# Metacognition: an overview of its uses in language-learning

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## 0. Introduction

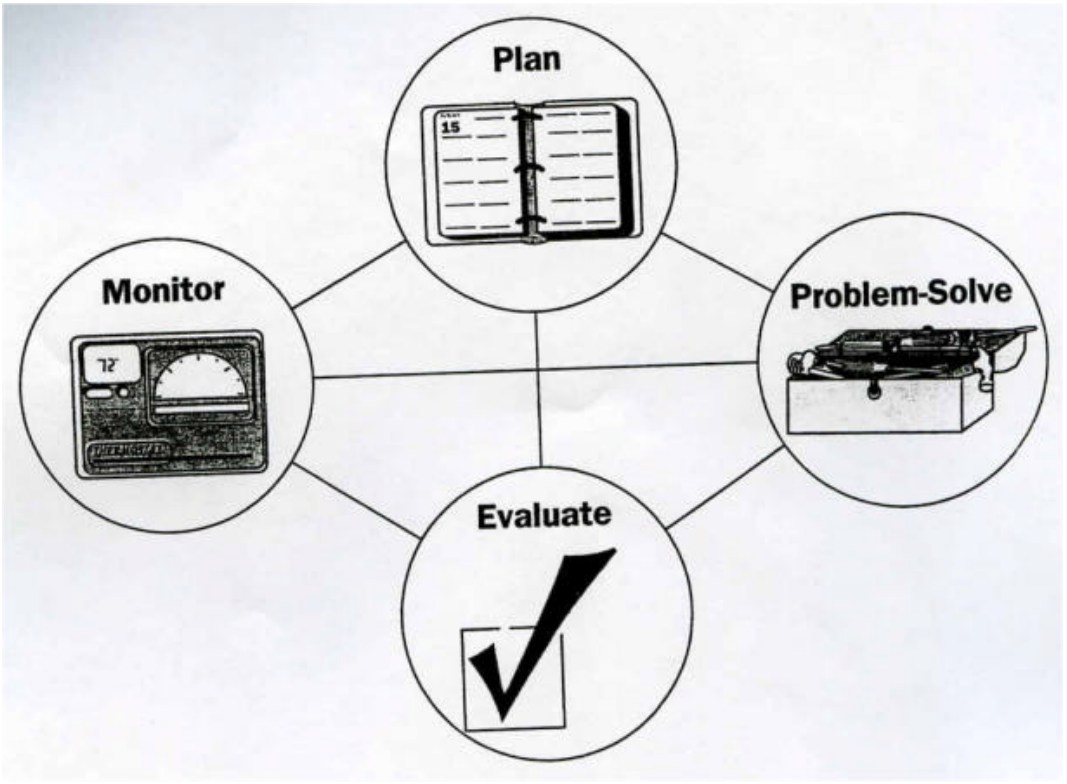
### 0.1 Details

- For those who don't know me, I work mainly with teachers who teach primary and secondary curricular subjects through the medium of English (CLIL). I do that in multicultural schools in the UK, in CLIL sections and bilingual schools in Europe and in English-medium education in Africa.
- However, today I'm talking about language learning in general, rather than CLIL. I'm going to be talking about metacognition in language learning, which is a topic about which I know something, but by no means everything. I'm sure there are a lot of you here who know more.
- A word about copies: I can send you anything which is word-processed (including the text of this presentation): my email address is above.
- Where separate OHPs are referred to, look for the relevant item in the accompanying list of OHPs which I am sending to Virgilio Marrone.
- On page 2 you can see what I want to cover. I'm not going to go into these topics in any depth. I'm just going to show you what the territory looks like.

## 1 What is Metacognition?

- Metacognition is knowing what you know; Metacognitive strategies are strategies for acting on what you know – i.e. directing, improving, increasing etc what you know.
- Very often, metacognitive strategies comprise a few major categories. This is how Chamot et al (1999) see them **(OHP Chamot et al 1).**

## Metacognitive Model of Strategic Learning




- If we ask what kinds of strategies might be called metacognitive in language learning, we might look at Oxford (1990) or at Chamot and O'Malley (1994) **(OHP Oxford 1) (OHP Chamot & O'Malley)**

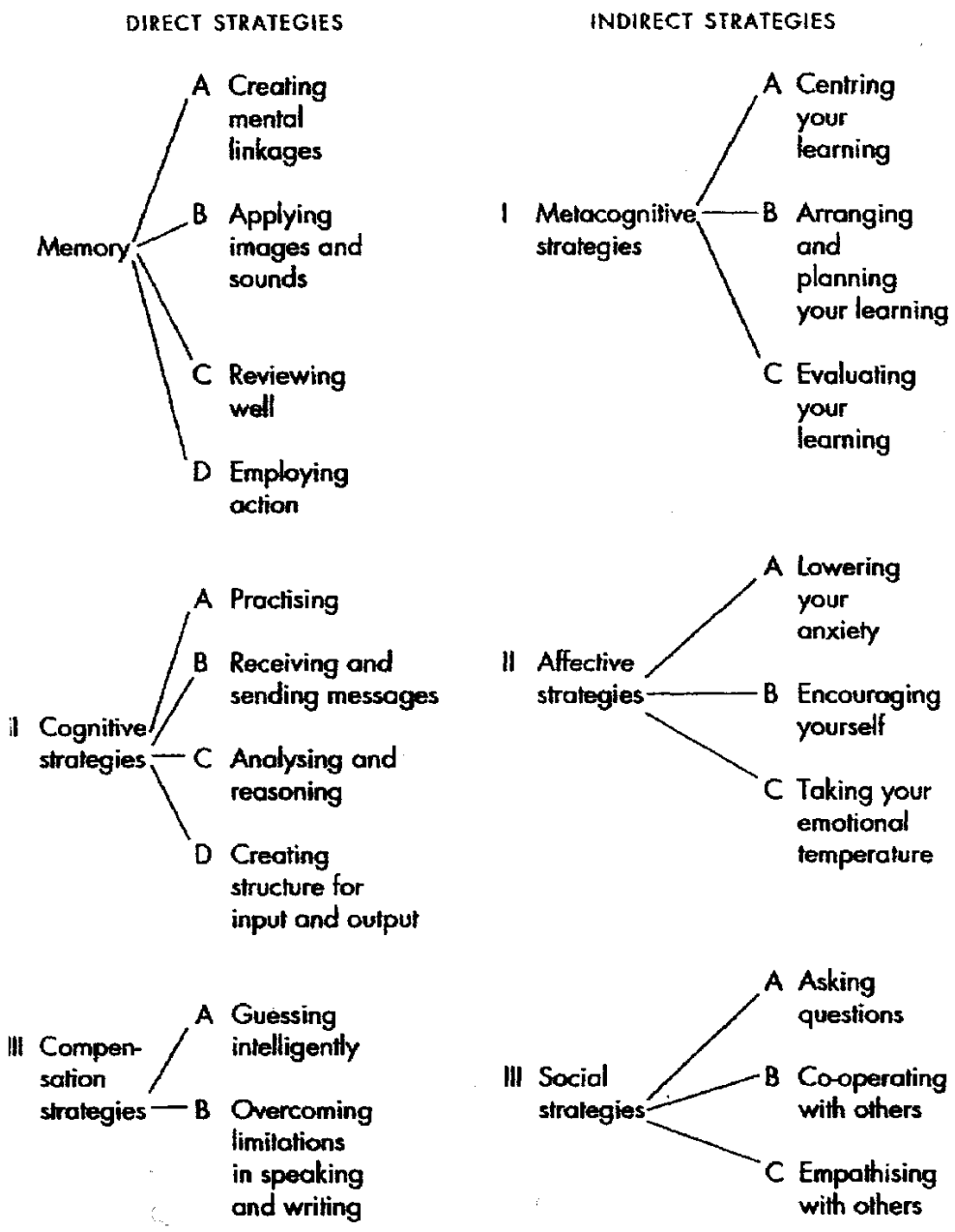



**Figure 23** *Diagram of the strategy system showing two classes, six groups and 19 sets (Oxford 1990:17)*

**Table 4.1**
**LEARNING STRATEGIES IN THE CLASSROOM**

## Metacognitive Strategies

| STRATEGY NAME | STRATEGY DESCRIPTION | STRATEGY DEFINITION |
|---|---|---|
| **Planning** | | |
| Advance Organization | Preview<br>Skim<br>Gist | Previewing the main ideas and concepts of a text; identifying the organizing principle. |
| Organizational Planning | Plan what to do | Planning how to accomplish the learning task; planning the parts and sequence of ideas to express. |
| Selective Attention | Listen or read selectively<br>Scan<br>Find specific information | Attending to key words, phrases, ideas, linguistic markers, types of information. |
| Self-management | Plan when, where, and how to study | Seeking or arranging the conditions that help one learn. |
| **Monitoring** | | |
| Monitoring Comprehension | Think while listening<br>Think while reading | Checking one's comprehension during listening or reading. |
| Monitoring Production | Think while speaking<br>Think while writing | Checking one's oral or written production while it is taking place. |
| **Evaluating** | | |
| Self-assessment | Check back<br>Keep a learning log<br>Reflect on what you learned | Judging how well one has accomplished a learning task. |

## Cognitive Strategies

| STRATEGY NAME | STRATEGY DESCRIPTION | STRATEGY DEFINITION |
|---|---|---|
| Resourcing | Use reference materials | Using reference materials such as dictionaries, encyclopedias, or textbooks. |
| Grouping | Classify<br>Construct graphic organizers | Classifying words, terminology, quantities, or concepts according to their attributes. |
| Note-taking | Take notes on idea maps, T-lists, etc. | Writing down key words and concepts in abbreviated verbal, graphic, or numerical form. |
| Elaboration of Prior Knowledge | Use what you know<br>Use background knowledge<br>Make analogies | Relating new to known information and making personal associations. |

**Table 4.1 (continued)**

**Cognitive Strategies (continued)**

| STRATEGY NAME | STRATEGY DESCRIPTION | STRATEGY DEFINITION |
|---|---|---|
| Summarizing | Say or write the main idea | Making a mental, oral, or written summary of information gained from listening or reading. |
| Deduction/Induction | Use a rule/Make a rule | Applying or figuring out rules to understand a concept or complete a learning task. |
| Imagery | Visualize<br>Make a picture | Using mental or real pictures to learn new information or solve a problem. |
| Auditory Representation | Use your mental tape recorder<br>Hear it again | Replaying mentally a word, phrase, or piece of information. |
| Making Inferences | Use context clues<br>Guess from context<br>Predict | Using information in the text to guess meanings of new items or predict upcoming information. |

**Social / Affective Strategies**

| STRATEGY NAME | STRATEGY DESCRIPTION | STRATEGY DEFINITION |
|---|---|---|
| Questioning for Clarification | Ask questions | Getting additional explanation or verification from a teacher or other expert. |
| Cooperation | Cooperate<br>Work with classmates<br>Coach each other | Working with peers to complete a task, pool information, solve a problem, get feedback. |
| Self-Talk | Think positive! | Reducing anxiety by improving one's sense of competence. |

- So different people have different views; it's often good to think about it, read about it, teach it and gradually make your *own* categories.
- We talk about cognitive strategies and metacognitive strategies. It's sometimes difficult to distinguish between them. Here are some examples of cognitive strategies from Chamot et al (1999) which can also function as metacognitive strategies.
  **(OHP Chamot et al 2)**

**FIGURE 2.2**

## Learning Strategies

| STRATEGY | DEFINITION | OTHER POSSIBLE TERMS | METACOGNITIVE PROCESSES |
|---|---|---|---|
| Set Goals | Develop personal objectives; Identify the purpose of the task | Determine destination, Establish purpose, Plan objectives | Planning |
| Directed Attention | Decide in advance to focus on particular tasks and ignore distractions | Pay attention | Planning, Monitoring, Problem-Solving, Evaluating |
| Activate Background Knowledge | Think about and use what you already know to help you do the task | Use what you know, Elaborate on prior knowledge | Planning, Monitoring, Problem-Solving, Evaluating |
| Predict | Anticipate information to prepare and give direction for the task | Anticipate, Guess outcome | Planning |
| Organizational Planning | Plan the task and content sequence | Outline, Brainstorm, Priority list | Planning |
| Self-Management | Arrange for conditions that help you learn | Know yourself, Plan how to study | Planning |
| Ask If It Makes Sense | Check understanding and production to keep track of progress and identify problems | Monitor comprehension and production, Self-monitor | Monitoring |
| Selectively Attend | Focus on key words, phrases, and ideas | Scan, Find specific information | Planning, Monitoring |
| Deduction/ Induction | Consciously apply learned or self-developed rules | Use a rule, Make a rule | Monitoring |

**Overview**

**1. What is metacognition?**
**2. What fields is metacognition related to?**

- Learning styles
- Learning to learn
- Learner autonomy
- Learning strategies
- Learning and culture
- Assessment (especially portfolio assessment)

**3. The language-learning curriculum**

- Metacognitive skills: in general and in Foreign language learning

- Cognitive skills in general and in Foreign language learning

**4. Learners**

- Finding out about learners
- Attitudes and motivations

**5. Teaching learning strategies**

**5.1 Cognitive strategies**

a) Presenting a strategy
b) Practising a strategy
c) Evaluating a strategy
d) Developing a metacognitive routine
e) Sustaining and improving the strategy

**5.2 Metacognitive strategies**

**6. School policy on learning to learn**

- The relation between metacognitive and cognitive strategies is complex. The way I see it is that:

  - Metacognitive strategies are specific cognitive strategies used for metacognitive purposes. Chamot et al (1999) also see it this way **(see OHP Chamot et al 2)**

- Metacognitive and cognitive strategies interact: I think learners are constantly moving from cognitive to metacognitive: engaging in a skill – monitoring it – engaging – monitoring etc. So models of metacognitive strategies tend not to be *sequential*
- We combine strategies: we combine metacognitive strategies (e.g. goal-setting and checking). We combine cognitive strategies (e.g. in note-taking: listening for signals – like 'for example' and using abbreviations – like e.g.). We combine cognitive and metacognitive strategies (for example: writing a sentence and checking that it fits into an overall plan)

- So there is no point in talking about metacognitive strategies without also talking about cognitive strategies. It's like a hamburger without the meat.
- In this presentation I'll be talking about both cognitive strategies *and* about metacognitive strategies - how you control, select, monitor and evaluate cognitive strategies).

## 2 What fields is metacognition related to?

- When you think about metacognition in school learning, you are also asking yourself *about knowledge or cognition.* If you ask a question about metacognition, e.g. '*what is it that I know I know?'* or '*what is it that I am directing, improving etc*?', you are asking about knowledge about *something*. And that something is, for example, learning, and language, and language-learning. In particular, you will find yourself talking and reading about learning generally. So looking at cognitive strategies in language learning involves you, for example with:

  - Learning styles
  - Learning to learn
  - Learner autonomy
  - Learning strategies
  - Learning and culture
  - Assessment (especially portfolio assessment)

Let's look at some of these:

### 2.1 Learning styles:

- People are interested in learning styles these days. There is a good literature on it both in general learning and in language learning. What might you find if you look into that literature? You would find ideas on *learner types*. For example:
- This is a diagram of learner types by Willing **(OHP Willing)**

**analytic**

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **passive** | Conformists<br>- authority-oriented learners<br>- classroom-dependent<br>- visual | Convergers<br>- analytic learners<br>- solitary<br>- independent<br>- 'about' language | **active** |
| | Concrete learners<br>- classroom-oriented<br>- games, groups<br>- people-oriented | Communicative learners<br>- prefer out-of-class<br>- integrated skills | |

**holistic**

*Willing's two-dimensional framework of learning style*

- This is one by Tyacke. You might like to check where you are on Tyacke's scale. **(OHP Tyacke)**

| | **very** | **fairly** | **a little** | **a little** | **fairly** | **very** | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| cautious (careful, considers consequences) | | | | | | | impulsive (jumps, takes chances) |
| convergent (goes along with group or authority) | | | | | | | divergent (goes out of way, decides independently) |
| practical (understands how things work) | | | | | | | artistic (creates art, music, literature) |
| analytical (takes ideas apart and examines each one) | | | | | | | holistic (puts ideas together, sees things as a whole) |
| serious (thoughtful, sober) | | | | | | | playful (jokes, plays games) |
| logical (decides based on reason, rational thinking) | | | | | | | intuitive (able to 'feel' or know without evidence) |
| plans (works things out ahead of time) | | | | | | | spontaneous (does things on spur of the moment) |
| realistic (deals with facts, things | | | | | | | imaginative (likes fantasy, |

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| as they are) | | | | | | | unusual ideas) |
| intellectual (relies on reason and knowledge) | | | | | | | emotional (relies on feelings and instincts) |
| reflective (lets things sink in before acting) | | | | | | | active (likes to get on with things) |

- Here is a simpler one by H. Douglas Brown **(OHP H. Douglas Brown 1 and 2)**

| | **Reflective Style** | **Impulsive Style** |
|---|---|---|
| **Advantages** | More accurate speaking<br>More accurate reading<br>Think carefully before acting | More willing to speak in class<br>Faster reading<br>Better in timed tests |
| **Disadvantages** | Wait too long to speak<br>Read more slowly<br>Slower in timed tests | Less accurate in speaking<br>Less accurate in reading<br>Act without thinking enough |

## QUESTIONNAIRE 2 Slow or Fast?

***Circle the number that best describes how quickly you usually do things. Circle only one number for each item. Use the following scale:***

**1** *Very fast*
**2** *Fast*
**3** *In between*
**4** *Slow*
**5** *Very slow*

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**Example**

How fast or slow I usually am when I . . .

Do my homework **1** **(2)** **3** **4** **5**

*Number 2 has been circled. This means that this person does homework quite fast and takes less time than most classmates.*

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How fast or slow I usually am when I . . .

| | |
|---|---|
| 1. Read books, magazines, and newspapers in English | **1 2 3 4 5** |
| 2. Read textbooks, articles, and reports in English, in my academic field | **1 2 3 4 5** |
| 3. Write an essay or composition in English | **1 2 3 4 5** |
| 4. Take multiple-choice tests in English | **1 2 3 4 5** |
| 5. Answer tests in English that ask for written sentences or paragraphs | **1 2 3 4 5** |
| 6. Answer a direct question to me from the teacher, in my English class | **1 2 3 4 5** |
| 7. Raise my hand when the teacher asks a question in my English class | **1 2 3 4 5** |
| 8. Volunteer to say something in class, when the teacher has not asked me | **1 2 3 4 5** |
| 9. Speak up in a small group in English, in class | **1 2 3 4 5** |
| 10. Answer a question in English from someone outside my classroom | **1 2 3 4 5** |

***Add up the numbers you circled. You should get a total score between 10 and 50.***

**Score: ____**

- And you will also find references to Gardner's *Multiple intelligences* **(OHP H. Reid)**

**Table 1–1. Gardner's Seven Intelligences**

***Verbal/Linguistic Intelligence***

The ability to use words effectively, both orally and in writing. Sample skills are remembering information, convincing others to help, and talking about language itself.

***Musical Intelligence***

Sensitivity to rhythm, pitch, and melody. Sample skills are recognizing simple songs and being able to vary speed, tempo, and rhythm in simple melodies.

***Logical/Mathematical Intelligence***

The ability to use numbers effectively and reason well. Sample skills are understanding the basic properties of numbers, the principles of cause and effect, and the ability to predict.

***Spatial/Visual Intelligence***

Sensitivity to form, space, color, line, and shape. Sample skills include the ability to represent visual or spatial ideas graphically.

***Bodily/Kinesthetic Intelligence***

The ability to use the body to express ideas and feelings, and to solve problems. Sample skills are coordination, flexibility, speed, and balance.

***Interpersonal Intelligence***

The ability to understand another person's moods, feelings, motivations, and intentions. Sample skills are responding effectively to other people, problem solving, and resolving conflict.

***Intrapersonal Intelligence***

The ability to understand yourself, your strengths, weaknesses, moods, desires, and intentions. Sample skills are understanding how one is similar to or different from others, reminding oneself to do something, knowing about oneself as a language learner, and knowing how to handle one's feelings.*

Source: Christison 1996a, p. 11

- Sometimes you will find these ideas related to language-learning: Here is H. Douglas Brown on multiple intelligences in language-learning: **(OHP H. Douglas Brown 3)**

## QUESTIONNAIRE 7 Seven Kinds of Intelligence

***Circle the number that best describes you. Circle only one number for each item. Use the following scale:***

**4** *Definitely, very much so!*
**3** *Yes.*
**2** *Not really.*
**1** *Definitely not!*

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**Example**

I like to learn by watching videos. 4 (3) 2 1

*Number 3 has been circled. This means that this person agrees and thinks that this statement describes him or her well.*

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| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | I like memorizing words. | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 2. | I like the teacher to explain grammar to me. | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 3. | I like making charts and diagrams. | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 4. | I like drama and role plays. | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 5. | I like singing songs in English. | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 6. | I like group and pair interaction. | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 7. | I like self-reflection through journal writing. | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 8. | I like word games and puzzles. | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 9. | I like problem-solving exercises. | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 10. | I like to learn through movies and videos. | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 11. | I like to move around a lot in the classroom. | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 12. | I like jazz chants and rhythmic activities. | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 13. | I like one-on-one conversation practice. | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 14. | I like to analyze my own performance. | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |

***To figure out your score on Questionaire 7, see the directions for scoring that follow.***

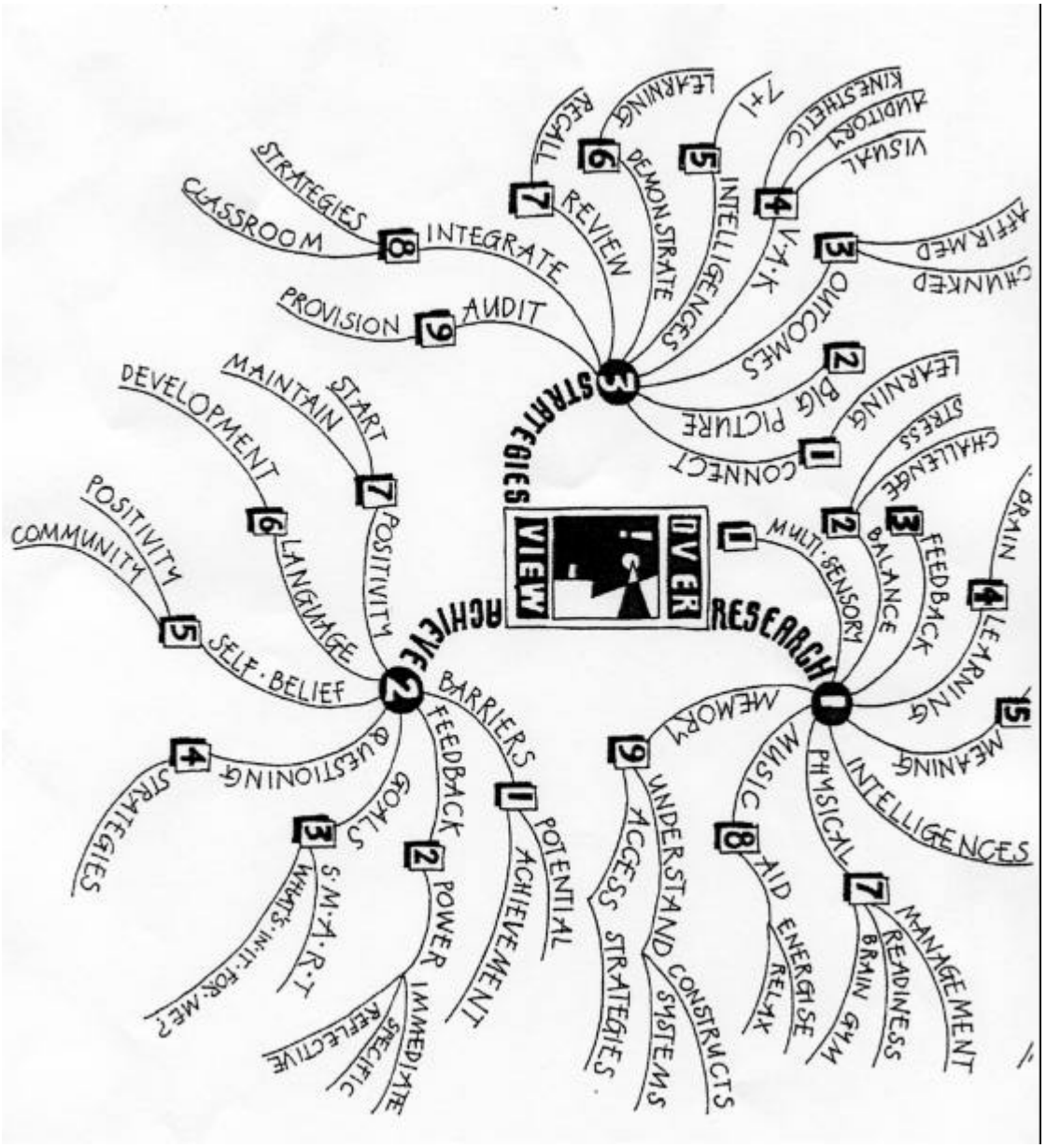
- You will also find ideas on Foreign Language *aptitude* (e.g. Skehan 1998). The 4 main categories of language aptitude to which language-learning psychologists normally refer are:

  - Phonemic coding ability
  - Grammatical sensitivity
  - Inductive language learning ability

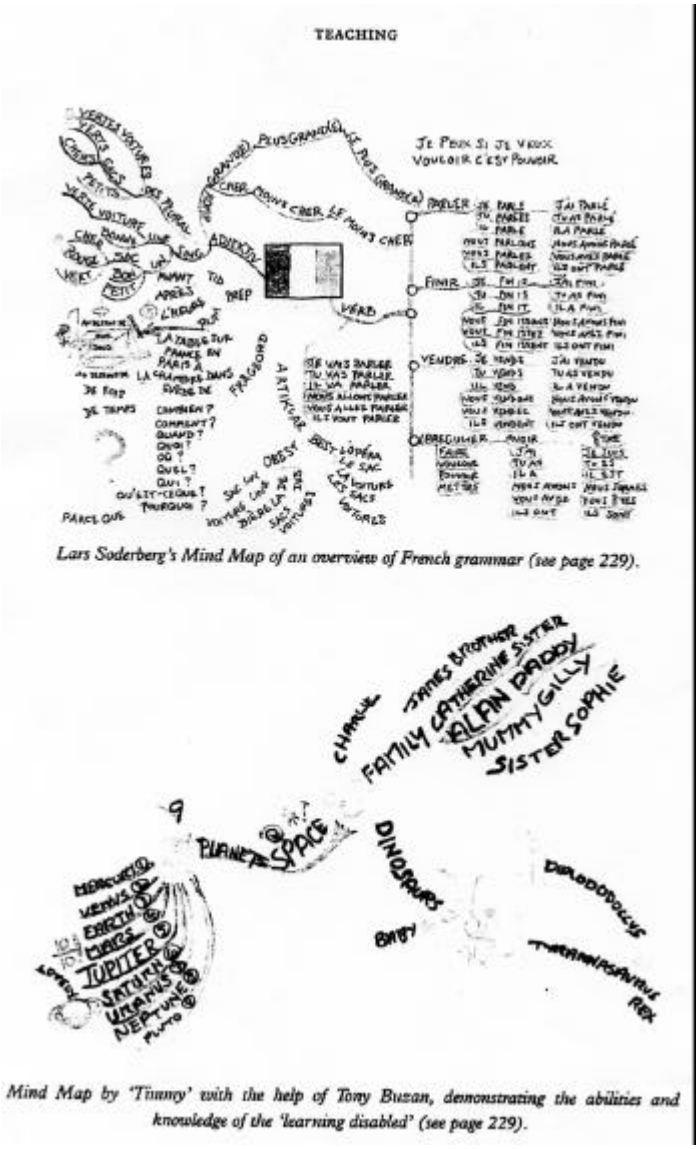
- Rote learning ability

## 2.2 Learning to Learn

- From looking at learning styles you can easily find yourself in a wide world of learning to learn, accelerated learning, learning to think, etc. The Americans are very good at it and publish a lot. Here you find a range of sub-topics. This is a mind-map of a book called *Accelerated learning in practice*, by Alastair Smith () who is a bit of a learning guru in England. **(OHP Smith)**



- What do these people talk about? They tend to talk about such things as:
    - Brain
    - Multiple intelligences
    - VAK (visual, Auditory, Kinaesthetic styles) (Neuro-linguistic programming people talk about this a lot)
    - Mind-mapping (here's an example from Tony Buzan, a British mind-mapping guru) **(OHP Buzan)**



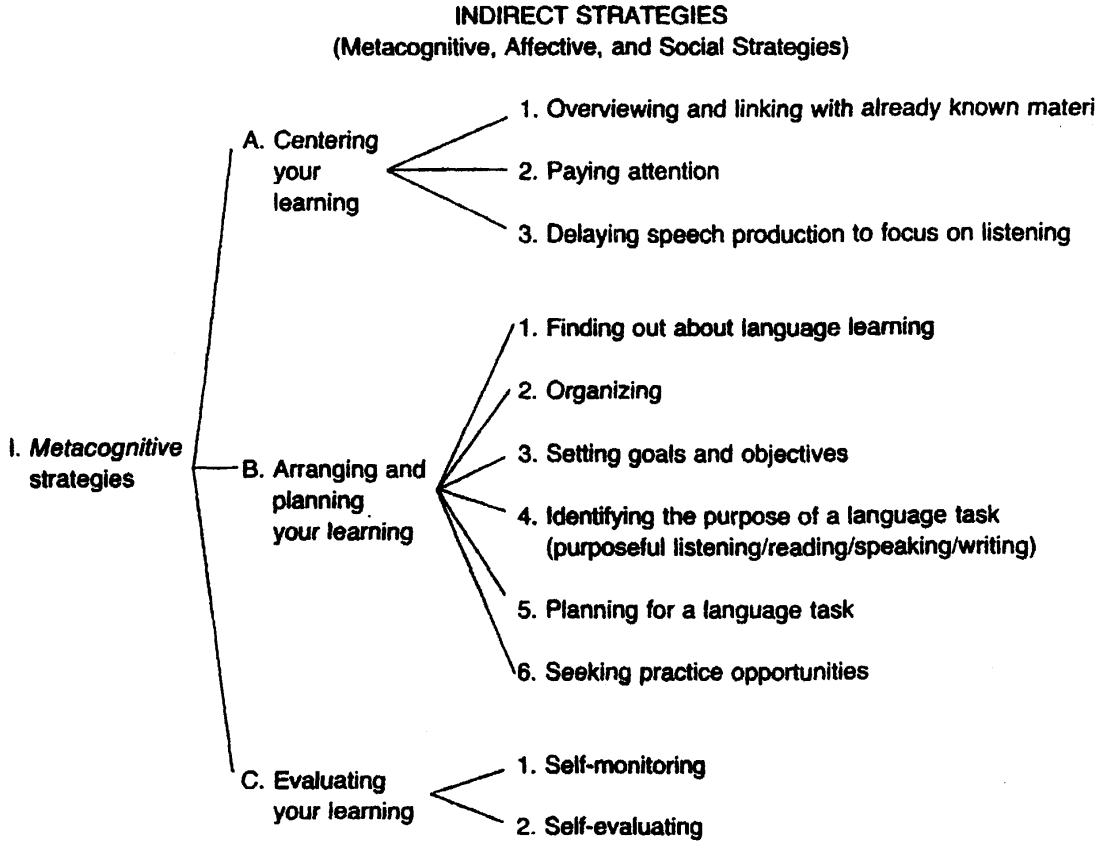

*Lars Soderberg's Mind Map of an overview of French grammar (see page 229).*

*Mind Map by 'Timmy' with the help of Tony Buzan, demonstrating the abilities and knowledge of the 'learning disabled' (see page 229).*

    - Memory
    - Motivatio n
    - Stress

- Self-belief
- Physical environment
- Resources
- Time management
- etc

- Language learning people translate some of these issues into language-learning terms. Here's Rebecca Oxford talking about strategies to do with the general management of language-learning. **(OHP Oxford 2)**




- Gail Ellis and Barbara Sinclair (1989) are interesting on learning to learn (for adult language learners). Here are the contents of their book *Learning to learn English*. **(OHP Ellis and Sinclair)**

## Framework for Learner Training

Keep a record of the learner training you have covered by ticking the boxes (✓) as you finish each section.

| *Stage 1 Preparation for language learning* | |
|---|---|
| 1.1 What do you expect from your course? | |
| 1.2 What sort of language learner are you? | |
| 1.3 Why do you need or want to learn English? | |
| 1.4 How do you organise your learning? | |
| 1.5 How motivated are you? | |
| 1.6 What can you do in a self-access centre? | |

| *Stage 2 Skills training* | *How do you feel . . .?* | *What do you know . . .?* | *How well are you doing?* | *What do you need to do next?* | *How do you prefer to learn/practise . . .?* | *Do you need to build up your confidence?* | *How do you organise . . .?* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Skills* | *Step 1* | *Step 2* | *Step 3* | *Step 4* | *Step 5* | *Step 6* | *Step 7* |
| 2.1 Extending vocabulary | | | | | | | |
| 2.2 Dealing with grammar | | | | | | | |
| 2.3 Listening | | | | | | | |
| 2.4 Speaking | | | | | | | |
| 2.5 Reading | | | | | | | |
| 2.6 Writing | | | | | | | |

### 2.3 Learning strategies and language-learning strategies

- You will also find yourself in the field of learning strategies. Here, language-learning is well-represented. People to look for are:

  - Oxford (1990): here is her overview list of language-learning strategies
  - **(see OHP Oxford 1)**
  - Chamot et al (1999) and Chamot & O'Malley (1994)
  - Wenden & Rubin (1987), Macaro (2001) and Cohen (1998) are also interesting.

**2.4 Learning and culture**

- You may find yourself reading about how learning and language-learning is affected by culture: i.e. learners learn differently depending on where they come from.
- Lily Wong-Filmore (1987) writes about differences between Asian and Latino children learning English in California. She says Latino children, for example, are more outgoing, take more risks, make more mistakes. Asian children tend to be more silent, like to get things correct, listen more to the teacher as model.
- And here is Macaro (2001) (who must be half-Italian) looking at the British and Italian *educational* contexts
  **(see OHP Macaro)**

While both countries would claim to espouse a broad communicative approach in their teaching, English pupils will have been exposed more to a *presentation, practice and use* approach. Italian students are more likely to be expected to 'learn the chapter or unit', 'prepare exercises for individual interrogation', 'learn passages of text by heart' and 'understand grammatical concepts'.

Italian students are, by and large, left much more to their own devices in their language learning. English students will have been much more 'spoon-fed'.

In England the majority of students will have been grouped according to their perceived aptitude in the subject. In Italy, 14 year olds will find themselves learning languages in mixed ability classes and slower learners will be expected to catch up and/or keep up with the other students.

In Italy school finishes at around 1.30 in the afternoon and students have many hours of homework to prepare. In England schools finish at approximately 3.30 p.m. and pupils have relatively few hours of homework to do.

**2.5 Portfolio Assessment**

- You will certainly find yourself thinking about assessment and especially portfolio assessment. It relates to cognition and metacognition in several ways:

- It is a stimulus for thinking about *learning strategies*. Once you start thinking about what aspects of language-learning a portfolio should contain, you have to ask yourself, *what is language-learning*? and *how can we break it down and describe it, so that we can say what a learner has achieved?*
- The same is true of *self-assessment*: to assess yourself in language learning you have to have a model of language, and a model of language-learning, and a model of directing and improving language-learning (i.e. meta- language-learning – which is partly what we are talking about today)
- You also start thinking about *strategies for assessment*; how do you assess yourself best and what knowledge and skills does that presuppose ('meta-assessment')

- However, I'm not going to say much about assessment, because colleagues are going to talk about that.

So, to summarise:

- Metacognition for language teachers is knowing what you know about language-learning.
- Metacognitive strategies for language teachers are strategies for acting on language learning and teaching: directing, improving and increasing it.
- You can't talk about metacognition, meta-learning in language-learning, without talking about language and language learning itself. Sometimes it's difficult to distinguish between the two.
- Finding out about language-learning will take you into related fields, e.g.:

  - Learning styles
  - Learning to learn
  - Learner autonomy
  - Learning strategies
  - Learning and culture
  - Assessment (especially portfolio assessment)

- In some of these fields, language teaching people have taken key concepts and elaborated them for language-teachers and learners. It's useful to know these people are.

## 3 The language-learning curriculum

So what are the main contents of the language-learning curriculum? This is where it's useful to have lists in your head. What kind of lists are we talking about?

- *Metacognitive skills:* in general and in Foreign language learning (FLL)
  **(see OHP Oxford 1)**

- *Cognitive skills* in general and in FLL
  **(see OHP Chamot et al 2)**
- Let's break these down so that we can have a closer look. To look at the detail of learning strategies, we need to have a clear idea of what we think language is and what we think language learning is.
- So let's now break these categories down further:

  - Language: includes, for example:

    - Skills
    - Discourse
    - Functions
    - Grammar
    - Vocabulary
    - Morphology
    - Sounds/spelling

- A learner who is going to start saying what he/she can do with reference to language learning is going to have to make 'I can…' statements about some of these things: about skills, for example (*I can write simple letters*) or about grammar (*I can use the present simple tense*).
- In order to say what learners can do with these categories, we need to know what each in turn is composed of. What are the main sub-categories of the use of discourse, for example? How would you break down *written discourse*, for example? Perhaps like this:

  - Titles, headings, sub-headings
  - Numbering systems
  - Paragraphing
  - Connectors
  - Reference (e.g. pronoun system, definite article etc)
  - Lexical reference (connections between words, collocations etc)

- Now we can say what a learner can do with discourse: for example *I can use simple connectors in writing; I can predict using titles and headings, etc*

  - So far we have been looking at aspects of language in order to be able to say what our learners can do with language. But we are talking today about learning strategies in language learning. And this means that we need to have other lists – lists which describe *learning to learn* language. One kind of list which would help here is a list of the key processes involved in a language skill, e.g. reading or writing. In the Appendix is a version of the skills involved in the writing process and in the groupwork process.
- You can find this kind of list in the literature, but most teachers would be able to make it for themselves.

- In addition, however, other things have to be included in our model of the strategies of language learning. We also need to know, for example about the role of

    - Study skills
    - Self-assessment
    - Using my first language
    - Working with other people
    - Using resources
    - Using memory
    - Learning styles
    - Motivation
    - Emotions
    - Self-belief
    - Managing learning
    - Etc

- Here we are in territory which may not be familiar to language teachers. So we may need to consult the literature.
- Here, for example are some questions a learner might have about *memory:*

    - How can I improve my memory for aspects of the L2?
    - What makes something stick in memory? E.g. repetition, using a thing in conversation, putting it in context, putting it in a chunk, using mnemonics, etc?
    - Do I have personal ways of making things stick in memory?

- We need to be able to answer questions like this. So how do we find it out? Either we find them in books or we make your own.
- We should do both. Don't be afraid of making your own. If we all sat down for half an hour and brainstormed some of these learning skills categories, we could do it quite well.
- You can see, however, that there's a problem with *scope*. We're dealing potentially with the whole language-learning curriculum. And we're dealing with the minutiae of it. It could become overwhelming. To avoid this, it's useful to know the learning strategies territory in outline (e.g. have a mind-map) but to focus: on a few things only. Take things bit by bit.

## 4 Learners

- We have to know our learners. What is it useful to know about them? It would be useful to know:

    - Their learning style preferences (see for example OHPs on Tyacke and H. Douglas Brown above)
    - What strategies they use What strategies they like
    - Their language learning aptitude

- What learning strategies they can use at specific ages?
- Whether their culture or school culture predisposes them to learn in particular ways

- How do we find these things out? We can use:

  - Questionnaires
  - Interviews
  - Think-alouds
  - Diaries
  - Self-report
  - Informed observation of learners

- Here's a questionnaire from H Douglas Brown on 'language ego'. Books are full of questionnaires like this

  **(see OHP H. Douglas Brown 4)**

## QUESTIONNAIRE 6 Language Ego

***Circle the number that best describes you. Circle only one number for each item. Use the following scale:***

**1** *The sentence on the left describes you well.*
**2** *The sentence on the left somewhat describes you.*
**3** *The sentence on the right somewhat describes you.*
**4** *The sentence on the right describes you well.*

---

**Example**

I don't care if people laugh at me. **1 (2) 3 4** I get very upset if people laugh a me.

*Number 2 has been circled. This means that this person generally doesn't mind if people laugh at him or her.*

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| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **1.** | I don't want to make mistakes because people will laugh at me. | **1** | **2** | **3** | **4** | Everyone makes mistakes, so it's okay to try out my English. |
| **2.** | I must speak perfectly or no one will understand me. | **1** | **2** | **3** | **4** | Other people will not care if I make mistakes. |
| **3.** | If my English is bad, I feel very stupid. | **1** | **2** | **3** | **4** | If my English is bad, I still have strong confidence in myself. |
| **4.** | Classmates who speak English better than I do really bother me. | **1** | **2** | **3** | **4** | Classmates who are better than I am don't bother me. |
| **5.** | A bad score on a test means that I am not intelligent. | **1** | **2** | **3** | **4** | A bad score on a test means that I need to study harder next time. |
| **6.** | When my teacher corrects me, I feel ashamed. | **1** | **2** | **3** | **4** | When my teacher corrects me, I don't feel ashamed. |
| **7.** | I hate making a fool of myself. | **1** | **2** | **3** | **4** | I don't mind making a fool of myself. |

***Add up the numbers you circled. You should get a total score between 7 and 28.***

**Score:____**

- We also need to think about the attitudes and motivations of learners. Many learners don't like learning to learn. They find it unimportant: they want to learn contents. Or they may not like some of the particular strategies we are proposing. Or they may get bored: there is a big danger that teaching cognitive and metacognitive strategies is boring.
- One can make strategy training more interesting, for example, by:
    - Giving a choice of ways to do things
    - Starting with what strategies learners use already
    - Start with wide-range strategies: the learners can how useful they are
    - Start with strategies which give them solutions to current learning problems

- Use IT: many learners like it and it requires a lots of learning strategies, which the learners will know already

- You can't underestimate the tendency for learning strategy instruction to be dull. We have to find ways of making it interesting, useful and, over time, of routinising it, so that focussing on strategies needs to take less and less classroom time.

# 5 Teaching learning strategies

## 5.1 Strategies

- First, I want to look at teaching *cognitive strategies*. Then I'll look at teaching *metacognitive strategies.*
- There's no magic about teaching strategies. You need a sequence of stages: I like to use 5, but there's no magic about numbers

### 5.1.1 Presenting a strategy: approaches to choose from

- Ask the learners what strategies they use
- Show a strategy
- Describe a strategy
- Explain/discuss the purpose of the strategy; why it is important
- Discuss it/reflect on it

### 5.1.2 Practising a strategy; approaches to choose from

- Scaffold the strategy
- Prompt learners/ask them questions while they are working
- Get the learners to do the task in groups: this can generate supportive group talk about the strategy
- Use a task which provides an outcome which all can see and comment on
- Provide more than one strategy for one goal: students can compare

### 5.1.3 Evaluating a strategy: approaches to choose from

- Learners report
- Learners demonstrate what they did
- Teachers checks what learners did
- Teacher observes and discusses (with groups and individuals)
- Class discusses and reflects (groups or whole class)
- Learners fill in a questionnaire: process it and feed it back

### 5.1.4 Develop a metacognitive routine

- Prepare and plan, e.g. decide on a strategy/strategies
- Solve problems as they arise: select strategies
- Monitor progress and efficiency: check the strategies
- Evaluate: think about/improve the strategies

### 5.1.5 Sustain and improve the strategy: approaches to choose from

- Learners keep track of the strategies they use (e.g. charts, diaries)
- Learners keep track of their progress in using strategies (e.g. progress charts)
- Learners experiment with strategies
- Learners reflect on their learning orientation/style
- Teacher checks strategy use at intervals (using questionnaires, checklists etc)
- Teachers reminds learners (e.g. by posters – see 1 above)
- Teacher encourages learners to repeat and routinise strategies, e.g. by reminding them, by using posters (see 1 above) etc
- Teacher encourages learners to transfer the strategy to new contexts
- Learners agree a contract on strategy use

- Before I move on to looking at teaching metacognitive strategies, a few key points about teaching:

  - Be very *explicit* about learning strategies: show learners exactly how to use a strategy; discuss the strategy and give it a name. But in the long run, aim for *implicitness*: strategies become routine for the learners: they use them without prompting.
  - Aim to *integrate* strategies into teaching. You will need *separate* time to teach new strategies, but teach them in connection with ongoing learning and gradually reduce this separate strategy time.
  - Help learners learn strategies from *peers*. Many learners will already use a lot of strategies. That means, for example, getting learners to deal with strategies in groupwork; getting learners to demonstrate to their peers. Also encourage peer-coaching.
  - Talk about strategies in the learners' mother-tongue.
  - Understand each strategy you choose to teach

    - Break it down so that you can se the detail of it
    - Find activity types which are useful for teaching it

- And finally, if you wish, treat the whole topic as an experiment.

  - Experiment yourself: if you don't know about an aspect of it, try it out
  - Get learners to experiment, try things out

## 5.2 Metacognitive strategies

- Now let's look at teaching *metacognitive* strategies. But bear in mind that much of your work on teaching cognitive strategies is *metacognitive* in nature: you're teaching *about* these strategies and you're teaching *how to use them and improve them*. In other words, metacognition is not separable from cognition.
- Let's first check that we know what we are doing. We are now looking at how to teach students – not to use strategies – but to make these strategies efficient. And to do that, we're teaching them how to think about, select, monitor, evaluate these strategies as they use them
- I like to use a 3-stage process: preparation, application and monitoring, and evaluation. You can se it as a 4-stage process: preparation, application, monitoring, evaluation. It doesn't really matter.
- Let's look at the example in the appendix: writing. What are points to emphasise here?

    - Firstly, it's useful to get students to think in terms of preparation, application/monitoring and evaluation. But in practice I don't think learners will do too much final evaluating – they will evaluate while the process in ongoing
    - Secondly, these processes – preparation, application, monitoring, evaluation are going on all the time, interactively, concurrently, rather than sequentially
    - Thirdly, we as teachers have to know what is involved in good practice of common classroom learning events. We have to know what good writing, or good groupwork, good reading etc, involves. We have to make lists like the list I showed for writing. Very often, we haven't thought these through – we know them, but we've never put them on paper.
    - Fourthly, when you make these lists, the process can get very complicated and the lists of details can be long. That may or may not be useful for you. It's not so useful for students: long lists put them off.
    - Fifthly, many of the strategies involved in a sequence of activities like this will have been taught separately. But what we are doing here is showing students how to use a metacognitive cycle themselves, in order to improve their learning.
    - Finally, we have to teach this metacognitive cycle. I would simply teach it by using a similar process to the one I showed when we were thinking about cognitive processes. I.e. list the main processes involved (what should you do before, while and after a key activity). Put them on the board. Monitor whether the students are using these processes and intervene where necessary. Ask them afterwards what they thought of it: get them to discuss it. Later get them to improve it. Put a poster on the wall. In the long run help them to make it routine.
    - And absolutely finally, don't bore the students. If it can be tedious and complicated to teach strategies, it can be even more tedious and complicated to teach metacognitive strategies. Keep it short, interesting and visibly useful in the minds of students.

## 6 School policy

- Schools need to develop institutional policy on teaching learning strategies. Learning strategies are for the whole curriculum. Your learners need them in every subject and ideally every teacher should teach them. If they do this, then they should do it in a co-ordinated fashion, so that the learners know that there is a whole-school policy on this and all their teachers will be taking it seriously.
- If you can make policy from the top, with the support of your senior management, do so. If you can't, do it as a select and enthusiastic group and sell the idea to the school when you can see that it works
- Agree tactics: e.g. focus on one strategy in one week; monitor, evaluate and improve
- Collaborate: pool ideas and distribute them to staff
- If you need training, get a well-recommended person in from the outside
- Visit another school who has developed a learning to learn policy
- And treat the issue as a district/regional issue: plan, collaborate and evaluate across the region
- When you feel confident, publish your results

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# Appendix: Learning strategies: 2 examples of breaking down larger areas of classroom work into sub-strategies.

***Teaching the metacognitive cycle: groupwork***

**1. Preparation**

- Organise roles
    - Chair
    - Scribe
    - Reporter
- Agree goals
    - What we have to do
    - What stages there are
    - How much time we have
- Agree procedure

**2. Execute, monitor, evaluate**

a) Open discussion: pay attention to discourse functions, e.g.:

- Propose a view
- Support a view with evidence
- Exemplify
- Agree with a view
- Challenge a view
- Manage consensus
- Summarise
- Shift a topic

b) Monitor re:

- Participation, e.g.:
    - Contribute
    - Take turns
    - Be a good listener
    - Appreciate useful contributions
    - Challenge ideas where necessary
    - Support your opinion where necessary
    - Take a lead if necessary but don't dominate
- Time
- progress towards goals
- recording

c) Agree and record outcomes at each stage

- Read out
- Propose revisions
- Discuss revisions
- Agree revisions
- Record

d) Agree and record final outcome
e) Report

**3. Evaluate**

- Decide what to evaluate, e.g.:
    - Organisation
    - Participation
    - execution of roles
    - outcome
    - reporting
- Decide how to evaluate
- Evaluate

***Teaching the metacognitive cycle: writing***

**1. Preparation**

a) Check what the topic is
b) Check you have understood it
c) Decide strategy, e.g.:

- brainstorm topic
- organise under headings
- write drafts
- revise drafts
- write final draft

d) Organise resources

**2. Execute and monitor**

**a) Brainstorm**

- Choose a method:
    - Anyhow
    - Use a mind-map
    - Use headings
- Apply it

**b) Organise under headings**

- Decide on headings
- List headings in sequence
- Organise under headings
- Organise sequence under headings
- Check and revise

**c) Write a draft**

- Write, paying attention to:
    - Grammar
    - Vocabulary
    - Textual organisation
        - Paragraphing
        - Connectors
        - Back-reference
        - Punctuation
        - Spelling

**d) Revise**

- Edit, paying attention to above
- Rewrite where necessary
- Write final draft

**3. Evaluate**

- Decide what to evaluate
- Decide how to evaluate
- Evaluate