

Using Cognitive Strategies to Develop English Language and Literacy

JoAnn Crandall, Ann Jaramillo, and Joy Dreeft Peyton
October 2002

Immigrant students of secondary school age not only have to adjust to a new country and school system, but they must also learn academic content in a new language.

Educators are looking for ways to help these students achieve at high academic levels, which involve reading English well, understanding academic discourse, writing coherently, and speaking English at cognitively complex and abstract levels. Crandall et al list five ways to develop students' English language and literacy skills:

1. Build conceptual frameworks for new knowledge

Use various methods to help students see how ideas/concepts relate to one another and fit into a larger picture. For example, learners may be able to retain facts about social studies or science, but have difficulty performing more demanding cognitive tasks such as relating those facts to historical trends.

Provide students with graphic organizers – visual aids that display the chunks of information to be studied.

2. Teaching Learning Strategies

Chamot & O'Malley's work (1994) with second language learners reinforces the notion that students who learn to consciously monitor their own learning and who have a storehouse of strategies to use when learning becomes difficult do better than students who do not have such strategies. When teaching a learning strategy, identify the strategy, explain why it is useful, demonstrate its use, give students practice in applying it to a learning situation, and show them how to evaluate its effectiveness and what to do if it does not work (Duffy et al, 1986).

3. Focusing on Reading in All Classes

Teachers can use a variety of strategies to ensure that students are actively engaged in reading. A well-designed unit might include practice in four teaching strategies: questioning, predicting, clarifying, and summarizing. The teacher can model first, and then students practice. When they gain sufficient skill, they can work in groups on selected portions of text and take turns using the four strategies.

4. Giving Students Opportunities for Free Reading

Voluntary reading and sustained silent reading can build students' vocabulary and develop good reading habits. It is best to make reading time extended and consistent.

5. Helping Students Move Beyond the Text

At the end of a unit, lesson, or theme, teachers can plan tasks that move students back to the text or content to reexamine, reconnect, and rethink the major ideas or concepts. "Beyond-the-text"

tasks force students to go back to the text, reflect on its meaning, clarify and question, and reread with a different purpose in mind.

Conclusion

In the recent past, the focus of education for newcomers to U.S. schools was primarily the mastery of English. By extending this focus to include the development of literacy and higher order skills and the belief that these students can achieve at high levels in school, we come closer to ensuring that no child is left behind. The strategies described here are designed with this new focus in mind.

References

Chamot, A.U., & O'Malley, J.M. (1994). *The CALLA handbook: Implementing the cognitive academic language learning approach*. New York: Addison-Wesley.

Cho, K.S., & Krashen, S.D. (1994). Acquisition of vocabulary from the Sweet Valley Kids series: Adult ESL acquisition. *Journal of Reading*, 37, 662-7.

Coady, J. (1997). L2 vocabulary acquisition through extensive reading. In J. Coady & T. Huckin (Eds.), *Second language vocabulary acquisition* (pp. 225-37). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Duffy, J. L., Roehler, M., Meloth, M., Vavrus, L., Book, D., Putname, J., & Wesselman, R. (1986). The relationship between explicit verbal explanation during reading skill instruction and student awareness and achievement: A study of reading teacher effects. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 21, 237-52.

Summarized by Bella Hanson. The full article was downloaded from <http://www.cal.org/ericcll/digest/0205crandall.html>.