course, is that the learner is given a number of possible answers to choose from. The response they choose may not be the one they would actually use. Also, students may, consciously or unconsciously, want to give a positive image of themselves and therefore not answer the questions truthfully.

Another way to find out what learners know about strategies is to ask them what they are doing when they are engaged in learning. By asking your students open questions such as:

• How are you going to remember this?
• How are you going to solve this problem?

It is possible to learn how they handle various language learning tasks and whether or not they make use of a wide range of strategies.

Another way of identifying the strategies your students use is through interviews. Karen Bond presents on her website a sample list of questions to use in a strategy interview.

http://www3.telus.net/linguisticsissues/questionnaire.html

Her interview questions relate to the learner's background and previous knowledge, language learning strategies, and feelings and motivation. There are no suggestions as to how to interpret and compare the results, but the questions are a good starting point for class discussion.

Learner diaries have also been used to explore learners' strategies. These may be used for a number of purposes and have other benefits for learners such as improvement in their writing skills. Learner diaries also have the advantage of being open-ended, allowing learners to continue making entries over time as their awareness of strategies develops.

You may find that your students use more strategies than they are aware of. This would be a good point for discussion in class. We suggest you try and identify strategies which are likely to be of immediate use to your learners.

INTRODUCING LEARNER STRATEGIES TO YOUR STUDENTS

How you introduce strategies to your students will depend on how much you will focus on strategies in class. If you want to encourage your students to take control of their learning and to give them more responsibility for their work in class, you will need to plan for a quite extensive introduction. If, on the other hand, you choose to focus on specific strategies only occasionally, then a brief introduction as part of a particular lesson may be enough.

One way of introducing strategies is to provide students with a rationale for learning about them. You could do this by presenting some of the ideas mentioned in chapter 2. Another useful approach is to introduce 'the good language learner' (see Naiman et al 1996) and show how good language learners make use of a wide range of strategies, and know when to use each one. Another motivating approach is to use actual students as role models, especially students who are studying a subject that your learners are preparing for. For example, an academic preparation course could present university students as role models, inviting them to talk about the range of strategies that they use for successful study. In schools, a student from a higher year could be asked. Students preparing to travel overseas may be interested to hear about the experiences of someone who has just returned from abroad.

> ## Task 4.2
>
> ### Linking Strategy Use with Learning Goals
>
> Think about how being able to use certain strategies (for example using clarification checks) can make it easier for your learners to reach the goals that are important to them (for example to talk to native speakers). Focus on these strategies first and use them to highlight how strategy use is linked to their goals and interests.

Presenting comments from more advanced students can also be very motivating. One of our own students, from Iran, wrote:

> *I never knew how much time I wasted learning words in the way I did! I used to write words down in a notebook and learned them by heart. Now that I use flashcards, I remember many more words and much more quickly.*

Another student, this time from France, wrote the following:

> *Looking back at how I learned when I was younger, it seems that other people always made all the decisions for me. What I studied and how I studied, even when I studied, and how much, was decided for me by someone else. Now I tend to go to courses and lessons much better prepared, knowing what I want. I learn more this way, and I learn the things that are important to me.*

Class discussions are also a good way to get your students to talk and think about learning strategies. You can find out if strategy instruction was included in their previous courses, and ask them how they think learning strategies might be helpful. One easy way to get the discussion started is to get the students to fill in a questionnaire and use their answers as a starting point.

PROVIDING HANDS-ON EXPERIENCE

Talk about strategies can easily become abstract and boring for students. For learners with little experience in this area it may therefore be best to start off by doing rather than listening. Showing learners that they already use a range of strategies (perhaps without being aware of it) and that these strategies can be helpful, is a motivating way to introduce the topic. Some ideas for initial practice include:

- Show learners a video or play a recording of two people having a conversation, and ask them to note down any strategies that they notice the speakers using. Get the learners to practise one or more of these strategies themselves.

- Ask your students to read a text in the target language and then interrupt them and ask them to tell you what they did when they came to an unfamiliar word.
- Play a video or audiotape in the target language and ask students to complete a task based on it. After checking their answer to the task, ask them what they did when the speakers used words they did not know.
- Ask learners to use a strategy out of class and report back during the next lesson. You can do this with communication strategies (for example, using confirmation checks such as 'did you mean…?'), but also with metacognitive strategies, for example by asking students to plan their English learning for the next week.
- Ask one student to give directions to another student using the target language. Ask a third student to write down any strategies the speakers use when communication breaks down.
- Give students a topic to write about in the target language, and ask them to brainstorm keywords on a piece of paper. Then ask them to work with a partner and report back on how many new ideas they thought of when working as a pair.

TAKING ACCOUNT OF DIFFERENCES IN CULTURAL AND EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUNDS

Differences in educational and cultural backgrounds make it likely that not all your students will be comfortable with the idea of strategy instruction. Some may think it takes up too much classroom time – time that they feel should be spent focusing on the target language. Others may feel uncomfortable when you try to change their preferred ways of learning. Your students may have little experience of making choices about their learning by themselves. Asking them suddenly to take control of their own learning can be quite daunting.

For these reasons, it is important to explain clearly why you focus on strategies. There are also several other ways to make sure your learners feel comfortable with the changes:

1. Introduce strategies gradually

Some types of strategies, such as communication strategies, are easier for students to adopt than others such as metacognitive strategies. Expect it to take time for your students to get used to the idea of taking control of their learning.

2. Start with what your students already know

If your students know something about certain strategies, it is a good idea to start with these. This will make it easier for them to follow.

By asking them to share their different strategies with each other, everyone can become involved.

3. Give students options

Another way to reduce learner anxiety is to give learners options. Forcing strategy use upon them is unlikely to be effective, and requiring them to take responsibility for their learning is doomed to fail. One option is to expose learners to a wide range of different strategies, encourage them to try out as many of these as possible, and give positive feedback. Of course, although it is important to be encouraging, a clear evaluation of successful strategy use is also important to remind students what they are learning, and which strategies they should continue to use. Otherwise, the learner may not feel that anything is gained from the time spent on these skills in class, or may continue to use ineffective strategies.

We conclude this chapter by encouraging you to share your experiences with colleagues and exchange ideas about how to make the process of introducing strategies successful. Don't be afraid to experiment and find out what the best approach is for you and your students. Give yourself and your students time!

5 How Do I Teach Strategies?

In the last chapter we talked about how you can prepare your students for strategy instruction. In the first part of this chapter we suggest a procedure for showing your students how to use new strategies. In the second part of the chapter we suggest some ways you can find out what your students know about strategies, and which ones they use.

OVERVIEW OF THE PROCEDURE

There are five key steps in teaching new strategies to language students:

- Raise awareness of the strategy
- Model the strategy
- Try out the strategy
- Evaluate the strategy
- Encourage transfer of the strategy to new contexts

We explain the strategy instruction procedure below in detail, using the cognitive strategy of summarising when reading as the target strategy. We have chosen this strategy because it is easy to demonstrate and should produce immediate benefits for students when they are reading a wide range of different texts.

1. Raise Awareness

The first step in teaching students a new strategy is showing them how useful it can be. One way of doing this is by relating it to a problem which it can help solve. Let us say you have decided to introduce summarising to your students. Start by asking them how they normally read long texts that are difficult to understand. After listening to what they typically do, you could explain that good readers summarise the text in their heads as they read. Tell your students that you will show them what this means. The aim of the discussion is to raise interest in the strategy and to

persuade your students that it can help them. At this stage it is also important to name the strategy and explain what it involves. The strategy of summarising is usually described as "saying or writing the main idea".

One important decision you need to make early on is what terminology you will use to describe the strategies that you introduce to your students. Your decision will depend on the age of your students, their level of proficiency in the target language and the number of times that you intend to refer to that strategy, amongst other things. Some teachers like to ask their students to name the strategies for themselves. This can make the strategies more accessible and adds an element of fun. You may also want to consider using the students' first language to talk about the strategies, if that is an option for you. If this makes it easier for the students to understand the purpose and benefits of the strategies, then it is definitely a good idea.

A number of different tasks can be used to raise students' awareness of strategies. While discussion is usually the most popular option, you can also ask students to interview each other about their experience with strategies, invite experienced language students to talk about their strategy use, or produce reading or listening tasks based on ideas presented in teacher guides (e.g. Chamot & O'Malley, 1994).

Task 5.1

Awareness Raising

Think about your students. What strategy will you focus on in your first strategy instruction session? Think about how soon the students will be able to use the new strategy in their learning, how easy it is to demonstrate, and how widely it can be applied in different subject areas.

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2. Model the Strategy

The next step involves showing the students how to use the strategy as you read the text together. The basic procedure you use here is a "think aloud". When you "think aloud", you say out loud what thoughts are going through your head as you use the strategy. With summarising, this helps students see, for example, how "clues" in the text help good readers distinguish between main ideas and details. Your aim in modelling the strategy is to show your students how summarising helps you build up a picture of the text in your head, and helps you understand the next section of the text. During the

think-aloud, ask yourself questions like "So what is that sentence telling me?", and answer them out loud e.g. "It's giving an example of the point made in the previous sentence." This helps your students know what you expect them to do when it is their turn to try out the strategy.

The good thing about modelling is that it helps students "see" learning processes which are normally invisible. For example, in the case of summarising, often poor readers simply don't know how to turn the words on the page into a main idea statement. However by watching you construct your summary as you read, they see for themselves how the information in the text contains meaning, and how each sentence adds to that meaning. By modelling strategies, the "secrets" of successful students can be shared with the less successful ones.

You will also need to put some time into choosing an appropriate text to use for the strategy instruction session. You want to be able to model the strategy on the text without the students spending too much time making sense of it. They will then continue reading the same text when it is their turn to try out the strategy.

Task 5.2

Think Aloud

Practise doing a "think aloud" with the paragraph you have just read. First re-read the paragraph. Then, stop and ask yourself out loud "What was that paragraph all about?" What was the main idea that it discussed? How did it explain that idea? What kinds of details did it include? How would I finish the sentence – "This paragraph explains how …"

1. Try out the Strategy

Now it is time for the students to try out the strategy for themselves. During this stage, they need to be able to get help at any stage, and to receive feedback on what they are doing. This might mean that you want to ask a colleague to help out in your classroom to share the load. Their first experience of using the strategy must be successful. Design the activity so that your students begin using the strategy gradually. For example, after modelling the strategy to the whole class for several paragraphs of text, you could ask for a volunteer to produce a summary of the next section of text. As a class, you could then listen to the volunteer's summary, and ask questions about how the produced it. Next, you could ask the students to work in groups,

taking turns to try out the summary strategy on a paragraph of text each.

When you introduce a strategy for the first time, make sure that each student gets plenty of practice using it. This has implications for timing. Students need to finish the strategy session feeling confident that they know how, when and why to use the strategy. You can encourage extra practice by giving students "take-home" tasks. Ideally, strategies should become part of normal class discussion.

2. Evaluate the Strategy

The fourth step in the instruction procedure is the most important one. After introducing a new strategy to your students, you need to ask them how useful they found it, and how easy it was for them to use. Encourage your students to report honestly on their experience, and don't force them to keep using any strategy they find unhelpful. Some strategies will be more helpful to some students than others. Therefore you need to present a wide range of strategies and also ask students to share their own successful strategies. This will mean that your strategy programme has something to offer everyone.

One of the goals of the evaluation stage is to find out what difficulties your students experienced when they were using the strategy, and to provide help. Often students follow the wrong steps in using the new strategy at first, or find that it is too difficult to use on their own. This is normal. Therefore you need to plan additional opportunities for your students to try out each new strategy. If you provide enough strategy practice and the right kind of support, your students will gradually become more efficient and confident at using the new strategies.

Task 5.3

Evaluating the Strategy

What is the best way of getting your students to evaluate the new strategies you present? Will they be more honest if they can talk in groups first and then report back? Will the discussion be better if they have time to think or write some comments first? Brainstorm a list of possible methods and then rank them in terms of appropriateness.

5. Encourage Transfer of the Strategy to New Contexts

If you want your students to become confident at using particular strategies, you need to encourage them to use them in new situations. In order for students to do this, they need two things: firstly, the chance to reflect on the value of strategies in learning, and secondly - opportunities to use the new strategy.

A key element of successful strategy instruction is a continued focus over time. Students cannot be expected to start using new strategies after meeting them only once. Therefore it is better to introduce a small number of strategies to your students and provide regular practice opportunities with them, than to introduce a larger number of strategies in one session without providing follow-up practice.

If your students are successful when they try new strategies, this will motivate them to use those strategies again in the future. But this should not be left to chance. You need to develop a plan which identifies which strategies you will introduce, and how and when you will provide further practice with each one.

However, in addition to ongoing opportunities to use their new strategies, students also need the chance to develop their knowledge about strategies. Students can only transfer learning to new contexts if they understand and can manage their learning. You can help learners gain control of their learning by providing practice opportunities. But if students are to understand the strategies they use, you need to create opportunities for them to develop their understanding. One good way of doing this is to ask your students to write in a journal what they know about strategies, and which ones they find most useful. Another simple way of getting students thinking about strategies is to ask them to design posters or cartoons to "advertise" their favourite strategies. They can then be asked to "sell" their strategy to their classmates.

ASSESSING STRATEGY KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS

Once you have begun introducing new strategies to your students, it is a good idea to spend some time regularly checking what your students know and can do. It is possible that your students' knowledge and skills may develop at different rates; in other words, they may be able to explain quite well what a particular strategy is, but not be able to use it. Therefore, you may have to use different methods to get a good picture of what your students know and can do.

In the previous section we mentioned several ways of obtaining information about students' use of strategies, such as keeping a journal, interviewing each other and discussing strategies. In chapter

4 we looked at questionnaires and interviews as ways of finding out what your students already know about strategies. These methods can also be used to find out what your students have learned about strategies. Each of these methods will give you a different type of information. Here are some points to consider:

- Questionnaires may tell you what students know about strategies and how they *think* they use them, but they may not tell you much about what your students actually do! Be aware that questionnaires are generally easy to administer but may take a long time to develop.

- Interviews can give you very useful information about *why* students use or don't use strategies. But, interviews can take a long time to conduct and even more time to analyse, especially if you want to transcribe them.

- Discussions are an easy, informal alternative to interviews and often form part of your normal classroom activities. However, you will probably not obtain much information about individual students from a discussion. Discussions are more useful for getting a general idea of how the class is finding the strategy work.

- Observations can give you a good idea of which strategies students use, especially in tasks which involve communication. Observations can also show you how successfully a particular strategy was used. However, observations can be very time-consuming and are less useful at providing information on cognitive strategies such as inferencing which occur inside the student's head!

- Think-aloud tasks, where the learner verbalises what (s)he is doing, can give a lot of information about how a learner approaches a task and what strategies (s)he uses. However, a think-aloud task can be time-consuming, and is probably not a very natural thing to ask students to do.

- Finally, you can use journals or logs. Many teachers use these as part of classroom teaching; they can be a great source for reflection, motivation, and discussion. They can also be used to record strategy use. Below we discuss this further.

There are many other ways in which strategies have been assessed by researchers, such as with the help of computer programmes and by doing extensive analyses of learning behaviour. However these methods are not likely to be of great relevance to busy teachers.

If you decide to use a strategies journal or log with your students, you can organise it in many different ways. Students probably need to be aware of the different types of strategies (metacognitive, cognitive and social/affective), so you could suggest that they have different sections in their journal for strategies of each type - using whatever names they choose. You could also ask your students to keep a record of the different tasks they use particular strategies for, and to evaluate the effectiveness of the strategy for doing that task. Also get them to write about their difficulties. By using a journal like this, students can gradually increase their knowledge of specific strategies.

Task 5.4

Which method?

Look at the list of methods (above) for assessing strategies. What do you want to find out about your students? Do you want to find out what they know about strategies or which strategies they can use ? Or do you want to find out why they use some strategies and not others? Also look at the practical points noted about each method. Which method would suit you best?

This chapter has presented a five-step procedure for introducing strategies to your students. A focus on strategies emphasises the process of learning and using the language more than the outcome of individual tasks. This emphasis should help focus students' attention on how they can find the best "match" between strategies and language tasks. In the final chapter, we discuss materials which can be used for teaching strategies.

6 What Materials Can I Use?

This last chapter of the booklet looks at materials you can use for strategy instruction. We start with materials that may be available in your school or institution and how you can evaluate them. You may find that materials are only partly useful or need to be adapted in some way. We also look at how to identify what improvements need to be made and how to make them. Finally, we look at how to create your own materials as a satisfying way of building up highly relevant resources.

EVALUATING RESOURCES

Throughout this booklet we have suggested a number of online resources (such as the strategy questionnaires in chapter 3) as well as books (see McDonough & Shaw, 1993) and articles you can follow up. Some of these contain great ideas for and examples of successful materials for strategy instruction. However, even these materials may not be entirely suitable for your students or the topics you want to cover. Also, you may prefer to make use of resources that are already available in your school, for financial reasons or simply to save time. Of course you will want to make sure that the resources you use are relevant, useful, and practical. Many of the things you look for in strategy instruction materials are similar to what you would look for in any teaching materials with a few extra points to take into account.

Relevance
The first question to ask is whether the materials you have available are relevant to:
- your students' interests and needs
- the topic you are focusing on
- the course/curriculum

As for the first point, some questions you may want to ask include:
- Are the materials right for your students' language level?
- How about their developmental level? When teaching children or young adults, you may need to introduce topics such as decision-making in the language learning process more gradually than when you are working with adults.
- Are the materials (topic, types of tasks) interesting for your students?

Obviously, the materials also need to be relevant to the subjects covered in the course at that time. If your focus is on communication strategies then that is what the materials need to help the students develop. Be specific; when talking about communication strategies do you mean strategies for conversation or discussion? Which are the materials for?

The materials also need to be appropriate for you! If, for example, you (or your students) are not comfortable with open (unstructured) activities, then this is something to consider. Think about how you would feel doing the task or activity that you are asking your students to do. Would you be comfortable if there was no clear answer to a task? If it involved talking to strangers?

Usefulness

The materials also need to contribute to your goals. It is not always easy to decide how well materials do this. You may have to try out the materials first to see how effective they are. Do the materials provide clear instructions, good examples, plenty of exercises? Will the materials be a useful tool for you to work with?

Practicality

The materials have to be relevant and useful, but also practical and efficient. For example when working on communication strategies in a foreign language situation, it will probably not be possible to use activities where your students interview native speakers. Similarly, tasks that ask learners to look up information on the internet or send emails are not practical if no (reliable) computers are available in the school.

If a resource is effective, it means that it is useful in reaching your goals. If it is efficient, it means that it helps you reach those goals quickly. This distinction is important because materials that help your students develop the skills you want them to acquire but take a year to complete may be successful, but you would probably not want to use them.

> ## Task 6.1
>
> ### Choosing Suitable Materials
>
> Think of a strategies-related goal that you want to achieve with a particular class. Now, take a book or tape or other resource that you have in your school and ask yourself how relevant, useful and practical it is for reaching that goal.

ADAPTING RESOURCES

You may find that the resources in your school are not ideal. It could be that they:

- don't explicitly focus on strategies
- focus on a limited range of strategies
- are only partly relevant, useful, or practical

If this is the case, then it may be possible to try and adapt them to make them more suitable. This can be done, for example, through adding, rewriting, deleting, simplifying, or re-ordering parts of the content. There are advantages to this:

- You are likely to make the resources more suitable for your (students') needs
- It is often easier to rewrite existing materials than write entirely new ones
- You may have a course book that you have to use. In that case adaptation is your only option.

Some of the disadvantages of adapting materials include:

- Adapting materials can be quite time-consuming
- There may be practical issues such as copyrights to consider

If you decide you want to try your hand at adapting materials, first decide what it is you want to improve. If the materials do not explicitly focus on strategies, find out if they do so implicitly. In other words, do the materials encourage learners to use or practise strategies without mentioning this? For example, you may find that learners are given a choice as to what to learn next or how. You can focus learners' attention on this and ask them why they think they were given a choice.

It can also be that materials simply do not seem to pay attention to the strategic aspects of learning. However, you may still find that the resource is useful because it contains good exercises or useful explanations. You can then add parts where necessary. This option

is probably most suitable when strategy instruction takes place in an integrated way (see Chapter 3). Sometimes re-ordering parts of a book can make it fit in better with your teaching or the curriculum. Other options include deleting parts that you don't like or simplifying authentic materials or materials that are too advanced for your students.

The way in which you go about adapting materials depends on what type of strategies you want to instruct your students in. With metacognitive strategies, there are several options:

- Chapter beginnings and endings can be added that highlight what is/has been covered in the chapter and how it fits into the programme.
- The purpose of individual parts (exercises, instructions) can be made explicit (e.g. 'this exercise will help you to…', 'This paragraph has shown you…').
- Insofar as this kind of commentary is missing, you can add opportunities for reflection, monitoring and assessment (e.g. 'Think about what you have learned in this chapter. How will you be able to use/practise this?' Or: 'You have now completed the chapter on … How will you know if you have improved this skill?').
- As a teacher you often choose from the materials what you think is most suitable for use in class. You can ask your students to do the same, of course with your help.
- You can supplement, rather than adapt materials by having your students use a learner diary or keep a journal of some sort.

Finally, the adjunct strategy instruction option (see Chapter 3) will give you a chance to add the parts you found missing before or after (or both) using the materials.

Cognitive strategies can be introduced as part of the materials. For example, exercises can be presented in such a way that the suggested steps for completing the task mirror common cognitive strategies. For example, the cognitive strategy of "resourcing" can be highlighted in a reading task simply by stating in the instructions that students should use any target language reference materials they can find (dictionaries, textbooks, target language experts, etc.) to help them understand the text.

To highlight a social strategy, you can ask students to complete an activity such as a dictation by themselves first, and then ask them to consult with a partner in order to produce a joint version of the dictation. Finally, when you distribute the dictation text to them, ask them to compare their joint mark, and the one they produced when they were working individually. An activity like this can show students how working cooperatively is a powerful social strategy.

> ## Task 6.2
>
> ### Adapting Materials
>
> Look at some of the materials you use in class and identify 3 strategies that you feel are either missing or not adequately covered. Look at the tips above. How would you try to adapt the materials and incorporate the strategies?

CREATING RESOURCES

Sometimes doing all of the above would take too much time. It may also be that you do not have to make use of pre-selected course materials. In that case, if what you are looking for is not available in the materials you can get (or that are affordable), creating your own materials can be a good and very satisfying solution. There are, however, both advantages as well as disadvantages to this. The advantages of creating your own resources include:

- Your materials are likely to be relevant, since you decide on the level, topic, content, etc.
- You are able to ensure that your materials are culturally appropriate.
- Creating materials can be very satisfying, and when done with colleagues, can help create a team spirit.
- You will own copyright to your resources and you can use them and share them as you please, including on the internet.
- Although there will be costs involved (e.g. your time, recording equipment, photocopying), it is possible to make resources much more cheaply than when buying commercial materials.

The disadvantages of creating your own resources include:
- Producing materials can take a lot of time
- Producing materials is difficult and sometimes commercial resources are simply better
- Producing audio and video resources can be difficult and expensive to do well
- Developing computer resources requires special skills and expensive equipment

Materials development is a huge topic and we don't have the space to go into it in great detail here. There is a reference at the end of the chapter if you want to learn more about this subject. Here are some general guidelines:

1. Work as a Team
Try to develop materials as a team. It is likely that you will not be the only teacher to use the new resources. The best way to make sure people are happy with them and will use them is by getting them involved.

2. Identify Experts
Look out for someone in your team with more experience in materials development or special skills. If you find someone like that, you could ask him/her to lead the team. Different members of your team may have different strengths. Find out what everyone's interests and expertise are and have people work on different areas.

3. Establish Goals
Make sure everyone is working towards similar goals. In developing materials for strategy instruction, this is particularly important. In chapter 3 we talked about introducing the idea of strategy instruction to other teachers as well as developing an action plan to guide strategy instruction and implementation. A good starting point may be to develop this first, as a team, before starting to actually design materials.

4. Start small
This is the same advice as we gave in chapter 3. It is better to start with a few exercises than to rewrite all your materials. See what works and how much time is involved. Decide where your efforts should go first.

5. Expect setbacks
Expect difficulties and treat them as learning experiences and challenges to overcome. Every group is likely to experience some problems. Your materials may not work at first. Your students may not like them or they may be too difficult. Try again! Most professional materials writers produce many drafts before being happy with the final version.

There are many different reasons why people don't like the materials they work with, and there are many ways of overcoming these problems. We have looked at some of these, but the most important advice is to keep looking critically at the materials in your class. By doing this you can remind yourself of what you are looking for in good teaching materials and therefore in your own teaching. Evaluating materials is one way of keeping your own teaching standards high!

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