

Chapter 3:

TEACHING LEARNING STRATEGIES

After reading this chapter you should be able to:

- Write a learning strategy lesson using the CALLA framework
- Introduce and review a learning strategy with your students.

Now that you have prepared students for learning strategies instruction by helping them reflect on the learning strategies they currently use and by introducing them to strategic thinking, your students are ready for explicit instruction in learning strategies.



How Do I Begin Strategies Instruction?

Many students are not accustomed to focusing on how they learn. If they have not already experienced strategies instruction, most of their educational experience has focused on *what* they learn, not *how*. The scope and sequence in Chapter 4 can be used as a general guideline to help you determine strategies that are appropriate for students' grade and language level; yet, it should be used only as a general guideline. In determining strategies to introduce, the most important factor is your curriculum—the content and language you teach. Referring to the curriculum enables you to select strategies that will help students learn the necessary content, language concepts and skills.

The first step in strategies instruction is to draw up a plan based on the following three factors: the scope and sequence, the content, and the curriculum. Your plan may include teaching just two or three new strategies in a semester. This is sufficient, as you will want to allow time for review and practice. Although the plan may change as you progress, having an outline of the strategies that matches students' cognitive level, content tasks and language skills prepares you for the job.

What Procedure Should I Use to Teach Strategies?

The goal of learning strategies instruction is for students to become independent learners with the ability to use strategies appropriately in a variety of contexts. In the beginning, however, learning when, how, and in what contexts to use particular strategies or groups of strategies requires direction and guidance from you, the teacher. You will find it helpful to use a framework such as the Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach (CALLA) to explicitly teach learning strategies (Chamot et al., 1999). **CALLA** is a language and content learning approach that specifically incorporates learning strategies instruction, and thus it is appropriate for immersion settings.

CALLA involves **5 phases** of instruction:

- (1) Preparation
- (2) Presentation
- (3) Practice
- (4) Self-Evaluation
- (5) Expansion

You most likely already employ these or similar steps as you teach. Below, we outline how you can use these five phases of instruction to integrate learning strategies instruction into your existing lesson plans.

(1) Preparation

When you prepare students for a lesson, you do so by activating their background knowledge of the concept you will present. In the preparation phase of a lesson that includes learning strategies, you want to activate their background knowledge of the strategies they already use to help them complete a specific task. For example, if you are introducing the strategy *Summarize* in a reading comprehension activity (a useful strategy to check comprehension), you might want to ask students what they do to make sure they understand what is happening when they read a story. Students can share their strategies with a partner or small group, then with the whole class as you make a list of all the strategies students identified. You can also share your own strategies for the task.

(2) Presentation

In the presentation phase of a lesson, you introduce the new concept or language skill. In a lesson that includes specific instruction in learning strategies, you also introduce the new strategy. The most effective learning strategies lessons introduce just one or at most two strategies. To present the strategy, you want to embed it in the context of the content you are teaching, but you also explicitly teach the strategy. To do this, you will want to:

- (a) **Name** the strategy
- (b) **Explain** how to use it
- (c) **Tell when** to use it
- (d) **Model** it
- (e) **Explain** its importance.

These steps are discussed below.

(a) Name the strategy

Give the strategy a name and encourage students to use that name when referring to it, for example, “This strategy is called *Make Inferences*.” Knowing a strategy's name enables students to carry on discussions about strategy use and to differentiate between strategies. You will want to select an age-appropriate, target language equivalent for *Make Inferences*. For example, a third grade class might use the name *Advina* in Spanish or *Deviner* in French; on the other hand, a fifth grade class might call the same strategy *Suponer que* in Spanish or *Faire hypothèses* in French. You can provide the name for the strategy or you can have students help you determine it. In Appendix I you will find Learning Strategies Inventories in several languages. By naming the strategy, and perhaps designating it with a gesture or illustration, students will have more opportunities to understand and remember the strategy.

Teaching Tip

Name each learning strategy in the target language, and explain to students when, how, and why to use each strategy.

(b) Explain how to use the strategy

Tell students what the strategy means and how to use it. For example: “This strategy is called *Make Inferences*. *Make Inferences* can help us figure out the meaning of a story by using clues such as the content, pictures or specific words in the story. If you do not know what a word means, try to read other sentences to figure it out.”

(c) Tell students when to use a particular strategy

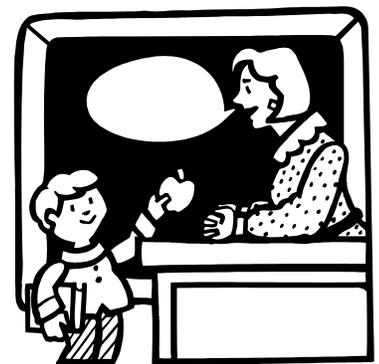
Make it clear to students what situations call for the strategy’s use. For example, you can explain to students that *Make Inferences* is an appropriate strategy to use when they do not understand every word they hear or read; they can use what they do understand to help them figure out the rest. If you have emphasized in your explanations one skill, like reading, make sure to emphasize that the strategy can be used with other skills as well, such as listening or writing.

(d) Model the strategy

If students are learning to *Make Inferences* when reading a story, then you can model the strategy on a part of the story. When reading aloud, you can stop where a point is unclear and think aloud while trying to figure out the meanings of words or phrases from the context. This technique, called a “think-aloud,” serves the dual purposes of modeling the strategy and making learning strategies instruction explicit. For older students, you can ask them to model thinking aloud while doing a task. For an example of a think-aloud, see Appendix H.

(e) Explain the importance of the strategy

Point out to students how they benefit from using the strategy: “As I listen to this story, there are parts that I do not understand. I can understand better by making inferences.”



(3) Practice

Once you have explicitly taught a particular strategy, students should have the opportunity to practice using the strategy. The content and language skills you are teaching serve as the material students use to practice the strategy. For example, in their science lesson, students may read a text about the life cycle of frogs. In the practice phase, they use the strategy *Make Inferences* while studying the text to complete their assignment. When creating or selecting material for the practice phase of a lesson that includes learning strategies instruction, you must think carefully about your students' abilities. The level of the tasks and material should be slightly above what the students can do independently. If the class contains students at varied levels of ability, then you might design different types of tasks for the practice phase to accommodate these differing ability levels.

Success with learning strategies depends upon whether students find them useful. If the chosen practice material is too easy, they might not see the need for the learning strategy—they can succeed without it. If the material is too difficult, then even with the learning strategy the students might not succeed at the task and might perceive the strategy as unhelpful.

Additional components of the practice phase include coaching and teacher feedback. After introducing students to new strategies, provide them with additional opportunities to practice those they already know. While introducing new strategies, coach students with reminders to use previously learned ones. You should continue to provide practice opportunities and encourage students to use strategies over time; nonetheless, you may gradually eliminate specific reminders, since the expectation is for students to develop independence in strategy use. In the early stages, students also need feedback about how well they are applying a strategy. Feedback should be specific. It should restate the strategy the student used and how it was used. You might say: “I liked the way you used *Make Inferences* to figure out the meaning of that word. You used the words after the comma to figure out that here ‘fuego’ must mean ‘passion.’”

(4) Evaluation

The evaluation phase of the CALLA instructional framework focuses on student self-evaluation of the effectiveness of the strategies they use in accomplishing specific tasks. Students need to find out which learning strategies work best for them on certain tasks and why. Through such self-evaluation, students consciously monitor those strategies they find effective and ineffective, and by so doing refine their individual repertoire of strategies. Below is a variety of methods that you can use to encourage student self-evaluation of learning strategies:

(a) Class Discussions

Teacher-led class discussions of a particular strategy's effectiveness should come immediately after students have practiced the strategy. They may include inviting students to comment on how they used an assigned strategy, whether they used additional strategies, and which strategy or combination of strategies worked best for them.

(b) Learning Strategies Checklists

Checklists consist of a series of statements such as: "I made predictions before listening to the news report. I thought about what I already knew about mountain ranges. I used *Use Selective Attention* to focus on key vocabulary words, etc." Students indicate on the checklist whether they used the strategy. A sample checklist for fourth grade student self-assessment follows.

Sample Checklist for Fourth Grade Student Self-assessment (written in target language)

Learning Strategies Task	I used these strategies.	
	Yes	No
Organize/Plan		
Make Inferences		
Make Predictions		
Use Imagery		
Use Real Objects/Role Play		
Summarize		
Use Selective Attention		
Access Information Sources		
Cooperate		

As you and your students become more familiar with strategies, you can monitor and evaluate students' strategy use on a regular basis, not just when you are explicitly teaching a strategy. Eventually you may observe students using them in their daily activities and elicit their comments about the strategies' effectiveness.

Teachers who are serious about strategies instruction are continually looking for strategy use initiated by their students. When a student is observed using a new strategy, or using a familiar strategy in a new context, teachers can direct other students to think about and evaluate its usefulness for performing the task at hand. This spontaneous evaluation illustrates to students that strategies are a natural and useful part of language learning.

(5) Expansion

In expansion, students learn to relate and transfer strategy use to other tasks, subject areas and aspects of their lives. You may initiate a brainstorming session by sharing with your class different ways you have used a particular learning strategy. The class can continue brainstorming additional contexts in which it could be useful. You may then point out how to transfer a strategy from one context to another. If students have used *Use Imagery* to help them remember the main events of a story they have listened to, you might help them expand their use of this strategy to reading a story. If they have used *Make Predictions* before reading a story, you might model how to *Make Predictions* before watching a movie. Finally, you can assign students to use a strategy in a new context for homework. The next day, students can report how they used the strategy and how well it worked.

Teaching Tip

Help students expand their strategy use by asking them to use specific strategies at home or in other classrooms.

Learning strategies are useful not only in the classroom but also in personal lives. Brainstorm with students ways they can apply strategies to tasks like learning to play the piano or to ride a bike. Model how you use strategies to help you learn a new skill or game. Such modeling will help students transfer and apply strategies to all aspects of their lives.

Learning strategies instruction is recursive. Once you *prepare* your students for learning a new strategy, *present* it to them, give them the opportunity to *practice* it, help them *evaluate* it, and provide options for *expanding* the strategy to other areas of study or their personal lives, the strategy should be recycled in later lessons. It should be re-taught and practiced until students have an intuitive sense for when, how, and why to use it.

In addition to explicitly teaching learning strategies through an instructional sequence such as that offered above, it is important to recognize and seek out occasions when learning strategies instruction can be reviewed and reinforced. This more informal approach emphasizes to students the natural link between strategies, language, and content learning. For example, when you observe a student tackling a mathematics problem in an original way, ask her about the strategies she is using and share these with the rest of the class. Students learn to use strategies independently by talking about their learning. Immerse students in the language of strategies. Seek out opportunities at all times for mini-strategies lessons and for sharing individual students' strategy use with others. In this manner your immersion instruction will include not only content and language learning, but also strategies learning.

How Do I Write a Learning Strategies Lesson?

The five phases of CALLA detailed in the previous section of this chapter are your guideline for writing a learning strategies lesson. In this section, we will walk you step-by-step through the process with an example.

Grade 5 – French – Writing an Autobiography in Language Arts

- **Decide on your content objective:** Students will be able to write two pages in French describing the basic events in their lives.
- **What learning strategy could help them meet this objective:** Organize/Plan

To teach the students how to write their autobiographies and introduce the learning strategy Organize/Plan to help them accomplish this objective, you can use the following sequence:

1. **Preparation: Activate the students’ background knowledge about the topic and the strategy.** Ask students’ about the main events of their lives. Tell them a little about yourself. Ask them to share their life stories in pairs or groups. Include questions about what happened in which order. Elicit that it is important to organize this kind of a story in order of earliest to most recent events.
2. **Presentation: Present the content of the lesson and the strategy that will help the students learn the content and/or carry out a task. (Remember this has several stages).** Tell the students you are going to ask them to write their autobiographies. Explain what an “autobiography” is and the elements of the task. You might want to include reading an autobiography or watching an autobiographical film. Then tell the students that there are strategies that can help them write their autobiographies and present the strategy. The presentation of the strategy should take a minimum of time and should always be integrated into the task and the content objectives. (This lesson plan will focus on describing teaching the strategy. During an actual lesson you focus on the content and seamlessly slip in the explicit instruction on using learning strategies and reflection on their usefulness).
 - a. **Name the strategy:** Once it is understood that it is important to organize the information, tell the students that you are teaching them a learning strategy and name it – “Organize/Plan” (in the target language) or devise a different name appropriate for your students. Write down the strategy name on your “Learning Strategies List” poster kept on the wall to refer to in later lessons.
 - b. **Explain how and when to use the strategy:** “You can use Organize/Plan to help you organize stories or anything else with a lot of parts that need to be in order.”

- c. **Model the strategy:** Retell some main events in your life and write them down in order on the board. Tell the students you are using Organize/Plan to organize your autobiography.
 - d. **Point out the importance of the strategy:** Start to tell your autobiography out of order, ask if it makes sense, ask students what this tells us. The answer: that planning and organizing are important.
3. **Practice: During the Practice phase, the students have the opportunity to carry out the content-based task using the learning strategy to help them accomplish it.** Ask the students to start working on their autobiographies. Ask them what they will do first. Elicit that they should plan/organize their information. You can ask how they can do this. Elicit writing down an outline before starting (or any other method that is appropriate). Continue helping students to write out outlines/plans for their autobiographies and by helping them write the autobiographies.
4. **Evaluation: Evaluate the students' learning of the content and the effectiveness of the strategy. During this phase, the teacher and the students evaluate how well they accomplished the objective and also how useful (or not) they found the learning strategy.** To evaluate the autobiographies you may ask students to evaluate their own work using a rubric. You will probably want to read the papers and evaluate them yourself. Perhaps using the same rubric, you may ask students to share autobiographies and give each other feedback. Part of the evaluation would focus on the organization of the autobiography and whether it leads to clarity. As with all writing tasks, it is a good idea to allow students to rewrite after receiving feedback. To evaluate the strategy use, you can ask students how useful it was to organize their ideas before writing, and whether their method of organization was efficient (writing a list, a summary, etc.). Would they use it again?
5. **Expansion: In this phase the teacher helps students identify other situations and tasks where they could use the learning strategy.** Give examples and ask students for examples of other situations (in and out of the classroom) where planning and organizing could help them.