Helping learners learn:
exploring strategy instruction
in language classrooms across Europe

Vee Harris

with

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Foreword

This is a book by teachers for teachers. It describes the work of an international group from five countries, supported by the European Centre for Modern Languages. Vee Harris and colleagues present both the rationale for incorporating learning strategy instruction into second language learning and the results of their action research projects. Both the theoretical framework and practical experiences of these teacher-researchers provide a solid experiential foundation for novices to embark into the domain of language learning strategies in second language learning and teaching. In January 1999, I had the privilege to work with this group in an exchange of ideas and experiences in the conceptualization of language learning strategy instruction. It is good to see the results of their work come to fruition in this book.

It is now generally recognised that language learning strategies are the key to learner autonomy. Teachers new to the idea of incorporating learning strategy instruction into their language lessons but eager to facilitate that autonomy in their students will find this book useful on a number of fronts. We hear the voices of both language learners and teachers. Teaching learners how to learn is not always rewarded with immediate success. We read about the honest struggles of teachers and teacher trainers in implementing a new concept into their language teaching. We hear about what discourages teachers from embarking on language learning strategy instruction, we learn from their mistakes, we benefit from their practical advice and we learn how to deal with objections to strategy training. We are given tasks to try and reflective questions to help us relate what we are reading directly to our own classrooms. In short, we are guided by teachers, we learn from their mistakes and we are led to develop a concrete plan of action for implementation into our own language classrooms.

Not only do we hear the voices of learners and teachers, we are presented with a pedagogy that is theoretically grounded. Vee Harris and colleagues have firmly rooted the rationale for learning strategy instruction, the research projects and the recommended training cycle in the cognitive framework of O'Malley and Chamot. The importance of metacognition and the development of metastrategic awareness is emphasized from the outset. A cycle of strategy instruction to foster the development of metacognition is delineated at the beginning of this book, sustained through the projects described and interwoven into the guidelines for pre-service and in-service training. Links to research are regularly made throughout the book, tying the research projects to other relevant research in the field.

This book is highly relevant to teachers and teacher trainers for the insights and practical, concrete advice it provides. It is written in a way that is accessible to those who would like to incorporate strategy training into language classes; in particular to teachers and teacher trainers who work with the Common European Framework of Reference (CEF), but also more generally to international audiences interested in a practical handbook for integrating learning strategy instruction.

Larry Vandergrift
University of Ottawa, September 2000

Preface

Why a book on Learning Strategies?

The Council of Europe workshop

In February 1998, a group of people who had never met each other before came together in Graz, Austria, for a workshop jointly organised by the Modern Languages Division[1] in Strasbourg and the European Centre for Modern Languages. The purpose of the workshop was to work on the second draft of the Common European Framework of Reference for Learning, Teaching and Assessment of Modern Languages (CEF) with particular reference to teacher training. As its name suggests, this document is designed to enable all those involved in language teaching in Europe to reflect on and share their practice. It provides common or compatible descriptions through which we can discuss and compare our objectives as language teachers, our methodology and the assessment procedures we use. Since the draft document was lengthy and somewhat unwieldy, separate User Guides had been written, directed at specific audiences such as teachers or teacher trainers.

One of the aims of the workshop was to set up networks for the coming year to pilot projects with different themes and within different national contexts. One of these themes was Learning Strategies.

The Learning Strategies group

Of the initial nine countries interested, five were able to continue with the project. The delegates came from Portugal, Hungary, Iceland, Britain and Austria and were all experienced teachers and teacher trainers. Even though we had never met before, we soon found we had a lot in common and we developed a close working relationship over the course of the workshop. We rapidly agreed that, valuable though the CEF was, it was not a document that would readily allow teachers and student teachers to grasp how vital Learning Strategies are in promoting successful learning or to know how they should tackle teaching them. For understandable reasons, references to Learning Strategies were scattered, so teachers would have to look under Learning to Learn (6.7.4.) for some of the reasons for the importance of Learning Strategies. And to understand what strategies were, they would need to refer not only to the specific section on Strategies (4.8) but also Study Skills (4.7.1.4.3.), Interactive Activities (4.4.3) and Communicative Language Processes (4.5), for example. Most importantly of all, the group felt that, even if the document managed to convince teachers and student teachers of the value of strategies in the language learning process and in developing learner autonomy, they needed clear guidance on how to set about teaching them. And they needed concrete evidence that it was worth trying.

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[1] Former Modern Languages Section.

This then was the task we set ourselves; to produce a book based on our own practical experiences of teaching Learning Strategies. We agreed that each delegate would undertake some form of strategy instruction, depending on their particular national context. It might be that they would directly teach their learners strategies or it might be that they would work with either their student teachers or with practising teachers to enable them to teach strategies to their learners.

The task of undertaking the projects, collecting appropriate evidence and writing up our findings was a daunting one and we were very aware that we would need to share our experiences and support each other as we went along. We were fortunate in that the European Centre for Modern Languages funded us to meet together again in January 1999 in London and in November 1999 in Graz.

This book is an account of our journey to explore Learning Strategies.

Acknowledgements

Introduction

Traditionally, we tend to feel we should read books from start to finish. This book is not like that. The intention is that you, the reader, start with the chapter that you feel would be most useful for you and then if you are interested and want more information, you proceed to another chapter. We suggest, however, that everyone starts by reading chapter 1. To help you negotiate your way through the book, here is a summary of what you will find in each chapter:

	Why Teach Learning Strategies? You are probably a successful language learner. Many modern language teachers enjoyed their languages lessons at school and got good marks in their exams. This chapter starts by helping you to understand why. It gives you a reading task to do in an unfamiliar language and asks you to think about how you went about it; the strategies or tools you used to make sense of it. It then summarises some of the reasons why it might be important to share such strategies with your learners, particularly the less successful ones. It ends by explaining the broad principles of how to set about strategy instruction.	Chapter 1
The secondary school context	**How to Teach Learning Strategies.** The next chapters describe a number of case studies, showing exactly how we went about strategy instruction with younger learners.	**Part 1**
England	**Memorisation** strategies	Chapter 2
England	**Reading** strategies	Chapter 3
England	**Communication** strategies and a summary of issues raised by the secondary school case studies	Chapter 4
The university context	**How to Teach Learning Strategies.** The case studies here deal with strategy instruction for more advanced learners.	**Part 2**
Austria	**Reading** strategies	Chapter 5

	Listening strategies and a summary of the issues raised by the university case studies. This chapter also includes some brief ideas for teaching listening to secondary school pupils.	Chapter 6
Secondary school pupils and student teachers Portugal	**Developing Metacognitive Strategies** This case study bridges the gap between part 2 and part 3. It begins by describing how student teachers were introduced to strategy instruction but then goes on to explain how they implemented the ideas in their classrooms. Although it covers **reading and writing** strategies, a special focus of this chapter is the global, **metacognitive** strategies of planning and evaluating work.	Chapter 7
	Summary of the Projects; Lessons to be Learned. In this chapter, we set out not only our successes but also the problems we encountered and what we learned from them.	Chapter 8
	Ways Forward	**Part 3**
Iceland, England	**The Reality of the Classroom; Teachers' Concerns**. This is a 'Question and Answer' chapter based on what teachers have told us discourages them from embarking on strategy instruction.	Chapter 9
Iceland, England	**In-Service Training.** Here we suggest guidelines for and examples of in-service teacher training. We also report on the results of a questionnaire to teachers, following one such in-service session.	Chapter 10
England	**Pre-Service Training.** We describe how strategy instruction can be a continuous strand throughout the year, supporting both student teachers' language development and their understanding of how to implement strategy instruction. The chapter ends with the results of a questionnaire and some suggestions for how experienced and student teachers can work together.	Chapter 11
	What now? Strategy Checklists! Here you will find lists of the Learning Strategies involved in each of the skills that you may find useful for following up the ideas in the book.	Appendix

You will find that the chapters are regularly interrupted by two sorts of symbol:

This symbol means that there is a task you could undertake. When we are reading something, we often think; *'yes but what does this mean for **me** with **my** learners in **my** classroom?'* We hope that these tasks help you make the link between what you are reading and your own reality.
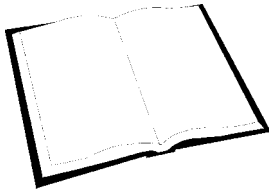
This symbol means that you will be able to read a very short summary of the relevant research into Learning Strategies. As teachers, we do not have to reinvent the wheel; we can draw on insights from research. Theory and practice should not be two separate entities. Indeed, we hope that our own projects perhaps form the middle ground between the two. Carried out by busy teachers or teacher trainers, often within very difficult circumstances, they cannot be said to constitute systematic, rigorous research. Rather they are part of the recent move towards action-based classroom research where teachers investigate their own practice (see for example Hopkins 1993). Whilst we recognise the limitations of the projects we have undertaken, it may be of interest that across different countries, different educational contexts, different age groups and different languages being taught, there appears to be some similar messages about Learning Strategies.

Chapter 1:
Why Teach Learning Strategies?

Some problems we face everyday in our classrooms

> If pupils used their common sense more, they wouldn't need to look up every word in the dictionary and it would save them precious time in exams *(UK teacher of secondary school pupils).*

> When asked to learn vocabulary for homework, even the conscientious ones are not achieving top marks, simply because they do not know how to learn words. So they lose motivation, because although they think they are spending a lot of time 'learning' the words, when it comes to the test they cannot remember them *(UK teacher of secondary school pupils).*

> When my pupils don't know a word, they just get tongue tied and embarrassed. They don't even try to mime it or find another way of saying it or even just use a 'filler' like 'umm, you know, well' to give themselves time to think *(UK teacher of secondary school pupils).*

> My university students think that what they should concentrate on is improving their reading and writing, as listening is an 'easy' skill *(Hungarian teacher).*

> My university students only care about passing exams. They think they are 'good at languages anyway' and there's no point in 'study skills' lessons on how to work independently to make their language learning more effective, since they won't be tested on it *(Austrian teacher).*

> I feel I have to teach in a very teacher-centred way; I can't trust my pupils to work on their own sensibly *(Portuguese teacher of secondary school pupils).*

> In a survey of 227 secondary school pupils in my local area, 97 said that working on their own did not help them learn a foreign language *(UK secondary school teacher).*

Do any of these quotes from practising teachers sound like familiar problems? In one way or another, we all get very frustrated that, in spite of our best efforts, our learners do not make the progress we would like them to. So maybe, like Allwright (1984), we have to ask ourselves the question 'Why don't learners learn what teachers teach?'.

One possible explanation is that although we devote considerable energy to *teaching* students the foreign language, how often do we teach them how to *learn* it?

This book is about teaching our students how to learn more effectively; about giving them the tools and the confidence to tackle their learning independently; whether it is a reading a text or memorising words or coping with the demands of face to face conversation. It's about giving them that sense of control so that they are not constantly reliant on the teacher.

As successful linguists, we often assume that our learners know what these strategies are since we ourselves often used them automatically, without even having to consciously think about it.

What are learning strategies?

To help you become more aware of exactly how skilful you are at using these strategies, try translating as much as you can of the following Dutch poem into your mother tongue.

Één appel is rood,
    de zon is geel,
        de hemel is blauw,
            een blad is groen,
een wolk is wit . . .
    en de aarde is bruin.

Én zou je nu kunnen
    antwoorden
        op de vraag . . .

Welke kleur de liefde?

Translation of the Dutch poem

An apple is red,
The sun is yellow,
The sky is blue,
A leaf is green.
A cloud is white …
And the earth is brown.
And would you now be able to answer
the question

What colour is love?

The poem is taken from Welke kleur de liefde? by Joan Walsh Anglund, published by Zomer and Keuning, Wageningen, Holland.

Now try to list what you did that allowed you to make sense of a text in a completely new language. We have provided one example but you can probably add at least three others.

Reading strategies

- Looked for cognates (words that are similar to a language I already know)
-
-

It is likely that you used a combination of some of the following:

1. recognising the type of text (in this case, a poem in a child's book) and therefore having some expectations of what it might be about, its overall structure etc;

2. skimming the text to spot familiar words;

3. using the picture;

4. using your common sense or knowledge of the world to make sensible guesses (an apple is not purple!);

5. using the pattern of the sentences to make sensible guesses ('a something is + colour');

6. saying the text out loud;

7. breaking up words into smaller elements;

8. using grammatical clues such as those involved in unpacking the more complex final sentence.

- Which of the strategies were you using?

- Were there any that you weren't? Some people, for example, fail to use the clues from the little pictures behind the girl.

- Do you have any strategies that you prefer or find particularly useful?

- How often do you see your students using these strategies?

- Which students tend to use them? The more successful?

Before reading on, you may want to reflect on strategies that you use in other skill areas, like listening strategies or those involved in checking written work or memorising words. And what about communication strategies; what do you do when you are stuck for words and need thinking time but want to keep conversation going? You will find a list of such strategies in the Appendix.

Some arguments for teaching learning strategies

1. Differences in strategies used by successful and unsuccessful learners

Our ability to use these kinds of tools or strategies was one of the reasons why we became successful linguists. So why do we not share them with our learners? We may have been lucky in that we developed a wide repertoire of strategies. Research suggests, however (O'Malley and Chamot 1990), that low attainers have a much narrower range of strategies and use them less frequently than high attainers. So the issue is do we just accept the situation or do we intervene and explicitly teach them these strategies? The National Curriculum for Modern Foreign Languages in Britain (1999, p. 16) includes statements like pupils should be taught:

techniques for memorising words, phrases and short extracts

how to use context and other clues to interpret meaning

how to listen carefully for gist and detail.

Such requirements are also clearly relevant to the national curricula of other countries.

2. Motivation

It seems that teaching these low attainers how to learn may be a powerful tool for motivating them.
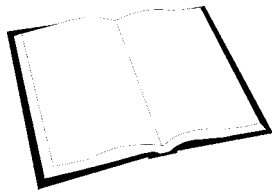
In a helpful summary of attribution theory, Dickinson (1995) explains that if learners attribute their lack of progress to fixed causes (such as their level of ability), they tend to give up the minute they encounter any difficulties, believing they are 'no good at languages' anyway. They are more likely to persist if they feel the outcome of their learning is not predetermined and they have some control over it. Strategies can play an important part in giving them that sense of control and changing their perceptions of themselves.

> Often poor learners don't have a clue as to how good learners arrive at their answers and feel that they can never perform as good learners do. By revealing the process, this myth can be exposed.
>
> Rubin (1990, p. 282)

Strategy instruction then is one way of helping them to understand that they are not doomed to be 'bad at languages' forever and that there is something practical and concrete that they can do about it for themselves.

3. Difficulties in different skill areas

Some learners may find one skill area relatively easy, reading for example, but really struggle with another, like listening. We need to find ways of helping them to tackle it. Rather than just saying 'your marks in the listening test were disappointing', strategies can offer a concrete means of making progress.

4. Differences in learning styles

Some learners like to have a written text in front of them; it is a kind of 'prop', even if the aims of the activity are oral. Others are happier in the oral/aural mode; they like to listen to and speak the language undistracted by the written word. Some learners like to be told grammatical rules, others find them confusing. They prefer to work out the rules for themselves, sometimes unconsciously, by listening to the language, reading it and trying to use it. Some are happiest when the teacher is completely in charge of the lesson; 'teacher talks, students listen'. Others like to be active and work in pairs or groups.

Recent years have seen the growth of interest in learning styles (Kolb 1971, Honey and Mumford 1986, Gardner 1993). Whether we define the differences in terms of visual/ auditory or activists / reflectors / theorists and pragmatists, we are faced with a problem of how to cater for all these different learning styles. We can and should create

differentiated tasks for our pupils but this is time consuming and at best we may only offer a choice of at least three or four different activities. Rubin (1990, p. 279) approaches the problem from a different angle:
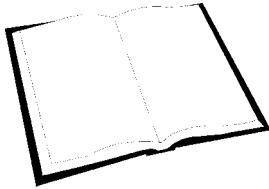
> … since each learner can only learn in ways that are meaningful to him or herself and since each learns in a slightly different manner, it follows that the same approach cannot be fully effective for all students. To help learners become more effective and efficient, teachers need to actively help students help themselves learn how to learn.

This leads us to perhaps the most important argument for teaching learning strategies.

5. Metacognitive awareness

This understanding of one's own preferred learning style, the sense of potential control and direction over one's own learning is often referred to as metacognitive awareness. Why are these metacognitive strategies so important?

It is commonly accepted that schools must prepare autonomous, responsible citizens. In the new millennium with its rapidly changing social and economic conditions, the traditional aim of education, transmission of knowledge, is not enough. Schools are no longer able to predict and then equip learners with the skills they will need throughout the rest of their professional lives. What they need to do is favour the most important of skills; learning how to learn.

From the early seventies, there has been a growing interest among psychologists and educators in our capacity to think about our own thinking. Such a capacity, which is exclusively human, is known as metacognition (Flavell 1971, 1976). One important dimension of metacognition is metacognitive strategies; *the processes used by learners to regulate and supervise their own learning*. Whereas cognitive strategies are the strategies directly involved in grappling with the language itself (making sense of a text, for example), metacognitive strategies are what we use to deploy them in the first place, how we organise, control and modify our thought processes. There is a danger that we see strategies as isolated, individual tools for specific tasks. Yet, these global, overarching 'thinking skills' seem to be at the heart of the efficient use of strategies. So a learner may have the cognitive strategies or skills needed to carry out a task 'but yet be unable to use that skill appropriately, that is unable to select or retrieve the appropriate skill when it is needed' (Nisbet and Shucksmith 1984, p. 5). Indeed some researchers go as far as to say that inefficient performance of tasks can be better explained in terms of deficiencies at the metacognitive level than deficits of knowledge or intellectual capacity (Culleen 1985, Nisbet and Shucksmith 1984, Torgesen 1987). Research also suggests that learners with metacognitive awareness are more likely to transfer strategies from one skill area or context to another.

The CEF emphasises the importance of these kinds of higher level, general, metacognitive strategies, by grouping all the other strategies under the four categories of:

- planning;
- execution;
- evaluation;
- repair.

Chamot, Barnhardt, El Dinary and Robbins (1999) group them slightly differently under planning, monitoring, problem solving and evaluating but we can see in either case, the central role given to:

- planning – thinking about the task before you do it and deciding how to tackle it. In a listening task, for example, we may decide that the first time the tape is played,

we will only try to pick out the gist of what is being said (often referred to as the strategy of 'selective attention');

- evaluating – this can refer to reflecting, once you have completed the task, on how well you have done it. We may, for example, think back to a conversation and wish that we had phrased something differently or corrected an error. We may then decide we will try to do that next time. It can also refer to monitoring whether the chosen strategies are working and deciding whether another approach would be better;

- repair/problem solving – this refers to how we cope when things are not working; when we do not understand what someone has just said, for example, or when our linguistic repertoire in the foreign language is too limited to reply, or when what we thought was the story line of the text we were reading just does not make sense when we read further.

What has all this got to do with your classroom? You may recognise that you as a successful advanced linguist use these sophisticated metacognitive strategies but be doubtful about whether your beginner learners can. We take up this issue in chapter 8 when we pull together the lessons learned from the various projects. First, though, let us hear from our learners about what they thought, after they had been taught some strategies.

> I used to get bored learning words. Using strategies makes it quicker, easier and more fun. I have also used the strategies for other subjects, like learning maths formulas *(UK secondary school pupil).*

> The strategies of using cognates and making sensible guesses helped me save time. I understand French texts much better now *(UK secondary school pupil).*

> Using 'fillers' makes you sound more French, instead of just sounding stupid and you can stay in the conversation longer *(UK secondary school pupil).*

> No one had shown me before how to do what there is to do, think of ways to do it – the best or the quickest way *(Portuguese secondary school pupil).*

> Before, although we were using some of the strategies, we did not realise we were using them. And now we know how to use them properly, so it's easier *(Hungarian university student).*

> I would be very interested in improving and expanding my learning strategies to make things easier *(Austrian university student).*

And here is what some of their teachers said:

> Students know better what they know and can transfer the strategies to other subjects *(Icelandic teacher of secondary school pupils).*

> Without having done a formal survey, I am still sure that fewer students fail the exams *(Icelandic teacher of secondary school pupils).*

> Pupils enjoyed reflecting on their work and their learning and it helped them to become aware of their own learning styles *(UK student teacher).*

> It raised awareness, gave guidance and stopped them feeling discouraged. In a low attaining group it can increase self-esteem and help them to see that French is easy *(UK student teacher).*

> Memorisation strategies can be used beyond the languages classroom and even beyond the school environment *(UK student teacher).*

> Pupils appreciated the opportunity to share their difficulties in learning a language. It increased their confidence and they felt more in control of their learning *(UK teacher of secondary school pupils).*

> It helped pupils become more independent and take responsibility for their own learning *(UK student teacher).*

In part 1 and part 2, we will look at exactly how the teachers set about strategy instruction. But before describing in detail each of the individual projects, it may be important to:

1. explain the questions related to the background research that we wanted to explore;

2. summarise the model of strategy instruction we chose to adopt.

What were we trying to find out?

There were four questions related to the background research literature that we wanted to explore. As we will be returning to these questions throughout the book, it may be useful to summarise them here, along with the research evidence. That way, at whatever section you choose to start the book, you will already be familiar with the references to research that we make.

1. *Who uses which learning strategies already?* Research told us that high attainers have a wider range of strategies and use them more frequently than their less successful peers (see O'Malley and Chamot 1990, for example). It also stressed that it was not just the greater number of strategies that characterised these successful learners, it was their ability to deploy the strategies in combination with each other and to know which strategies would be most helpful for which task (Graham 1997); in other words their metacognitive awareness.

2. *How do strategies develop over time?* The research here pointed towards a 'natural' developmental order. Some strategies are easier to acquire and therefore

develop early; others are more sophisticated and emerge later, if at all. Beginners then tend to adopt strategies that are fairly basic and mechanical and may be linked to the receptive skills. More advanced learners move on to strategies that facilitate interaction and also to those involved in reflecting on their own learning and on the way the language works (Chesterfield and Chesterfield 1985).

3. *How do learners respond to strategy instruction?* Are some more receptive and willing to try out new strategies than others? According to O'Malley and Chamot (1990, p. 161), we might assume that:

> Learning strategy instruction would be most valuable for students who are not successful learners, yet these are the very students who may be least motivated to try new strategies, since they may not have the confidence that they are able to learn successfully anyway – they are 'not good at languages' or do not 'have an ear for languages' and therefore may not consider it worthwhile to make an effort to improve their own learning.

4. Apart from learners' levels of attainment, *what other factors may determine both their existing use of strategies and their uptake of new strategies?* Research findings here were conflicting but there was some suggestion (Oxford 1993) that female learners use more strategies than males. This may or may not explain why other research (Macaro 1997) shows that although some boys in secondary schools have a narrower range of strategies, they respond more positively to strategy instruction than girls.

These were the issues that we wanted to find out more about, although not all of us covered all four questions. You will note that in quoting the research above, we have not used the usual convention of writing 'op.cit.' or 'ibid' to refer to a book that has already been mentioned. Because you may not choose to read the book from start to finish, we decided that it would be more helpful if we gave the full reference each time.

What were the principles underlying the model of strategy instruction we adopted?

During our first meeting at Graz in 1998, we explored guidelines for strategy instruction based on the framework presented in O'Malley and Chamot (1990) which draws together their own findings with those of a number of other researchers. This helped us to agree on a common series of steps that we would all follow, whether we were teaching university students or secondary school pupils and whether we were teaching English or French, German or Spanish. We called this series of steps 'the cycle of strategy instruction'.

The Cycle of Strategy Instruction

These were the 'dos' and 'don'ts' of strategy instruction that we tried to follow. We will explore in chapter 8 some of the difficulties we experienced when we could not follow the principles or did not know exactly how to implement them.

Table 1.1: Some 'dos' and don'ts' of strategy instruction

Don'ts	Dos	Rationale	Step
Don't treat strategy instruction as a 'one off' lesson, entitled for example 'Study Skills'.	Do fully integrate it into the everyday curriculum and link it to the kinds of tasks learners normally perform.	When we teach the foreign language, we do not expect that simply telling learners grammatical rules or giving them vocabulary lists will ensure that they are immediately assimilated. We provide opportunities for learners to practise them first and then set up tasks where they can use them independently. The same graded sequence of opportunities is necessary if learners are to progress to a point where they can automatically use appropriate strategies for whatever task they face.	A cycle of steps
Try to cover more than one skill area.	Focus on one skill area eg memorising words.	Within each skill is a complex range of strategies. Pupils will become 'overloaded' if they are presented with too much to cope with at once.	Skill focus

Don'ts	Dos	Rationale	Step
Start the sequence by discussing with learners how they learn.	Give learners a task to perform 'cold', in other words without any indication that they will be asked later to talk about how they went about it.	After they have done the task, brainstorm with the whole class how they did it and what they did when they encountered difficulties. The experience will be fresh in their minds so they are more likely to remember what they did. This brainstorming process allows learners to 'teach' each other about the strategies that worked for them.	Awareness-raising
Assume that just telling learners about the strategies will make them clear.	For each new strategy, give learners a number of clear examples.	Many strategies are hard to understand, if they are new to the learner. They need to see exactly how they work.	Modelling
Assume that pupils will know how and when to use them.	Provide practice in each of the strategies.	It takes time to get used to using new strategies just as it takes us time to remember, when we are learning to drive, to look in the mirror and signal before we make a manoeuvre.	General practice
Assume that learners will identify for themselves which new strategies are the most helpful for them.	Make it clear to learners which strategy will help them with their particular difficulties or the task that they most want to accomplish. Encourage them to set themselves appropriate personal goals.	We may understand the language learning process but our learners may not. They may need to be told, for example, which strategies will help them memorise the gender of a new word as opposed to its pronunciation.	Action planning

Don'ts	Dos	Rationale	Step
Assume that learners will then remember to use them.	Provide further opportunities for pupils to plan for and practise their 'chosen' strategies.	When we learn to drive, the instructor initially reminds us to signal every time we turn left or right. S/he gradually withdraws the 'scaffolding' as we become more confident and competent.	Focussed practice and fading out of reminders
Fail to provide any opportunities for learners to discuss how they are coping with the new strategies.	Discuss with learners whether the new strategies have helped them or not. Try to provide them with concrete evidence of their progress such as improved test results, for example.	It may be that learners are not using the strategies appropriately and they need guidance in identifying what is going wrong. Where there is improvement, they need to set themselves new goals.	Evaluation and further action planning

Look back at the cycle of strategy instruction and identify which steps are most likely to develop learners' metacognitive strategies and help them take control of their own progress. What are your concerns about implementing these steps? We take up this issue in chapter 8. First, we will describe practical teaching activities that we used to try to implement the cycle both in a secondary school context (part 1) and at university level (part 2).

Part 1:
How to Teach Learning Strategies;
the Secondary School Context

Introduction

In the last chapter, we identified what Learning Strategies are and reviewed some of the reasons why it might be important to teach them to our learners. We also set out some 'dos' and 'don'ts' of strategy instruction and the common sequence of steps that we agreed we would all follow in our projects. The case studies presented here were projects undertaken by student teachers, working in UK secondary schools. They are grouped together in part 1 according to skill area; memorisation, reading and communication strategies.

Before describing the projects, it may be helpful to briefly describe the context which encouraged the student teachers to explore strategy instruction with their pupils.

The British context: curriculum development projects

In England, prospective teachers must first have completed a degree in a foreign language before they can undertake the one year post-graduate teacher training course. They spend 24 out of 36 weeks in school, the remaining weeks being spent in the university. During their final term, the student teachers at Goldsmiths College, University of London, are required to carry out a curriculum development project (CDP) in their schools. This involves exploring an area of innovative practice in modern language teaching; creating the teaching materials, teaching the lessons and evaluating the pupils' responses. The topics for the CDPs are agreed on at a meeting between the school mentors and the college tutors. In 1999, seven trainee teachers chose to focus on Learning Strategies. Several sessions at the university were devoted to strategy instruction to prepare them for their projects, where the importance of systematically following the cycle of strategy instruction was stressed. You will probably notice that in spite of this, in some of the projects certain steps in the cycle were omitted. This was usually because of time constraints. The CDPs are summarised here as case studies by their university tutor.

Whilst the case studies cannot be said to provide reliable research evidence, they do suggest practical ideas for teaching strategies and indicate some relevant issues.

- Each case study starts by indicating the skill area, the context and any particular constraints or difficulties in carrying out the project.

- We go on to describe how the cycle of strategy instruction was implemented.

- We then summarise the methods used to evaluate the project. The purpose of this is not only to explain how we gathered evidence of the successes and difficulties of the project, but also to indicate the kinds of methods you, the reader, may want to use, if you want to evaluate any similar project you undertake.

- The case study ends with some observations indicating particularly interesting aspects of the project or problems encountered and linking them to the research literature.

- Materials used during the project are provided within each case study.

- For ease of reference, learners in this secondary school context have been referred to as 'pupils'. Those at university level, described in the part 2, will be referred to as 'students'.

Chapter 2:
Memorisation Strategies

We often set pupils for homework the task of learning a list of vocabulary. Yet how often do we pause and think about whether they know how to go about it? What strategies did you use when you were at school to learn your vocabulary? Before you start reading how the student teachers went about teaching their pupils how to, you may want to compare your list of strategies to the list in Figure 2.1 on the next page. Can you add to it?

☐ Case study 1

Skill area	Memorisation strategies.
Student teachers	Cécile Talon and Kylea McGovern.
Context	A mixed, comprehensive school in South London with a working class, multi-ethnic intake.
Target group	Two classes of mixed ability 11-12-year-old pupils. They were in their first year of learning Spanish and generally quite motivated and enthusiastic.
Number and length of lessons	One lesson a week for 6 weeks. Each lesson lasted 1 hour.
Constraints	The project had to be interrupted because there was a week of school exams and then a week's holiday.

The cycle of strategy instruction

Awareness-raising

Pupils were given ten items of vocabulary to learn for homework. The next lesson, after the vocabulary test, the class brainstormed the ways they had learned their vocabulary and the teachers introduced the word 'strategy', asking what they thought the word meant. The boys said that they had to use different strategies to kill people in their

computer games and the teachers prompted them to work out that strategies were the 'tactics' you used to achieve something. The teachers explained that the ways they approached learning their homework were also strategies. They stressed that people learn in different ways and it was important for them to try out a range of strategies to find the ones that worked best for them. Pupils were given a checklist (Figure 2.1) drawn up from the brainstorm and asked to use it for each subsequent learning homework (eg A, B) to record which new strategies they tried. Pupils could add any additional strategies to the checklist. All the discussion was carried out in the mother tongue.

Figure 2.1: Memorisation strategy checklist

	Name: Class:	A	B
1	Read the words aloud.		
2	Read the words in silence seral time.		
3	Cover up the words.		
4	Ask someone to test you.		
5	Learn the difficult words first.		

6	Write the words down.		
7	Repeat the words to a rhythm.		
8	Record yourself.		
9	Write the words on sticky labels, then stick them around the house.		
10	Teach a member of your family or a friend.		
11	Make the words rhyme.		
12	Jumble the words up, then match the English words to the Spanish.		

13	Chop the words up.		
14	Make up a song.		

Modelling/ Practice

Pupils were given a long list of words to learn to help them prepare for the forthcoming school exam. Having chosen ten of them, they wrote the Spanish words on one colour of card, and their English equivalent on the other. They were given 5 minutes to learn the words, using a new strategy from the checklist and then to test each other.

Next, the pieces of card were used to show them how to play the pelmanism game, which they then played. In this game, all the cards are placed on the table face downwards. The first player picks up two differently coloured pieces of card. If the English and the Spanish words match, they keep them. If they do not, they replace them on the table and the game continues. The winner is the person with the most matching cards. Pupils were told they could prepare similar cards themselves at home to help them learn vocabulary and that this was a further strategy they could use.

After the next vocabulary test, the class was asked which strategies they had used and what they thought of them. They were reminded that if they had not done very well, they should try a different strategy.

Evaluation

In the final lesson, pupils were given another vocabulary test which was marked in class. Then all the other test results were returned to them and their progress was discussed.

Methods used to evaluate the project

- Comparison of the results of the first test to the three subsequent tests following strategy instruction. Each test contained ten items of vocabulary to be learned for homework with broadly similar length and gender of words and number of cognates.
- Questionnaire asking whether they thought the strategy instruction had been helpful.

- Interview of four pupils, chosen on the basis of their test results or the comments in their questionnaires.

Results of the project

Test results

The test results improved (Figure 2.2) from an average score of 5.34 out of 10 to an average score of 8.12. The results of test 3 are however similar to test 2. The teachers noticed from the checklists for test 3 that half of the pupils had not bothered to learn their words, and most of the other half just used already familiar strategies like reading words, writing words down. The small number of pupils who had used new strategies eg making up a song, recording themselves, had improved their test results. They thought that this lack of progress was possibly because there had been no further mention of strategies after lesson 2, that they had 'faded out the reminders' too quickly. So, before test 4, they brainstormed pupils' thoughts on strategies and this may explain the improvement in their results.

Figure 2.2: Test averages for all pupils
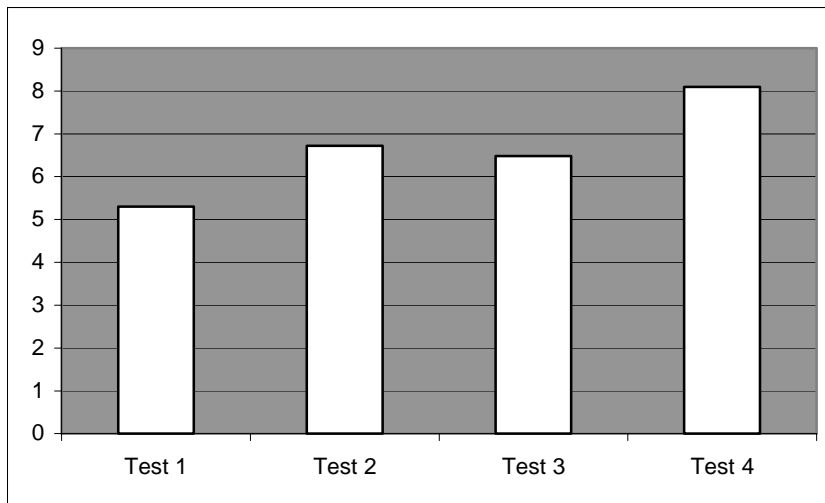
Figure 2.3 shows the test averages, grouped by gender. The teachers observed that: 'the girls appear to have better results to start with and then to progress at a constant level. The boys started at a lower level and then progressed only by a mark each test until the final test when they overtook the girls and scored a higher average'. The teachers are unclear of the reason, since throughout the project, the girls had responded more enthusiastically, whilst the boys were much 'more carefree and with no shame at all admitted that they could not be bothered to learn for their tests'.

Figure 2.3: Test averages for boys and girls
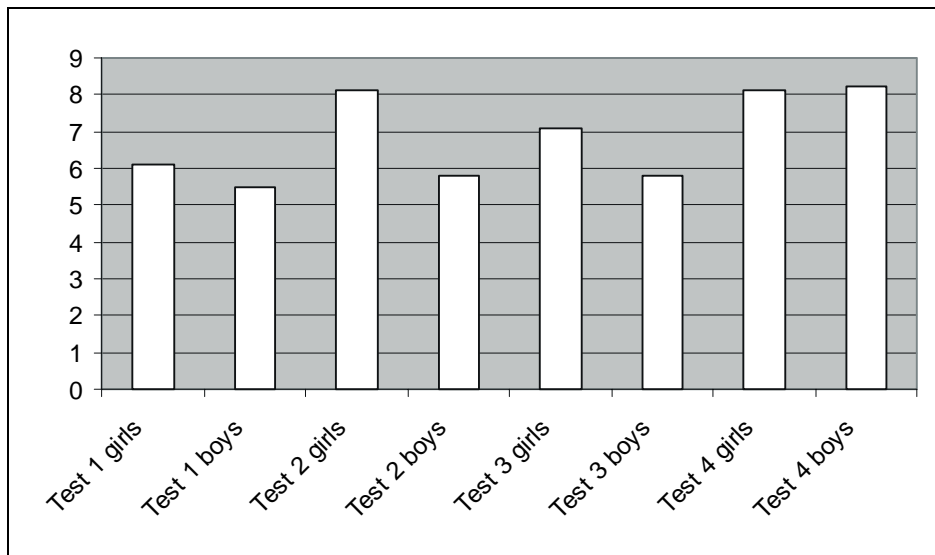
Questionnaire

Only 15 questionnaires were fully completed. Eleven pupils said that strategy instruction had made them like learning vocabulary more, four said that they felt the same about it: 'I am the same; I have never liked it and never will'. However, even if some found the regular tests off putting, all the pupils felt that they had learned more Spanish than they usually do: 'I have learned more Spanish because we have been learning both in and out of school'. Positive comments about what they had found easy or helpful included: 'the strategies suited me. And I tried all of them. It's wider range of strategies which I never new [sic]'. The same pupil added that the hard thing was: 'they were very different from what I usually do'. The pupils made frequent reference to the usefulness of the checklists. A number made comments such as: 'some of the strategies took a long time to do' and they would have liked more time to practise them in class rather than at home. They would also have liked more help with their pronunciation.

Interviews

Renee (test scores: 5, 10, 9, 10) said she used to get bored learning words because it took her such a long time. Now the strategies make it easier, quicker and more fun .

Viet, although he was a low attainer and his test scores were not high (0, 2, 4, 5), he made regular progress and tried out new strategies each week. He said that before the strategy instruction, he did not know how to go about learning his vocabulary and had not related the 'look-cover-test-check' taught in English lessons to the learning of Spanish.

Rochelle (2, 9, 7, 9). She had not used any strategies for the first test but had then used the pelmanism game and look-cover-test-check. She commented that the strategies are fun and when it is fun, she learns more. She also said that she would use the strategies in other subjects to learn spellings or mathematical formulae.

Lessons to be learned

The possible benefits of a coherent, cross-curricular approach to strategy instruction are evident from the last two pupils' comments.

As already noted, the teachers concluded that constant reminders were essential in the early stages of the cycle. They also thought that pupils might have been even more motivated if they had been given weekly feedback on their test results and their progress, instead of waiting till the end of the project.

Possible links to research findings
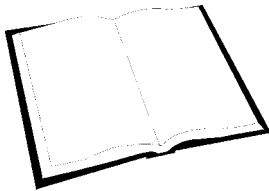
- Pupils' preference for the relatively easy strategies (reading words, writing words down etc) is reminiscent of Chesterfield and Chesterfield's (1985) study discussed in chapter 1. They suggested that there may be a 'developmental order' in which strategies are acquired, some strategies being acquired earlier like basic, mechanical strategies in the receptive skills.

- The boys' improvement in test scores may support Macaro's (1997) findings that boys find strategy instruction particularly helpful. On the other hand, the teachers reported that they appeared to have a more carefree, lazy attitude to their work. One possible way of resolving this conflicting evidence may be that, as Grenfell and Harris (1999) and Barton (forthcoming) suggest, peer pressure on boys may make it 'uncool' to show that they are taking their work seriously.

- The teachers had decided that they did not have time to include the action-planning step of the cycle. Would action plans have helped pupils focus on the strategies they particularly needed (eg for pronunciation problems) and helped the boys to take more responsibility for their learning?

☐ Case study 2

This project will not be described in such detail, as in many ways it was similar to the first. Action plans, however, were a feature of *Johanna Smith's* project, also on memorisation strategies. She worked with a middle to low ability class, aged between 11 and 12 years old, in a boys' school with a predominantly white working class intake. Figure 2.4 shows two of her pupils' action plans. On reflection, she thought that pupils

may have needed more guidance in drawing up their plans. At best pupils like Darren may opt for a strategy simply because it '*looks fun*'. At worst, they are like Simon, who '*does not know*' why he has selected a particular strategy. Part of raising their metacognitive awareness may be helping them to see that if their problem is pronouncing the words, it will not help them to write the words down and they should put them to a tune or a rap. Conversely, if their problem is remembering the meaning of a word, tunes may not help but associating it to a similar sounding English word and drawing a picture of it may. We return to the issue of action plans in chapter 8.

Figure 2.4: Two pupils' action plans

Name:	Darren
Class:	7 WD
Date:	Jeudi, le 13 mai 1999
Test 1:	
Date:	Le 12 mai 1999
Test Result:	7/10
How did you learn your vocab?	I learnt my vocab with a partner We tested each other spelling it out
Do you think this method suits you? Please try to explain why.	I think this method suits me because it's easyer. [sic]
Action Plan:	
Next time I will try …	To do a 50/50 cover up because it sounds easy.
Why?+	Because it also looks fun and interesting.

Name:	Simon
Class:	7 RN
Date:	13 - 5 - 99
Test 1:	
Date:	12 - 5 - 99
Test Result:	9/10 Good scor [sic]
How did you learn your vocab?	I tested my patner and they tested me.
Do you think this method suits you? Please try to explain why.	Yes because I need help here and thir [sic].
Action Plan:	
Next time I will try …	'Look, cover, wright [sic] check'
Why?	I do not know.

The other interesting feature of Johanna's project was that she provided pupils with regular feedback on their test results and even encouraged them to use computers to make their own bar chart (2.5) relating their test scores to the strategies they used. It is probably unsurprising that Lee scored better with the strategy of look-cover-write-check (LCWC) than simply looking at the words (MEMO). The less mechanical the strategy, the more the word is likely to be retained.

Figure 2.5: Graph of one pupil's test result
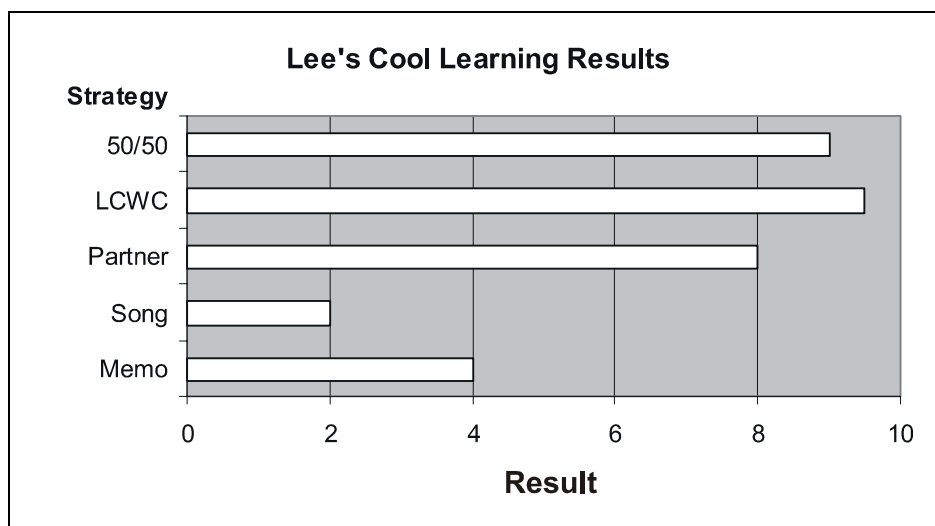
A number of different activities have been described for teaching memorisation strategies. Think of one of your classes for whom memorisation strategies might be particularly useful. Then fill in the box below.

Class	
Which strategies do you think they are already using?	
Which new strategies do you think would be most useful for them?	
Activities for awareness-raising	
Activities for modelling	
Activities for practice	
Will you use an action plan?	

You may want to return to these questions after you have read chapter 8. Is there anything you want to change?

Chapter 3:
Reading Strategies

In the last chapter, we explored strategy instruction for memorisation strategies. The next case study looks at reading strategies and we will find some of the same issues emerging. You may want to refer to the short list of reading strategies in chapter 1, or the list in the Appendix to see what strategies are involved.

☐ Case study 1

Skill area	Reading strategies with a particular view to avoiding pupils wasting time during their examinations in looking words up unnecessarily in the dictionary.
Student Teachers	Nathalie Mendes and Augusta Viera.
Context	A girls' catholic school in a predominantly middle class London suburb.
Target group	A class of 13-14-years-olds, in their third year of learning French. The class was a motivated, well-behaved, able group.
Number and length of lessons	7 lessons of 1 hour 10 minutes each over a five-week period.

The cycle of strategy instruction

Awareness-raising

Pupils were given a text (a short advert for a beauty product) and asked to read it, making a note of the steps they went through in order to understand the words they did not know. The word strategy was not used. They were also asked to write how long it took them and whether they had used a dictionary. The next lesson, the teachers brainstormed the strategies the pupils had used and explained that the aim was to widen their range of strategies, so that they would not have to waste time looking up so many words in the dictionary. They pointed out that high attainers might do even better if they

used more strategies and the problems experienced by low attainers may be due to lack of strategies rather than lack of ability.

Modelling

Pupils were given 3 minutes to read the Dutch poem (see Figure 1.1) in pairs and to try to understand it. The pictures had been coloured in and the last more complex line was covered up in order not to discourage the lower attainers. Then, the teachers asked the pupils which strategies they had used and wrote them on the board. The teachers observed that they enjoyed translating the poem, especially as they also learn German and were able to make a number of guesses from words that looked like German words. They also felt that it had been encouraging for pupils to see how much they could translate without using a dictionary.

The teachers then used the worksheet in Figure 3.1 to model each of the strategies needed to understand 'Peur dans les airs'.

Figure 3.1: Modelling reading strategies

For homework, pupils were given another advert to read and a strategy checklist; Figure 3.2. They were directed to using strategies 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 8 on the list.

Figure 3.2: Reading strategy checklist

Reading strategies

Before reading

1. **Recognising type of text**
   Look at the layout to see if you can guess what kind of text it is
   example: a newspaper article, an advert, a poem…

2. **Using pictures, headlines and title**
   It helps you guess what the text is about

3. **Brainstorming**
   Try to remember as many words as you can about the topic

While reading

4. **Reading the whole text through**
   Try to get a rough idea of what the text might be about and don't
   panic when there are words you don't understand

5. **Picking out cognates and other familiar words**
   Cognates are words that look like English words
   e.g.: "capitale", "sport"

6. **Sounding the words out in your head**
   A word may not look like an English word but it may sound like one.
   Say it over and over again
   e.g: "musique", "couleur", "attaquer"

7. **Recognising names of people and places**
   e.g.: "Madame Dunant", "Paris"

8. **Using punctuation**
   e.g.: question marks, exclamation marks, capital letters…

9. **Substituting unknown words with English words**
   e.g: "she has *something* on her head"

10. **Making sensible guesses from the context**
    Use your knowledge of the world

11. **Analysing the grammar**
    Analyse verbs endings, word order and their grammatical category

Use the key-words and NEVER GIVE UP!

Practice

In the following two lessons, the strategies were practised within a group work situation so that pupils could share the way they used strategies and to give them confidence in reading independently. Twelve texts from popular magazines were chosen, colour copied and laminated. The class was divided into groups of four and each group had to complete at least two texts. Before the group as a whole shared their ideas on what the text meant, each individual member chose one strategy on which to focus and indicated on a sheet what 'their' strategy had helped them to understand, giving examples. In the event, the pupils' comments showed that they were not certain what was required. So, for the following lesson, the teachers decided to structure the group work more tightly, giving the pupils the following directions:

1. first, help the person who chose the strategy of brainstorming (the strategy of 'activating prior knowledge') to share all the words the group knows about the topic (5 minutes);

2. then, read the text silently thinking about the strategy you are going to focus on (5 minutes);

3. go round the group, each person saying briefly what they found out from 'their' strategy (10 minutes);

4. summarise the text together (10 minutes).

For homework, pupils were given a little booklet containing two texts to read and two worksheets to complete. The first text was relatively easy with plenty of pictures and cognates to encourage low attainers. The second text, a poem without pictures, (Prévert's 'Déjeuner du matin'), was harder and was deliberately chosen to encourage pupils to use only the words themselves for clues and also to pay attention to clues from the grammar. The poem is written from the viewpoint of a woman watching her lover, who is about to leave her, drinking a cup of coffee (Figure 3.3). (The use of the second poem in Figure 3.3 will be discussed on p. 45.)

Figure 3.3: Two French poems

Jacques Prévert:
DÉJEUNER DU MATIN

Il a mis le café
Dans la tasse
Il a mis le lait
Dans la tasse de café
Il a mis le sucre
Dans le café au lait
Avec la petit cuiller
Il a tourné
Il a bu le café au lait
Et il a reposé la tasse

POUR TOI MON AMOUR

Je suis allé au marché aux
    oiseaux
Et j'ai acheté des oiseaux
    Pour toi
    mon amour
Je suis allé au marché aux
    fleurs
Et j'ai acheté des fleurs
    Pour toi
    mon amour
Je suis allé au marché à la
    famille

```
Sans me parler
Il a allumé
Une cigarette
Il a fait des ronds
Avec la fumée
Il a mis les cendres
Dans le cendrier
Sans me parler
Sans me regarder
Il s'est levé
Il a mis
Son chapeau sur sa tête
Il a mis
Son manteau de pluie
Parce qu'il pleuvait
Et il est parti
Sous la pluie
Sans une parole
Sans me regarder
Et moi j'ai pris
Ma tête dans ma main
Et j'ai pleuré.
```

```
                  feraille
   Et j'ai acheté des chaînes
      De lourdes chaînes
            Pour toi
           mon amour
   Et puis je suis allé au
      marché aux esclaves
       Et je t'ai cherchée
 Mais je ne t'ai pas trouvée
         Mon amour.
```

Jacques Prévert, 'Déjeuner du matin',
'Pour toi mon amour'. In *Paroles*.
(c) Editions GALLIMARD

Responding to pupils' difficulties; using grammatical clues to guess meaning

It is perhaps worth briefly explaining at this point that in many English schools, teachers have interpreted Communicative Language Teaching as implying a strong emphasis on oral work with less attention paid to grammar. The recently revised National Curriculum gives grammar teaching a more significant role, as the problems these student teachers encountered were typical of the situation in many classrooms.

Only one pupil (a medium attainer) correctly guessed the gist of the poem; others thought it was about what people have for breakfast! The teachers realised that the pupils had not been aware of the value of using such basic grammatical clues as the use of *je* and *il* to establish that there must be two people and the use of the perfect tense to establish that it was a particular event located in the past. They therefore decided that they needed to spend the next lesson modelling how to use grammatical clues. They quickly revised pronouns and then asked pupils to spot some of them in the text, reminding them that *je* could also be *j'*. They showed them that this must mean that there were two people in the poem. They then revised the formation of the perfect tense. In the following lesson, they went through the poem in detail, so that pupils could see each strategy they could have used to understand it. First, they asked them to come up and underline on the overhead transparency all the cognates and familiar words. Then they worked through the following questions.

44

- What tells you it is a poem?

- Underline the personal pronouns. How many characters are there? Who are they?

- Underline the verbs. What tenses are they?

- What are the main actions in the text?

- What do *dans* and *sans* mean? What kind of words are they?

The pupils appeared to enjoy this activity, saying: *'it made things clearer to us'*.

Further practice of using grammatical clues to guess meaning

Pupils were given a second text by the same author (Figure 3.3) but this time they were directed in a worksheet to follow a similar sequence of questions as had been discussed together in the previous lesson. The teachers were disappointed to observe that nearly 50% of the pupils still did not understand that there were two characters in the poem and 42% said the text was in the present tense. Arguably, even though they may have understood *je, tu, il/elle* from the first poem, they may not have recognised *toi* in this poem. The fact that very few pupils understood *chaînes* or *esclaves* (key words for understanding the gist) must also have exacerbated their problems. It suggests that what may seem obvious cognates to us may not be for our pupils.

Interestingly, when asked to list the strategies they had used, only 23% said they had analysed the grammar even though half of the questions on the worksheet had involved doing so! This raises the issue of what pupils understand grammar to be and of finding readily comprehensible terms to label strategies. The teachers again responded to pupils' difficulties next lesson by correcting the exercise in detail and modelling how the strategies could have helped them understand it.

Finally pupils were given a similar text to the initial beauty advert they had been given at the start of the project, with a similar number of cognates, familiar words, and at approximately the same level of grammatical difficulty. They were also asked to write down how long it took them to understand and summarise the text, whether they had used a dictionary and to list the strategies they had used, using the checklist they had been given.

Methods used to evaluate the project

- Comparison of time taken and use of dictionary for the reading text given at the start of the project to a similar text given following strategy instruction.

- Comparison of pupils' reported use of strategies before and after strategy instruction.

- Questionnaire on whether pupils thought the strategy instruction had been helpful.

- Interview with five pupils.

Results of the project

Test results

The overall average time spent on the text was unchanged (ie 20 minutes) but only 20% (as compared to 73%) had had to resort to the dictionary.

Reported strategy use

For the final text, two thirds of the class reported using more than one new strategy;

- Making sensible guesses from the context: 89% more pupils used this than in the first text;

- Spotting cognates: 40% more pupils used this than in the first text;

- Using pictures, headlines and title: again 40% more pupils used this;

- Substituting unknown words with English words: 72% tried this but 40% said it did not help. So an overall total of 28% used it more than in the first text;

- Sounding words out in your head: 76% tried this but 50% of those said that it did not help them. So an overall total of 18% used it more than in the first text;

- Analysing the grammar: 16% more;

Reading the whole text through: 14% more.

Questionnaire

14 pupils completed the questionnaire although the class was about twice that size. Figure 3.4 shows one pupil's responses.

Figure 3.4: One pupil's responses to the questionnaire

Name: Patricia.

Questionnaire

1) Are you regularly using any new strategies that you were not using before? Yes /No

2) If No, Why?

_____

_____

_____

3) If Yes, which new strategies?

• Picking out cognates and other familiar words. - I never use to do this.
• Substituting unknown words with English words.
• Analysing Grammar.
• Regognising names and Places.

4) Do you find those strategies useful?   Yes /No
Why?
because it is so much easier to work out which type of text it is and what it is about without taking time with a dictionary.

5) Do you find reading: (easier) / harder / the same ?

6) Do you enjoy reading: less / more / (the same?)

7) Do you use the dictionary: (less) / more / the same?

8) Have the new strategies helped you save time? (Yes) / No

Between 5 and 10 mins.

- 88% reported regularly using at least three new strategies that they were not using before. The other 12% felt that their existing strategies were sufficient to read the texts.

- 88% found reading easier. 12% found it the same.

- 12% enjoyed reading more, 84% found it the same, 4% enjoyed reading less.

- 72% said the strategies helped them save time, 12% said it made no difference, 16% said strategies involved more time.

Interviews

Anne Marie: a low attainer, who did not find the new strategies helpful, made no progress and appeared from her work not to use even simple strategies: *'I don't understand the words, even using the strategies doesn't help because I can't understand it. I do try at the start but after it is too difficult'.*

Helen: a low attainer, who made a lot of progress, said the new strategies were useful, particularly recognising words similar to English ones, and helped her to save time.

Victoria: an average attainer, used a limited amount of strategies but not the strategy of using grammatical clues: *'The strategies of using the cognates and making guesses helped me save time. I understand French texts better now.'*

Rianna: an average attainer, who made a lot of progress, considerably expanded her repertoire of strategies or at least her use of them.

Lisa: a high attainer, who did not make much progress and did not push herself to use the analysing grammar strategy: *'It takes me longer to understand it because I have to go through all the strategies. I enjoy reading less just because it takes a long time and is boring.'*

Amy: a high attainer, made good progress: *'It takes me kind of the same time because the strategies are different from the ones I used before. Before I was looking at the text as a whole bit, but with the new strategies, I have learnt I can separate the text into different sections and concentrate on different parts of it. That is why it takes me the same time but I am going into more detail and I understand the text better now.'*

Lessons to be learned

The teachers felt that the pupils needed more time to assimilate the strategies progressively and over a longer period so that they automatically knew how and when to use them. This possibly explains why only 12% of pupils reported enjoying reading more. They are still at the stage where they have to make a conscious effort to use each strategy and, as Lisa indicates, it can be time consuming. However, time spent internalising strategies that can be transferred to any text is likely to be more productive in the long term than time spent searching for individual words in the dictionary. The teachers were particularly surprised at pupils' lack of grammatical knowledge and felt that more time would be needed to build it up before they could use grammatical clues as a strategy.

Possible links to research findings
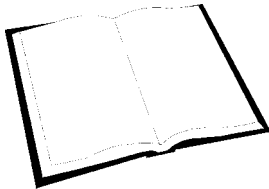
- Pupils' preference for the relatively straightforward strategies (cognates, pictures etc) and their struggle with the harder ones like using grammatical analysis for clues is reminiscent of Chesterfield and Chesterfield's proposal (1985) that there may be a 'natural' developmental order. That said, we cannot be certain whether their difficulties in this area are simply because they had not been exposed to much explicit grammar teaching.

- Amy provides a good example of how successful learners use strategies in combination, discussed in Graham (1997) and O'Malley and Chamot (1990). A common distinction drawn in the research literature is between strategies involved in 'top down' processing, like going for the overall gist of the text and using pictures for general clues as to the content, and those used in 'bottom up' processing; word for word translation, looking for grammatical clues etc. Following the strategy instruction, it seemed that Amy was able to use both.

- As in the memorisation case study, it seems that some pupils were more motivated than others and more willing to experiment with strategies. How do we encourage low attaining pupils like Anne Marie to widen their use of strategies? It appears that, in spite of the strategy instruction, she continued to translate every word ('bottom up processing') rather than also look for the overall meaning of the text. So she continued to become quickly discouraged and not to persist in her reading. The student teachers in this case study did not make use of action plans. Would such a plan have helped Anne Marie to see that the strategy she needed most was to

read the whole text through first and that this might help her make sensible guesses about the meaning of individual words?

▪ A further related question is the issue of ability/attainment. Both Anne Marie and Helen are low attainers. Yet one is much more willing to adopt new strategies than the other. Both Lisa and Amy are high attainers but only Amy makes the most of the strategy instruction offered. It has been suggested (Grenfell and Harris 1999) that factors such as personality may play an important role in pupils' openness to strategy instruction.

Think of one of your classes. Make a list of three pupils who you think would be willing to adopt new strategies and three who might be more reluctant to try something new. What has each group got in common – attainment, gender, personality?

3 receptive pupils	▪
	▪
	▪
3 reluctant pupils	▪
	▪
	▪
Factors in common	
Tools of persuasion!	What would you do to try to persuade the more reluctant? You could return to this question once you have read chapter 8.

If you are particularly interested in the strategies involved in reading, you may want to refer now to the case study in chapter 5 on reading strategies, carried out with university students, and to the project carried out in Portuguese secondary schools described in chapter 7.

Chapter 4:
Communication Strategies

Before describing the next case studies, it may be helpful to identify what are communication strategies; the strategies that we use to cope with trying to talk in the L2 (the foreign language) and particularly the 'fillers' or time gaining strategies that the student teachers focussed on.
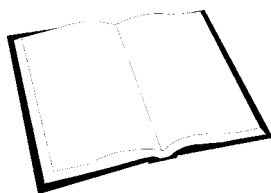
Some people can communicate effectively in an L2 with only 100 words. How do they do it? They use their hands, they imitate the sound or movement of things, they mix languages, they create new words, they describe or circumlocute something they don't know the word for; in short they use communication strategies.

Stalling *or time gaining strategies* are functionally different from the strategies mentioned above because they are not actually used to compensate for any linguistic deficiencies but rather to gain time and to keep the communication channel open at times of difficulty.

They provide the learners with a sense of security in the L2 by allowing them room to manoeuvre in times of difficulty. Rather than giving up their message, learners may decide to try and remain in the conversation and achieve their communicative goal.

Dornyei (1995, p. 57)

Stalling strategies then are those little words like 'well, you know, really' that give us time to think.

☐ Case Study 1

Skill area	Communication strategies particularly stalling strategies/ fillers.
Student Teachers	Katherine Moulds and Claire Sykes.

Context	A mixed comprehensive school in South London with a predominantly white working class intake.
Target group	A class of 13-14-year-old pupils in their third year of learning French. The classes in the school are streamed; high attaining pupils being placed together in the 'top' classes, low attainers in the 'bottom'. This was a 'top' group but a noisy, talkative class.
Number and length of lessons	Six one hour lessons over a four week period.
Constraints	The project was interrupted by the annual school 'Arts festival' which meant that pupils could not follow their usual timetable for two weeks. The class was not used to being taught in the target language and their regular class teacher focussed more on written than oral work. So pupils' level of oral competence was rather basic.

The cycle of strategy instruction

Awareness-raising

Pupils were placed in groups of three and told to choose an interviewer, an interviewee and a judge. The interviewers were given an interview sheet with questions to ask; for example on favourite school subjects and plans for the future. Most of this was new vocabulary. They were told to find out as much as possible without using the mother tongue. The judges were taken aside from the rest of the class at the start of the lesson and asked to observe how the information was relayed and to monitor any speaking in the mother tongue. The other pupils were not aware of their brief. The next lesson, pupils were asked what they had found difficult during the interview, and what strategies they had used to communicate when they lacked the vocabulary they needed. They mentioned strategies like mime and saying an English word with a French accent. The teachers discussed others like 'using key words' even if you cannot say a full sentence and getting the other person talking by asking *'et toi?'*. They then explained that 'fillers' were also a useful strategy; those little words like *'well, really, I don't know'* that give us time to think if we are not sure of how to say something. They told the class that this was the strategy they would mainly focus on over the following weeks. The class then brainstormed a list of English 'fillers'. They came up with about 40 words, some of the more original ones ('dust') leading to a discussion about local slang. Pupils were interested to find out that slang existed in France as well. The teachers explained how using fillers can make you sound more fluent as well as giving you thinking time.

Modelling

Pupils listened to a conversation in French where two friends discussed which bands they liked and whether to go to the cinema. These topics were part of the scheme of work but the teachers had asked two native speakers to make a special tape, deliberately incorporating fillers. Pupils were asked to write down any fillers that they could spot. They were then given a transcript of the conversation with the fillers blanked out and a list of possible fillers beneath it. Their task was to listen again to try to insert the fillers. The teachers were surprised by how much pupils enjoyed trying to copy the intonation of the native speakers and how well some of them managed to identify the more difficult fillers such as *alors* and *d'accord*, as well as easier ones such as *euh* and *mmm*. It also allowed a discussion of how conversations 'work'; how people follow on from the last person by answering a question or making a relevant comment in agreement or disagreement and that these were also fillers. For homework, pupils had to complete the conversation by adding another four lines with fillers in them.

Practice

In the next lesson, pupils were placed in groups of three to a) decide whose four line homework conversation was the best and b) to practise the entire conversation before recording it on tape. The homework was to group the fillers under categories such as positive / agreement and negative / disagreement. On reflection, the teachers felt that pupils probably needed to know in advance that the aim was for them to understand which fillers could be used almost regardless of context to provide thinking time (*eh bien, alors* etc) and which fillers required more careful selection (*pas du tout, tout à fait*). The latter would be those with a more affective content; to express strong agreement or disagreement and would probably be harder to use spontaneously as pupils would have to think more about which one was appropriate.

During the process of reviewing how pupils had categorised the fillers, the teachers realised that they were still not entirely aware of the meaning of some of them. When they asked pupils to identify the hardest, pupils chose; *tiens, tout à fait, franchement, enfin*. As each was mentioned, the teachers gave a simple example of how it could be used and then asked pupils to practise it in pairs; for example, *tiens* was practised by pupils handing each other a pen, pencil etc and the other replying *merci*. The teachers then asked pupils deliberately provocative questions such as '*Gary, tu es bavard?*' to which he had to reply either '*tout à fait*' or '*mais non*'. '*Franchement oui*', and '*franchement non*' were practised in a similar way. Some pupils used fillers accurately and imaginatively. Others were still uncertain both about the meaning of the words and exactly how and when they could be used. The teachers felt that they should have worked out an exact translation for each filler and given it to the pupils, as it was difficult to come up with a suitable translation for fillers like *ben, alors* on the spot!

This list was prepared in time for the next lesson. Pupils seemed delighted to receive it: '*oh great we can take this to France with us and speak to French people.*'

A number of other activities for practising fillers were used. For example in one activity, pupils were invited to take it in turns to throw a ball round the class, asking a question. The person who caught it had to reply using a filler and then throw it to someone else. Most of them managed this, although there was little variation, *mais oui* and *mais non*, being the most popular choices. In another activity, each group chose a mystery object from a bag that the class would subsequently have to guess from their description of it. They had 10 minutes to think of how to describe it, without using a dictionary or a textbook. They were also to use fillers during any pauses. Again, they appeared confident to speak French in front of the class although their utterances tended to be limited to key words and mimes eg *c'est fruit, c'est vert, c'est manger* (for apple), *c'est oeuf euh* (mime of boiling an egg).. *euh..tasse* (for egg cup).

During these activities, pupils were clearly trying hard to use the fillers but spontaneous speech poses particular demands that have to be resolved in a matter of seconds:

- understand the question you are being asked;

- think of an appropriate answer;

- think of an appropriate filler; do you want a simple 'time saver' or can you manage something with more of an affective content?

As Rebecca said: *'I wanted to say franchement oui, but when it came down to it, I panicked and forgot'*.

Action planning

Finally, pupils were given an interview task, similar to the task at the start of the project, but this time with different unfamiliar topics. Again, there was an interviewer, an interviewee and a judge. The judge awarded scores both for strategy use and for whether the messages had been successfully conveyed.

When they had completed the interview task, pupils were given a short questionnaire to prepare them for doing their action plans. They completed this in groups, discussing whether they had improved or not and why. They then wrote the plans with enthusiasm and appeared to be honest about which new strategies they would try.

Methods of evaluating the project

- Unfortunately both the interview task before the strategy instruction and the one at the end of it were scored by the pupils themselves and the teachers did not tape record them in order to be able to compare pupils' performances. They did however make some informal field notes and also invited the regular class teacher to observe the last lessons and comment on any differences he noticed.

- Action plans

- Interview with six pupils; three boys and three girls.

Results of the project

Informal field notes

Although everybody was making an effort to do the final interview task properly, the teachers noted that there were frequent errors and that pupils were not using many of the fillers spontaneously apart from *euh* and *mmm*! However they were trying to use as much French as possible and seemed more ready to take risks than in the task at the start of the project. Shakira, a high attaining but usually unmotivated pupil, came up afterwards to the teachers and said very proudly: '*non parler anglais, pas du tout!*'

Regular class teacher's comments

The class teacher was impressed that everybody was making an effort to do the tasks properly, that they were more confident in their speaking and more *willing to have a go*. He noted that they *did not freeze so much when asked a question but would give themselves thinking time by making euh noises*. He felt that two of the risk-taking higher attainers had made remarkable progress and was impressed that formerly unmotivated pupils were all taking part in the lessons. He also noted that Sarah, a very shy pupil, was *coming out of herself a bit* and had done very well on her last test and that Ashley, a low attainer, was managing to communicate.

Action Plans

9 boys and 18 girls completed these. All pupils said that they would use fillers in the future, the most popular ones being *mmm, euh, d'accord, bref, enfin, franchement, tiens, pas du tout, bof, je sais pas, tout à fait*. The teachers noted that these seemed to be either the shorter ones or those with a stronger affective content like *pas du tout*. One pupil's comment suggested that somehow he was aware of the need for extensive practice in order for new strategies to be fully internalised. In response to the question 'how will you know that you are getting better?' he replied: '*I will start using all these techniques without even realising it. It may even make me sound more French*'. Another pupil stressed that the new strategies would enable him to '*stay in a conversation longer because I will be able to hang the conversation out by using the fillers*'. The girls in particular indicated communication strategies they would try apart from the fillers. The teachers suggested that this could mean that girls are more willing than boys to try out new strategies but they also recognised that it could simply indicate that girls took the action planning and their work in general more seriously than boys.

Interviews

The reactions of both the girls and the boys interviewed appeared to be positive.

Mathew, an extrovert but formerly unmotivated boy, said: '*cos you know that when the French people speak, they do that euh, euh and all that and now we can do it.*'

Rebecca (an average, outgoing pupil) indicates the emotional content of fillers and the way we often latch on to one or two of them: '*I love the word franchement. I don't feel confident enough to walk up to a French person in the street and talk to them but if I got chatting to one then I would definitely use the word franchement. Also we sound more authentic as we can put more feeling in that way.*'

Shakira felt it had boosted her confidence: '*it makes you sound more French instead of just stupid*'. Both she and Nathalie (a shy pupil) felt that: '*people who normally would not have said anything had all tried speaking*'.

Gary, a shy, average attainer, commented: '*when you're trying to ask something and you're not very fluent it's a bit difficult and fillers give you time to think about what you're going to say.*'

The teachers noted that fillers appeared to improve the level of motivation, both of the shyer and the more extrovert pupils. The wish to sound authentic also emerged from the interview comments. It is almost as if they are aware of the gap between the artificial, stilted nature of many role play activities and 'real life' communication and between their ability to communicate successfully in their first language and their very limited repertoire in the L2.

Lessons to be learned

The teachers felt that they could have devised some more quick oral pair work tasks for pupils to practise each of the fillers and to really grasp the context in which it could be used. Although pupils' oral confidence had improved, the teachers were disappointed that, with the exception of Andrew, a high attaining pupil, none of the pupils mentioned how the project had helped them to reflect on their language learning and take more responsibility for working independently.

They had not, for example, revised the fillers over half term as they had been told to do, although the teachers realised they should have given them a more concrete task than simply revising, possibly involving teaching them some simple memorisation strategies.

Possible links to research findings
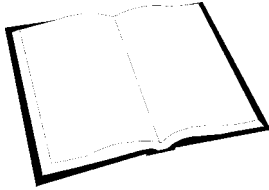
- The fact that pupils struggled to use spontaneously even the simplest of fillers appears to resonate with the 'natural' order of emergence of strategies; those strategies involving interaction emerging later than basic strategies involved in receptive skills. It also reflects Bialystock's findings (1990) that strategy instruction in communication strategies has been less successful than in other areas. More recently Dornyei (1995) however reports some success in teaching Communication strategies, noting, for example, that less fluent learners were able to use fillers and thus become more fluent, at least on a simple definition of fluency. Whilst the teachers did not measure fluency, it is interesting that the confidence of so many of the pupils seemed to have improved, even if the number and nature of the fillers they used was limited.

- The project raises the particular problems of teaching communication strategies (as compared to reading or memorisation strategies). It may be that it is relatively easy for pupils to see how they can use memorisation and reading strategies on their own. Communication strategies such as fillers are much harder both to teach and to use independently since;

  a) the actual words for the fillers must be learned (eg through memorisation strategies);

  b) they must be practised. Although this can be done by listening and writing, as the teachers did, in the end they are by their very nature interactive;

  c) more than any other strategy area, they have to be internalised to the point that they can be drawn on automatically since there is no time for reflection in spontaneous speech.

We will return to these points in chapter 8, when we discuss which strategies to teach when.

- It seems that both low and high attainers, extrovert and shyer pupils responded well to the strategy instruction, at least in terms of becoming more motivated and more confident orally, if not in terms of adopting a wide range of fillers.

- It remains hard to establish if boys are more receptive to strategy instruction than girls. This is discussed in more detail in the description of the next project. On the one hand, girls appeared to take the action plans more seriously and made greater reference than boys to strategies that they would use apart from fillers. On the other hand, from the interviews and from the class teacher's comments, it appeared that boys' response was positive. As in the memorisation case studies, we will not describe the second illustration in as much detail as the first, since many of the activities used were similar.

☐ Case Study 2

The focus of *Leanda Reed and Fabrice Bana's* project was encouraging spontaneous oral interaction between pupils. One of the elements was to teach fillers. They worked with a class aged between 14 and 15 years in a mixed school with a high proportion of pupils from the local minority ethnic communities. Particular features of their project were:

- they deliberately chose a very boring topic (buying petrol at the garage and reporting problems such as broken windscreen, tyre puncture etc) to see if techniques such as the use of drama and of fillers could enliven it;

- they too provided activities to help pupils understand the nature and function of fillers. Pupils performed a role play in English of breaking down on the motorway. A 'secret agent with a secret task' noted down fillers used but the other pupils in the group were not aware of exactly what they were doing. The agents then reported back all the fillers they had heard and there was a discussion on the function they serve in conversations;

- they then showed them an extract from a popular English soap opera and asked them to note the fillers they heard. Pupils were able then to come up with some fillers (albeit somewhat stereotypical) that they already knew in French eg *zut, bien, oh là là;*

- like Claire and Katherine, the student teachers had not thought through in advance the exact translation for each filler and this proved a problem;

- to practise the fillers, they created a board game, where pupils had to report the mechanical problem indicated on the square on which they landed but had to begin by using the filler indicated (Figure 4.1). The final activity was a role-play which was videoed.

Figure 4.1: Board game for fillers

j'ai gagné	tu triches!	j'ai fini	à toi à moi
Départ	alors	zut!	1
mince!	……quoi	3	ah oui
voilà	2	..vous savez	uhm
4	…quand même!	bon	oh! là!
alors	…vous voyez…	2	**Arrivée**

The teachers noted that, as in Claire and Katherine's projects, the pupils tended to stick to a small number of fillers (*mince, zut, euh, umm, oh là là*); some of which they knew at least passively already. Again however, the teachers were impressed by how much pupils' general confidence in oral work improved, although the girls seemed to be more confident than the boys. In a questionnaire completed by 13 girls and 6 boys, 36% of the girls said that their confidence in speaking had improved compared to only 11% of the boys.

In an interview, one girl said *'I was like more fluent. it was like kinda fun as well cos you got the fillers in there. They give you more confidence to speak'*. Low attaining boys were less positive: *'anyway, I don't use fillers in English'*, *'I got mixed up'*. The teachers felt however that the peer pressure to be seen to be 'cool', already mentioned in relation to the first memorisation case study, may have been a factor.
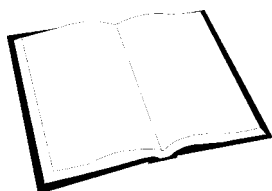
The reluctance of some boys, particularly older ones, to engage in oral work is discussed in Harris 1998, p. 61:

> They may feel particularly frustrated at appearing 'tongue tied', as they approach adolescence, when 'image' is all-important. As one thirteen-year-old boy commented: *'I've been like learning it for two years and I'm still speaking a two year old's language.'*

Finally, the low attaining boys also said that they would have liked more practice in the fillers, an issue that emerged in Claire and Katherine's project and indeed across all the projects.

These projects focussed on the teaching of fillers and some examples in French have been provided. Fillers are notoriously difficult to translate, not least because they are so dependent on the context.

But here are some suggestions. You may want to add to them, modify or translate them into another language that you are teaching.

English	French	German	Spanish
English	*French*	*German*	*Spanish*
Er	Euh	Ahm	hmm
Well yes	Ben oui	Hmm ja	Pués sí
Well no	Ben non	Hmm nein	Pués no
Yes, of course	Mais oui	Ja, natürlich	Claro que sí
No, of course not	Mais non	Natürlich nicht	Claro que no
Oh really?	Ah bon?	Wirklich? Echt?	Ah sí
So what?	Et alors?	Na und?	Y qué
Absolutely, completely	Tout à fait	Selbstverständlich absolut	Por supuesto
Not at all! No Way!	Pas du tout	Gar nicht, überhaupt nicht	Para nada
I don't know/ care	Bof, je ne sais pas	Na und?	No me importa
Hey	Tiens	He	Eh
Basically	En bref, en somme	Im Grunde	En breve
So, anyway	Alors, de toute façon	Und überhaupt	Pués, entonces

Look at the list of communication strategies in the Appendix. Are there other Communication strategies, apart from fillers, that you think would be more relevant and accessible to your classes?

How to Teach Learning Strategies;
the Secondary School Context

A summary of common themes and issues

The last three chapters have illustrated strategy instruction in a range of school contexts in the UK. In part 2, we will be looking at strategy instruction in the university context. But first, it might be helpful to summarise any common themes and issues that seem to emerge from the school-based projects. We will then be in a better position to compare them to the university contexts and establish any key similarities or differences.

Positive effects of strategy instruction

Clearly these classroom-based projects do not constitute rigorous research and any conclusions must be speculative. Nevertheless, there is some indication of the following positive effects of strategy instruction:

- improvement in test scores (first memorisation project);

- improvement in confidence and risk taking (communication strategy projects);

- increase in the range of strategies used and less need to resort to a dictionary (reading project);

- cross-curricular transfer of strategies from Modern Languages to other subject areas (first memorisation project);

- improved motivation at least for some pupils.

Lessons learned

Points stressed by the teachers were the need for:

- time. The teachers in all the projects felt that pupils needed more time if they were to fully assimilate the strategies;

- extensive practice. Pupils needed opportunities to keep using the strategies across a number of tasks and for their teachers to keep explicitly reminding them to do so. Communication strategies may pose particular problems and require even more practice than strategies in other skill areas;

- pair and group work. The teachers in the communication strategy project would have liked to provide more opportunities for pupils to practise in pairs and groups

and certainly the pupils in the reading project appeared to respond very positively to the group work tasks.

Other points

There was some suggestion to support Chesterfield and Chesterfield's notion of a developmental order, with these school pupils tending to adopt relatively 'easy' strategies like looking for cognates or writing words over and over, and finding strategies like looking for grammatical clues harder.

Questions

Willingness to adopt new strategies

Motivation

Although there was evidence of improved motivation for some pupils, others seemed unwilling either to try out new strategies or to persist in the face of difficulties. Some, for example, found using new strategies too time consuming. Providing regular feedback in the form of test results, as Johanna Smith did, may give them an immediate sense of success and 'proof' that it is worth experimenting with new strategies.

It is interesting to note that action planning was the step omitted by some of the student teachers. Yet we suggested in chapter 3 that one reason why Anne Marie remained unconvinced about the value of strategy instruction, may have been that she continued to use unhelpful 'bottom-up' strategies. Action plans that guide pupils towards the most appropriate strategies for their particular problem could help ensure that they experience this sense of success. *What other approaches can enhance motivation?*

Personality and attainment

There seemed no clear evidence to support suggestions from research that high attainers may be more willing than low attainers to adopt new strategies. It has been argued that low attainers may be more reluctant because they feel they are 'no good at languages anyway' so there is no point in them trying anything new. But in the 'reading' project, for example, we saw that high attaining Lisa was unwilling to adopt new strategies whereas low attaining Helen was enthusiastic about them. *Is personality a significant factor in the uptake of new strategies?*

Gender

The results here were confusing. On the one hand, the boys in the memorisation and in the second communication strategy project appeared, on the surface at least, to be less enthusiastic about the value of strategy instruction than the girls. On the other hand, the boys in the first communication strategy project responded very positively and in the memorisation project in the end the boys overtook the girls in terms of progress made. Are there issues of attainment here since the boys in the first communication strategy project were in a top set, whereas in the second, it was the low attaining boys in particular who seemed reluctant to adopt new strategies? *Do males respond positively to strategy instruction, even if peer pressure to be 'cool' may make some young adolescents reluctant to admit it?*

Can the projects undertaken in a university context help us answer these questions or is the situation so different there that it cannot be compared to the school context? We shall return to the issues raised in this summary at the end of chapter 6.

In part 1, we have seen how the student teachers were able to revise their initial plans in response to pupils' difficulties, to reflect critically on their own practice and to suggest improvements; all this in the short space of 5-6 weeks in which they undertook their projects. In part 2, we will see a similar process of self analysis at work but this time in a context where the teachers had the opportunity to undertake the project for a second time with a new class.

Part 2:
How to Teach Learning Strategies;
the University Context

Introduction

Learning from experience

When we explore a new way of teaching, we never get it right first time. We need time to iron out the teething problems. Often we may need to try it out three or four times before we feel reasonably satisfied. We have seen in the last three chapters how student teachers tackled the task of strategy instruction with their school pupils and the lessons they felt that they had learned from evaluating their projects. What we do not know is if they experimented with strategy instruction again in their first job, and if they did, what changes they made.

In the next two case studies, we are fortunate in that the strategy instruction was undertaken by teacher trainers working in a university context. They were open and honest enough to be able to see the limitations of what they had done in the first year and to refine the way they approached strategy instruction from one year to the next. This is an account of what they discovered.

The presentation of the case studies follows the same format as in part one.

- Each case study starts by indicating the skill area, the context and any particular constraints or difficulties in carrying out the project.

- We go on to describe how the cycle of strategy instruction was implemented.

- We then summarise the methods used to evaluate the project. The purpose of this is not only to explain how we gathered evidence of the successes and difficulties of the project, but also to indicate the kinds of methods you, the reader, may want to use, if you want to evaluate any similar project you undertake.

- The case study ends with some observations indicating particularly interesting aspects of the project or problems encountered and linking them to the research literature.

- For ease of reference, learners in this university context have been referred to as 'students'. Those at secondary school level, described in the part 1, were referred to as 'pupils'.

Chapter 5:
Reading Strategies

Before reading this chapter, you may want to refer to the list of memorisation strategies in Figure 2.1 and of reading strategies in Figure 3.2. These lists were produced for secondary school pupils and clearly university students will use a more extensive range of strategies. It may however give you a general picture of some of the skills the teachers in the next case study were trying to develop. You will find a full list of strategies in the Appendix.

☐ Case Study 1: Renate Neuburg and Ilse Schindler, Austria

Year 1: How (not) to teach strategies!

Group 1; March 1998

Skill area	Study Skills and reading and memorisation strategies.
Context	Both of us work in the Pädagogische Akademie des Bundes (State College of Education), Vienna, providing pre-service EFL teacher training for student teachers intending to teach in lower secondary schools (ie ages 10 to 15). The 'Study Skills' course is obligatory in the first year; for successful completion of the course regular attendance and active participation are required.
Target groups	Two groups of student teachers; altogether 25; 20 Austrian student teachers plus 4 ERASMUS students; upper-intermediate level (on average 8 years of English instruction in school), 1 native speaker of English. The average age of the group members was 25+, which is relatively old for first year student teachers who generally start immediately after graduation at 18.
Number and length of lessons	1 lesson a week for 12 weeks. Each lesson lasted 45 minutes; March to June 1998.

The cycle of strategy instruction

Reading skills and vocabulary learning were chosen as a focus for this target group because we noticed in language classes that students were reluctant to read, inexperienced at enlarging their vocabulary and used a very limited repertoire of learning strategies. On a wider level, they did not seem to reflect on the most effective means of studying independently, which is why we wanted to tackle issues like 'time management' with them.

Awareness-raising

Various questionnaires, completed in English, were used to help them to:

- identify their learning styles;

- compare successful/unsuccessful learning experiences in the past;

- consider time management and how to create a positive personal learning environment (see Waters and Waters (1996)).

Modelling

The students were given:

- handouts to read in English that described various strategies for vocabulary learning;

- 'What happens when we read: asking the right questions' (see Montgomery, Durant *et al* (1992)).

The subsequent discussions were also in English.

Practice

There was no time to really practise the strategies.

Methods used to evaluate the project

- Questionnaire.

- Teacher observation and field notes.

Results of the project

Teacher observations

There was little visible progress or evidence of students using new learning strategies. The students' motivation was low from the beginning, because most of them were looking back on fairly successful language learning careers and did not see why they should learn new tricks just because they were training to be language teachers. In the course of the lessons, motivation did not improve. We made the mistake of choosing material that was too demanding, both language and content-wise; in other words they had to struggle both to understand the meaning of the English in the texts *and* to absorb the new approach to their learning that strategy instruction implied. Moreover, the 45-minute slots did not allow for effective sharing of experience and reflection. This problem was possibly exacerbated by our insistence that the students use English for the discussions. It seemed there was a general feeling that learning strategies did not have anything to do with their future life as teachers nor even with passing exams. The students also stated that reading was not enjoyable if they had to do all that extra strategy work for achieving a fuller understanding of the text.

Questionnaires

Only six students bothered to return the short evaluation questionnaire. Significantly perhaps, the four out of the six who did give a positive comment, remarked that they could make a connection between what they had been doing in the course and their future teaching career.

Lessons to be learned

The negative responses of the students were disappointing and we reflected on possible causes. Apart from the students' general lack of motivation to improve their language skills and the time constraints, we thought that possible other negative factors were that the approach we took was too academic and demanding language-wise. We needed to:

- provide a tighter focus and not expect students to grasp general study skills, reading strategies and strategies for memorising vocabulary all at once;

- provide more practical, 'hands-on' tasks that are linguistically not too demanding but are typical everyday classroom tasks that students can identify with. This would allow them to make the connections both with the exam requirements and also activities that they could use with their pupils;

- give more time to group discussion and sharing of experience;

- allow use of the mother tongue.

Possible links to research findings
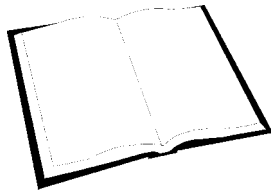
Holec (1996, p. 99) has discussed the benefits of integrating strategy instruction with typical classroom tasks, thus allowing the learner to: 'draw upon, experiment with and immediately apply in his language learning what he has learnt in learning to learn'. Similarly, Chamot, Barnhardt, El Dinaro and Robbins (1999, p. 99) stress that:

> effective strategies instruction is not an add-on, but rather a way to support language learning in an existing curriculum. Students should practise strategies while working on authentic, meaningful language tasks that are part of the language class.

They go on to discuss the design of the tasks:

> For a language task to be effective for learning a new strategy, it should be authentic and moderately challenging. If the task is too easy, students will not need strategies to succeed; they may therefore see the strategies as a waste of time. However, if the task is too difficult students may not be able to succeed even when they do use appropriate strategies.

Finally, they point out the difficulties of discussing learning strategies in the target language, particularly with beginners or with learners whose cultural or educational experiences do not emphasise individual approaches to learning. Although not beginners, these exam-orientated students may well have felt confused about being asked for the first time in their educational careers to talk openly about their different learning styles, and in the target language too.

Year 2; Group 2; March 1999

Skill area focussed on	Reading strategies.
Context	As in year one.
Target groups	Two groups; altogether 24 Austrian student teachers (18 female, 6 male); upper-intermediate level, on average eight years of English instruction in school. The distribution of gender is representative of the student population at our teacher training institution. Most of the group members had graduated from grammar school the year before and were therefore more homogeneous in age than the previous year.
Number and length of lessons	Two lessons a week for six weeks. Each lesson lasted 45 minutes each but the lessons were grouped together to create 90 minute sessions March to May 1999.

The cycle of strategy instruction

We chose to focus on reading skills again, not so much to cater for the group's particular needs but to see whether we had learned our lessons from the previous year. English was the language used most frequently. However, we decided that modelling and group discussions could be carried out in German.

Awareness-raising

Instead of giving them questionnaires to complete, we started by providing them with a direct experience of what learning strategies are. They were first asked to translate the short Dutch children's poem (see Figure 1.1) into their mother tongue: a relatively easy task for German speakers. Bearing in mind our previous experiences, we tried to keep anxiety level low and focus students' attention more on the strategies themselves than the language they were using to discuss them.

We also played the Embedded Strategies Game (Oxford 1990), asking them for their opinion on which strategies would prove most successful in various practical situations. For example, an English-speaking high school student learning Italian who enjoys jokes, has bought an Italian cartoon book. He wants to read it and explain some of the cartoons to his English friends, who know no Italian at all. Which strategies does he need?

Modelling

We chose a Swedish pop-song (Figure 5.1) and tried out the 'think-aloud' procedure. This is where you literally try to say out loud exactly what you are thinking as you struggle to make sense of the text, showing how strategies can help. So, for example, *'this looks a bit like a poem, as it's not continuous text. Klass looks like the German word Klasse and samma sounds like the English word same. So perhaps this means the same class at school or something. I wonder if ar means year, like Jahr in German. Maybe it's something about being in the same class for a year? I'll read on to see if that makes sense'.* Listening to their two tutors' think-aloud and watching us struggle with the translation task was not only quite amusing, they said, but also encouraging because they could see that there is no single, best way of accessing a text in a foreign language.

Figure 5.1: Swedish pop song

I mörkret hos dig

Vi har gått i samma klass i snart ett år.
Jag har döljt mina känslor så gått det går.
Men när jag tittar på dig
I bland så river du muren,
Som jag byggt upp**.**

English translation:

In Darkness with You

We have now been in the same class for almost a year.
I have been hiding my feelings as well as it goes.
But when I look at you
Sometimes then you knock down the wall
that I built up.

German translation
(this is included to allow readers to spot the cognates, as the students did):

Im Dunklen bei dir

Wir sind nun fast ein Jahr in dieselbe Klasse gegangen.
Ich habe meine Gefühle verborgen so gut das geht.
Aber wenn ich dich anschaue
reißt du manchmal die Mauern nieder
die ich aufgebaut habe.

Practice

The insights gained from watching us translate the song helped them when they themselves had to tackle translating a Catalan fairy tale into German. A colleague from the University of Palma de Mallorca had written down a fairy tale in Catalan (Figure 5.2). The students were asked to form small groups of two to three and produce a written German translation of it. It was suggested that students who knew a Roman language other than Latin should act as observers and take notes on the strategies used, since the text might be too easy for them. One group asked whether they could have the tale read out to them and the colleague from Mallorca gladly complied. After he had done so, 8 of the 24 students said that hearing it had been a great help in understanding the tale, 6 said it had not made a difference and the rest said it had been a waste of time. This provided us with a valuable opportunity to discuss differences in preferred learning styles.

Figure 5.2: Catalan fairy story

En Pere de sa gerra

Hi havia un home que havia nom Pere i tenia una dona i set fills. Eren tan pobres que vivien tots ells dins una gerra. Una vegada va trobar una fava i la va sembrar. Va créixer una favera tan alta que va pujar fins al cel. En Pere va enfilar-s'hi fins al cap damunt i quan va arribar a dalt va tocar a la porta. Sant Pere va obrir-li i quan va demanar-li què volia, en Pere li digué que era tan pobre que vivia amb tota la seva família dins una gerra. Sant Pere li respongué que miraria lo que podia fer per a ell i la seva família, i en Pere se'n tornà per avall. Quan va arribar a baix va trobar que la seva família ja no vivia dins la gerra, sino dins una casa ben ampla i arreglada. Sa dona va demanar-li què havia passat i quan en Pere va haver-li explicat tot, l'envià totd'una per amunt cap al cel per què demanàs a Sant Pere que els fes senyor i senyora d'una possessió ben gran i ben rica. Així ho va fer en Pere, i quan tornar a ser a baix, va trobar tot tal com ho havia demanat. Després la dona el tornà a enviar cap al cel per demanar que Sant Pere els fes batle i batlessa, i així va ser talment; després va demanar que els fes rei i reina, i així talment va ser; va acabar per demanar que els fes al seu home Bon Jesús, a ella la Verge Maria, i alsseus fills àngels... Sant Pere, que ja estava ben enfadat, va acabar d'enfadar-se del tot i va enviar en Pere immediatament per avall. Quan en Pere va tornar a ser abaix va tornar a trobar la seva família dins la gerra, però ara sense la favera i, fins i tot, sense la fava.

> *English translation*
>
> **Peter of the jug**
>
> There was a man whose name was Peter and he had a wife and seven children. They were so poor that they lived altogether in a jug. Once he found a bean and planted it. It grew into a plant so high that it reached heaven. And Peter climbed up to heaven and when he got to the top he knocked at the door. St Peter opened it and asked him what he wanted and Peter answered that he was so poor that he and his family lived in a jug. St Peter answered that he would see what he could do for him and for his family, and Peter went back down. When he came down he found that his family no longer lived in a jug but in a spacious and well arranged house. His wife asked him what had happened and when Peter had explained everything to her she sent him to heaven again to ask St Peter to make them the lord and lady of a big and rich estate. Peter did as he was told and when he came back down again he found that everything had happened as he had requested. Later his wife sent him again up to heaven to ask St Peter to make them Lord and Lady Mayor and this too happened; and later she sent him to ask St Peter to make them king and queen and that was what happened, and eventually she sent him up again to ask to make them Jesus and Mary and their children seven angels... St Peter was really annoyed and he sent Peter immediately back down. When Peter arrived on the ground, he found that his family was again living in the jug, but without the plant and, of course, without the bean.

We encouraged the students to translate the fairy tale, 'thinking-aloud', just as they had seen us do. No explicit time limit was set and students were free in their decision as to how much of the story they wanted to tackle. Some groups had an observer taking notes, others recorded their 'think-alouds'. In the subsequent discussion, students were invited to comment on which of their own or their partners' strategies seemed to render the most useful results.

Action planning

In the penultimate session we asked them to sign and hand in a written 'contract', stating 'I promise to improve my …….. skill(s) by……….'. Although we had focussed on reading, we had also introduced them to a range of other strategies, and the students were free to select which strategies they wanted to try. In the last session we had intended to check whether and how many of their promises had been kept. In the event, time constraints meant that we were not able to do this systematically.

Methods used to evaluate the project

- Tape-recordings of 'think-alouds' and teacher observation and field notes of the session.

- Contracts.

- Questionnaire on whether they found the strategy instruction useful.

Tape recordings and field notes of the 'think-aloud' session

Some of this class of advanced students seemed able to use the more complex strategy of using grammatical clues. Three of the group tape-recorded had at least four years of Latin at school and appeared to draw on that knowledge (albeit sometimes erroneously) in translating the Catalan text. They also used German rules of sequence of tenses to structure the action and force some meaning into it.

Line 1: '…*tenia* must be an adjective because it has the same ending and goes with *dona…*'

Line 2: '*va* must be a verb. All you need to do is skim the text and you can see that it appears in practically every sentence. It must mean something like 'he went', 'he did', 'he does', it could be 'has, he has..'

Line 2: '*una vegada* is so obviously feminine'. The group went on to use cognates to wrongly identify *vegada* as 'eine Wanderin', a female hiker. This in turn triggered off (an erroneous) correction of the first sentence where PERE had been identified as a male subject.

Line 2: '*tots* – totus – tots is plural'

Line 4: '…*obrir-li* …li is certainly passive..'

In another group, the translation of the title '*En Pere de sa gerra*' was the subject of lengthy discussions. Two girls, tapping their scanty knowledge of French, decided on the translation of 'war' for *gerra*. Philipp, a notorious low attainer and lazy student, was listening attentively to the girls' discussion. When he suggested that they should go on reading before finally deciding on the title, he was ignored. When the girls eventually got to the second line of the story, they believed that their 'war' hypothesis was gloriously confirmed by the word *pobres* – poor. Noticing that most of the groups had come to the wrong conclusion about the word *gerra*, the correct translation (jug) was given. Philipp was the only one in the group ready to accept this help. He took heart and suggested that Pere and his family lived in a jug. This time he was not only ignored but sneered at – 'Philipp, please!'. The fact that Philipp, known as a poor linguist, and being male, had taken up the 'jug' translation automatically made the information irrelevant and it was consequently ignored by the rest of the group for the rest of the task. Philipp's group could not get beyond the first half of the text. There may be implications here for the importance of building up good group collaborative skills. The discussion following the 'think-aloud' translation appeared to suggest the overall value of students working in groups. As one student said: '*it is intriguing to find out about one's own strategy use and, on top of that, worth noting other peoples' strategies and giving one or two of them a try.*'

Contracts

There appeared to be some difference in terms of gender as to which strategies the students opted for; the males choosing the less demanding strategies. In their contracts, three of the six males selected solely 'social' strategies or those involving going to the cinema or listening to the radio.

Peter: I promise (1) to talk with an American friend in English and (2) to listen to Jay Leno on NBC for more than 10 minutes.

Whilst some of the females also mentioned 'social' or 'leisure' strategies, 7 of the 18 comments suggest a more rigorous and detailed approach to their work, sometimes involving rote learning or grammatical analysis. They also tended to be more specific about exactly which new strategies they would try.

Sabine: I promise to go through the English coursebook and write down on little sheets the words I have got to learn. Cognitive strategies; practising, repeating, analysing and translating and reasoning, creating structure for input and output, taking notes, highlighting.

Amira: I want to listen to Blue Danube Radio every day. Next Monday I will go to the Burgkino to see an English film. I will read five to ten pages of an English book. I will learn three new words per day.

Elisabeth: I think I will choose a cognitive strategy, especially practising sounds and writing systems like vocabulary learning. The second thing is more creating structure for input and output: taking notes, summarising, highlighting an English text in a newspaper.

It may be worth noting that the latter two students were high attainers. The degree to which personality was also a factor in the uptake of new strategies is not clear but we see again the advantages of students' sharing their experiences in this quote from a cautious but pragmatic average attainer: '*I will try mind images because this seems very strange to me but Dani has been so successful with it*'.

Questionnaires

According to the questionnaires, completed by 13 students, 12 felt that strategy instruction had made them more confident about their learning and the same number believed that it had improved their performance.

New strategies adopted included;

- writing down new words;
- sticking grammar notes onto the wall;
- mind mapping;
- making mental pictures of new vocabulary.

Reasons given for their usefulness included:

- not fed up so fast;

- helps structure learning;

- learn new vocabulary faster;

- helps memorising;

- pictures are easier for me than just the sound.

In answer to the question, 'which strategies have you tried but not adopted?' the issue of how time consuming some strategies are again emerged, just as it did in the secondary school context. Making mental images of words, for example was rejected by one student for this reason. Recording words onto a cassette was rejected by three students for the same reason, along with an observation about their own personal learning styles; two of them commenting that they were not '*auditory types*'.

The issue of providing sufficient practice also emerges, as it did in the secondary school context. Six of the students felt that they did have enough time to practise the strategies, but the remaining seven felt that they needed more time.

The answers to the question about whether they would be interested in further strategy instruction were generally positive eg '*I would be very interested in improving and expanding my learning strategies to make things more easy*', '*the instruction is very interesting/most constructive*'. Some of the comments seem to validate the changes we had made to the course in relation to providing more group work and plenty of 'hands-on' practice:

- yes but only in team work;

- yes but only tasks where I can try out learning strategies myself;

- not now, because I want to try out several strategies that were new to me.

Lessons to be learned

- Since over half the students felt that they needed more practice, we see further evidence that strategy instruction should not be isolated in a short 'Study Skills' course, but also integrated into subsequent language lessons.

- Rather than briefly introducing students to a wide range of strategies, it seemed better to focus on a smaller number and to have clear, practical tasks for modelling and practising them.

- Such tasks also allow student teachers to see how they can use strategy instruction in the classroom with their own pupils, so they can relate it to their future careers.

- Group work is valuable because it allows an insight into the working of others' minds. A student may become more motivated to try out a new strategy, once they see how well it has worked for one of their peers.

- The occasional use of the mother tongue lowers the anxiety level and evens out the differences between low and high attainers.

Possible links to research findings
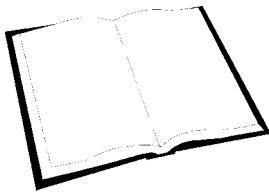
- These more advanced students' ability to look for grammatical clues is reminiscent of the developmental order identified by Chesterfield and Chesterfield (1985), especially if compared to pupils' struggles with grammar described in chapter 3.

- Gender differences in the way students completed the 'contracts' recalls Graham's (1997) study of the learning strategies used by a group of pupils of 16 and 17 embarking on an 'A' level course in a British secondary school. She noted (p. 81) that:

  > Across all tasks, there was an indication of a more careful, planned approach on the part of girls … in writing, oral work and the grammar tasks, planning, monitoring, evaluating and pattern/rule application were more common among girls than boys. Girls also seem more likely to try and learn grammatical items by heart … It is possible that in the reading comprehension passage, boys were more willing than girls to pass over items they did not understand, which the latter considered to be essential to their understanding.

- Such gender differences were also evident in the strategies used by the group of girls working with Philipp. Successful readers and listeners use both 'top down' processing (going for the general gist of the text) and 'bottom-up' processing (word for word translation). The girls appeared to insist on the latter type of approach (spending a long time discussing the title, for example), whereas Philipp was typical of the former approach, willing to pass over items he did not understand and to see if, by reading on, he would gain more clues. Similar observations emerge in the next chapter in relation to listening strategies. What these students needed was to adopt each other's strategies, so that they could use both 'top down' and 'bottom up' processing in combination.

- The poor dynamics within this group, notably the hostility of the girls, prevented them from learning from each other. Other studies too suggest that one cannot assume that students know how to work collaboratively in groups, valuing each other's suggestions, rather than labelling them as 'stupid' or 'typically male/ female'. For example, Marshall in Broady and Kenning (1996) noted that those individuals who were keen to take advantage of the opportunities presented by

autonomy found themselves frustrated by the inefficient workings of their group and this caused tensions.

It may be that students need explicit instruction in what is involved in successful group work and we suggest some guidelines in chapter 8.

What we have seen in this case study is not just the cycle of strategy instruction but also the cycle of action research. In this cycle, teachers start by identifying the particular difficulties their learners are having and plan new activities or approaches that may help them. As they implement their plan, they look carefully at learners' responses and in the final evaluation stage, they explore 'what worked and why'. This gives them the evidence (if not the energy!) to start the cycle again, modifying their original plans according to what they have learned. We will see this demanding but rewarding process in operation again in chapter 6.

- Have any of your attempts to experiment with strategy instruction been unsuccessful? Could it have been because you tried to teach too many different strategies at once?

- Consider the amount of reading your students are required to do in many lessons. Do you think it may, in the long term, be worth spending two or three lessons raising their awareness of reading strategies and modelling them as these teachers did? Which of their activities could you adopt and which would you have to modify for your classes? What aspects of teaching the cycle do you feel least confident about?

- The students reported that they did not have enough practice. Read the account of teaching reading strategies within a secondary school context in chapters 3 and 7. Could any of the activities described there be used as part and parcel of your regular lessons?

Chapter 6:
Listening Strategies

In the last chapter, the focus was on reading strategies. We turn now to the other case study carried out in a university context. The focus here was on listening strategies and again we will see how the teacher adapted and changed her approach from year to year. In particular we shall compare in this case study the value of making explicit from the start of the course that learners are engaging in strategy instruction to the arguments for delaying any explanation until later in the course.

☐ Case Study: Ildikó Pálos, Hungary

This is why the teacher chose to focus on listening strategies

I decided to teach a Listening course at the university because I felt very diffident about how you 'teach listening'. I even had my doubts regarding whether you can do anything that can be called 'teaching' it, apart from making them practise and practise – and watch as their skills, hopefully, naturally improve through increased practice.

Apart from my university work, I co-run a language school, where I teach a considerable number of hours, and I also have a few students I teach on a one-to-one basis. In all three set ups I have encountered a number of students who demonstrate clear deficiencies in their listening skills. Previously, before hearing about strategies, I provided these students/groups with an increased amount of listening experience 'increased exposure'), and gave on-the spot, brief crutches/suggestions as to how certain points might be/might have been understood. These suggestions were very similar to individual strategies in action, but the whole experience was by no means structured and principled enough to take real effect on the one hand, and to be convincing enough on the other.

So I decided to run the listening course because I wanted to force myself to do some research in the area. This I dutifully did: I read three methodology books on teaching listening. These were very helpful in leading me to a deeper understanding of the nature of listening and in reinforcing my sense that I had been right to provide additional opportunities for learners to improve their listening skills.

Then I went to Graz and became familiar with the notion of Learning Strategies and one possible way of teaching them, the cycle of strategy instruction, and the whole mixture of teaching experience and theoretical reading experience that I had kept stirring in my head finally turned into a cooked meal, and a potentially very nutritious one!

Year 1; Groups 1, 2 and 3; Autumn 1998, Spring 1999

Skill area	Listening.
Context	I work in the university of Szeged on the English degree course. In their second year, students can opt for the teacher training programme, which means taking additional classes alongside the English ones and a teaching practice in the final year. Language instruction is broken up into skill areas according to the components of the end-of-year comprehensive language exam.
Target groups	University students, majoring in English, in their first year (age 18+). The group was mainly female. They were advanced learners but with diverse listening backgrounds; some of them had only experienced a few textbook listening exercises, whereas others had had classes with native teachers at some point in their school careers and some had even spent considerable time in an English speaking country. The students were highly motivated to pass the exam, but did not necessarily share my views as to the best way to prepare for it (see: 'Lessons learned' section).

Additional information

There were four groups involved in the first phase of the project;

Autumn 1998

Group 1 (SI): Students were asked about the project and agreed to be involved. The cycle of strategy instruction was followed. There was also a 'Control' group (Group C) this term taught by another colleague.

Spring 1999

Group 2 (SI): Students were again asked about the project and again agreed to be involved. The cycle of instruction was followed.

Group 3 (no SI): Students were asked about the project but said they would rather engage in the type of preparation going on in the parallel class; that is to say simply exposed to listening material and completing tasks, with occasional quick guidance as to how the tasks can be solved most successfully.

Number and length of lessons	1 lesson a week for 12 weeks, each lasting 90 minutes.
Constraints	The prime responsibility of the teacher is to enable students to pass the end-of-year exam, which means preparing them to understand certain types of texts and do certain types of tasks. In my opinion, these types of text and task do not necessarily coincide with students needs in 'real life listening scenarios'.

The cycle of strategy instruction

The strategy instruction took place in both the mother tongue (L1) and the target language (L2). L2 was used for the wording of strategies on the checklist. L1 was used to discuss the strategies and learners' use of them.

Awareness-raising

Learners were asked if they would be willing to engage in a project to try out a 'good idea to make greater and longer lasting improvement in their listening skills'. They agreed. Without any further discussion, they were set a listening task and the class then brainstormed the strategies they used, leading to a discussion about the value of widening their range of listening strategies.

Modelling

Further listening tapes were played, with the following activities:

- the tape being paused at appropriate key moments and learners asked what strategies they were using to make sense of it;

- the teacher 'thinking-aloud', for the cases when my elicitation met with no response, and I had to supply the answer and how I figured it out;

- retrospective brainstorm. Here students are asked to 'attempt the impossible'; to complete a listening task while reflecting on the strategies they use and then to discuss the process. The teacher goes through the answers. If students are correct, s/he asks them how they arrived at their answer. Often students need considerable help at this point in making their thought processes explicit. If they are wrong, the teacher talks through with them how the appropriate strategies could have helped them avoid the mistakes. Possible, typical discussion prompts are provided in Figure 6.1. The prompts are designed not only to model specific strategies but also to help develop the kinds of metacognitive strategies that will allow the students to use strategies in combination, constantly checking their first hypothesis about the meaning of the text with additional new information.

Figure 6.1: Possible discussion prompts for a retrospective brainstorm. The materials used are from Jones (1986), exercise 2.8 'Who's talking?'

Tape

… Oh, but look! They're all over the place! Oh, I'm fed up with it, really I am. If I've told you once, I've told you a thousand times. Why should I have to do it for you? You're the one who put them there and they're yours not mine. Oh yes, I know, you're 'going to do it later'. If I had a pound for every time I've heard that excuse, I'd be a millionaire. Look, I've got better things to do. Don't look like that, of course it matters, it's symptomatic of your whole attitude. Oh God, it's almost time to pick them up now and I've got nothing done at all this afternoon, thanks to you. Yes, it is your fault and don't pretend it's not and they're just as bad. They think if you can get away with it, so can they. It's just not fair. I'm warning you, if you don't make an effort to ….

Task:

answer the following questions;

1. How does the speaker feel and where is she?

2. Who is she talking to?

3. She says: "...they're all over the place..." – who or what are "they"?

4. She says: "it's almost time to pick them up..." – who or what are they?

5. She says: "... don't look like that..." – how is the listener looking?

6. Why is the listener silent?

Discussion prompts

1. *"fed up"* say so. This is the only question in the exercise to which the answer is given in the text. So look out for these kind of 'ready' answers.
   at home – How do we know? From the tone of voice. You would not use this kind of tone of voice or familiar language in a public place or with anyone except family or very close friends, maybe. Also the text is about something "left all over the place", which could be in the home or office, but one does not talk to colleagues in such a tone. So: Tone of voice, World Knowledge: relationships and appropriate language (these words are written as part of a checklist on the blackboard).

2. *children or husband?* Judge from the tone of voice again but also listen to how quickly she is talking, and listen to the level of difficulty of the language she uses: can it really be a small child? Do we talk to small children like this? No. So we can narrow it down: husband or at least a teenage child.

3. books, toys, clothes? This depends a bit whether she is talking to her husband or a child. So you need to use a combination of strategies; use what you have

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summised so far from the context and the tone of voice with your knowledge of the world, your common sense. What do husbands as opposed to children leave hanging around?

4. What plural references do we have in the text so far? The things that are "all over the place". So can these be what it is "almost time to pick up?" Yes, you say? Just think: is there a specific pre set time to pick up books from the floor? No, there isn't, of course. So "them" must refer to something else. Now, tell me a few things that a woman has to "pick up" at a definite point during the day. - Yes, of course! Children! From school. Also, look at what follows: "...and I have nothing done, thanks to YOU." The woman feels frustrated: the children are coming back home soon and she hasn't finished what she was supposed to be doing while they were out and there was peace and quiet in the house. So again we are talking about a combination of strategies; Grammatical Clues (added to the list on the board) but also common sense, world knowledge, the context of the situation.
Now, let's go back and reexamine our answer to Question 2: can we decide who she is talking to now: big child or husband? No? Still both possibilities open? Any new ideas? No. So sometimes, we can't answer a question straightaway, we need to use the strategies of Carrying On and Waiting for More Clues and then Monitoring and Checking Back to see which of our first guesses were right.

5. Look at what follows: "...of course it matters!" So how is he/she looking? As if it did not matter. Tell me a nice word for it? "indifferent" – (on blackboard)

6. Usually lots of answers are offered for this: feels intimidated, knows that it would only be like pouring oil on the fire, the speaker gives no chance for turn taking, has heard it a million times – knows the next sentence, bad relationship – indifferent, patient – knows that she has to "explode" and then everything will be OK. When I ask them how they know, they smile/grin and quote a relative/teacher who is like that and this is what they themselves do or see somebody else do: keep silent. To the list on blackboard is added Background Knowledge – includes my own personal experiences.

Practice

Homework and in-class listening tasks, using TOEFL material and the coursebook, gave students further opportunities to practise the strategies. The tasks were accompanied by:

▪ a checklist of listening strategies to tick;

▪ discussion of individual instances of how one might understand this or that or avoid certain misunderstandings ('tricks');

▪ feedback on students' work. This was based on giving them the transcript, once the listening task had been completed. Depending on the time available, the teacher can a) make a list of typical errors, type them out and students discuss in pairs how they could have avoided making the mistakes or b) (less time consuming) circle in

their test papers mistakes that could have easily been avoided, and they either have to give their neighbours advice, or the teacher writes a selection of mistakes on the board and the class collectively gives advice on how they could have been avoided.

Action planning

Checklist

Following discussions with Professor Vandergrift at the January meeting of our group, I adapted his 'performance checklist for listening' (1999). So my original checklist was extended for group 2 in the Spring term beyond a simple list of strategies to include the division into 'Before Listening' and 'After Listening' and the section on 'In order to improve my performance next time, I will…' shown in Figure 6.2. I stressed that they should only tick strategies if they had really used them, not in order to please me and only write something about the strategies they would try next time, if they really meant it.

Figure 6.2: Listening strategy checklist (adapted from Vandergrift (1999)

Student name:..   Date:........................

Title of text:...   Score: ....

Before listening	
I understand the task (what I have to do after I have finished listening)	
I know what I must pay attention to while I listen	
I have attempted to recall all that I know about the topic	
I have attempted to recall all the type of information I am likely to hear	
I have made predictions on what I am about to hear	
I am ready to pay attention and concentrate	
I have encouraged myself	
After listening	
I concentrated on the task to be accomplished	
I tried to verify my predictions	
I revised my predictions accordingly	
I focused my attention on the information needed to accomplish the task	

I used my world knowledge to help me guess the bits I did not understand:	
- my knowledge of English	
- tone of voice	
- key words	
- context	
- other	
I used my world knowledge to infer information not directly mentioned in the text:	
- my knowledge of English	
- other	

In order to improve my performance next time I will

....

....

Contract

At the very beginning of the semester, after the pre-test which is very similar in level and kind to the exam, we always:

1. establish their 'listening background';

2. brainstorm what resources we could utilise to improve our listening skills; resources like TV, movies, coursebook cassettes in the library;

3. ask students to complete a 'contract' for home practice. They decide what resources they are going to utilise and how much time they will spend (an hour a week, etc) in order to improve their listening skills. I accept 'zero-contracts' as well, which say things like *'I am satisfied with my listening abilities, so I am going to concentrate on other things this semester'* even if it is other studies or partying! At the end of term, as part of a process of grading themselves, students return to their contracts and are asked to assess their progress and the effort they have invested in the course.

Methods used to evaluate the project

For all three groups and the control group:

▪ comparison of tests before and after the strategy instruction. The tape and tasks were taken from Sue O'Connel, Focus on Proficiency and designed to be of a similar level of difficulty. They included gap filling exercises as well as those matching

information to pictures. In the pre-test (Unit 1), for example, students were told that they were going to hear a talk about a typical house in the ancient city of Sana'a in Yemen and that they should look at the two plans which were labelled with the letters A-O and at the list of rooms and their uses. They should write the appropriate letter by the room or use which it represented. In the post-test (Unit 3), they were told that they were going to hear a conversation between an agent for holiday caravans and a client. While they were listening, they should label the diagram by writing the number of each item (gasfire, bunk beds etc) in the correct place.

For groups 1 (SI), 2 (SI), and 3 (no SI):

- regular tests during the Autumn and Spring terms. Sometimes these were modified from one term to the next to meet students' interests but every attempt was made to make them of the same level of difficulty.

For groups 1 and 2 only:

- informal teacher observation; general impression as to how actively they participated when discussing strategies (not necessarily talking but 'internal active participation' that teachers often can judge from eye contact, state of alertness etc);
- checklists;
- contracts.

Results of the project

Tests   *Autumn*

Pre- and post-tests

- Control group (no SI) pre-test average: 66%; post-test average: 79%.

- Group 1 (SI) pre-test average: 65%; post-test average: 79%.

Whilst the results from the first attempt to implement the cycle appeared disappointing in terms of the effectiveness of the strategy instruction, it is perhaps worth indicating that time had not permitted full discussion with the colleague working with the control group about the conditions for the testing to take place and there may have been some variation in the procedures. It may also be worth noting that in the gap filling task, the control group in the pre-test scored 73.5% and appeared to make no progress in the post test (73%). Group 1, however, scored 68.65% in the pre-test and improved to 81% in the post-test. Both groups improved in the picture test, the kind of task to which they had not previously been exposed. Further research may be needed to establish why the strategy instruction yielded benefits in one type of listening task, but not the other. *Spring*

Pre- and post-tests

- Group 2 (SI) pre-test average: 69%; post-test average: 86%.

- Group 3 (no SI) pre-test average: 74%, post-test average: 82%.

Thus, although group 2 started below the level of group 3, they made more progress. It is also interesting to note that for group 2, the post-test individual scores were very similar, whereas for group 3, they were more scattered. It seemed that the low-attaining and middle-range students in group 2 all made good progress, catching up with their high attaining peers. It may be that very good listeners in group 2 did not bother to adopt new strategies, perhaps because they felt safe they would do well in the exam and did not aspire beyond that?

Average performance on regular tests during the term (on a 1-5 scale):

- Group 2 (SI): 3.9

- Group 3 (non SI): 3.4

Again group 2 outperformed group 3.

Teacher informal observation

It would be interesting to know how much the improved rate of progress for group 2 was due to the effects of the group dynamics, since the classroom rapport among group 3 members appeared to be less positive than those of both groups 1 & 2 (SI). This difference is, of course, my own subjective judgement but I would want to emphasise the following positive effects of strategy instruction on group psychology and group dynamics:

- honesty and willingness to be open;

- not minding our follies becoming public knowledge if it helps others realise something or avoid the same mistakes;
- accepting and appreciating others, their different learning and general cognitive styles and approaches;

- the resulting relaxed and cheerful atmosphere, even bonding.

There were also benefits in terms of individual psychology. From informal discussions with them, it seemed that:

- confidence increased;

- there was a sense of 'I-am-in-control' and a strange 'intellectual poise' resulting from the general feeling that we are doing something 'in an intelligent way', not just mechanically digesting an amount of chores to be accomplished;

- the general impression was that girls seemed to have been more enthusiastic and benefited more. For the boys in our classes, it is 'trendy' to be negligent and easygoing. It is interesting to note, however, that they are often better listeners. This may be because they have watched more TV/films by the time they come to these classes – instead of sweating over homework assignments! It may also be because of their more easy-going nature. I have noticed a kind of internal compulsion in some students to understand a section of the text in isolation. This unhelpful strategy of 'bottom up processing' may be characteristic of the more consciencious, conformist, anxious type of learner, the rote-learning type, like the girls in the Austrian case study. But it can also be typical of the aggressive type, who wants to reach a conclusion in two seconds and cannot tolerate ambiguity or uncertainty. More easygoing learners tend to be better at listening to the whole text ('top down' processing) because they dare to 'suspend judgement', and have got used to employing all sorts of inference strategies to make up for not actually immediately understanding all the data.

Checklists

It appeared from informal observation of the checklists that most students in group 2 used a wider range of strategies by the end of the course than at the start. However, the last bit of the checklist ('In order to improve my performance next time I will …') did not yield many comments. I had not insisted on it too much, as I was not confident enough to do so.

Contents

The 'contract' for home practice was not taken seriously at all by group 3 (no SI). Below are some comments from group 2. Like the Austrian projects, there is a preference for 'social' and 'leisure' activities, although I did not analyse the entries on the contracts by gender.

'I will ask my ex-teacher for cassettes and listen to them on my walkman while I am travelling home at the weekends'

'I will watch one hour of news programmes and one hour of something else every week on TV'

'I will choose a subtitled film whenever possible (cinema or video)'

Their responses to grading themselves were rather limited. I would like to teach them to be better at assessing themselves against their own personal goals and to take account of their capability. In Hungary, however, the educational and political context does not encourage self-assessment. So, during a course where you meet the students 13 times a semester and maybe never again what you can achieve is limited. My minimal ambition is to expose them to a different experience and make them feel that self-assessment is not an easy way to get a good grade but a very tough method whereby you have to face yourself and cannot blame anybody for your failure or disappointment. And I am rarely able to achieve any more than this. My suspicion is that they are very willing and able to judge themselves against the others and that this has a negative influence on their ability to assess themselves. They know their grade average, and add or deduct a grade if they think they put in a lot of effort or not.

But their judgement as to what constitutes 'a lot' is in relation to others in the group rather than their own personal potential. I usually ask them to justify their self-assessment in a few sentences, and a few of these 'confidential letters' are very meaningful and promising. But not everybody is able to comment openly about these matters after such a brief experience of something that goes against everything they were previously used to, even if they do have something to say.

Lessons to be learned

Comparison of test types. I had thought that the two texts and tasks varied similarly in difficulty. I only forgot one very obvious difference: the great role culture and background knowledge plays in comprehension. Whereas everybody in this region can be expected to have seen a caravan from the outside and be totally familiar with the notions 'gasfire, cupboard, bunk beds, sink, etc', virtually none of the students had the slightest familiarity with a typical Yemenese house, with its different layout and functions for the various rooms and the strange social context of several generations as well as their cattle and grain sharing a house, not to mention the restrictions as to who is allowed to enter which room etc.

My experiences had given me a lot to think about, not least in terms of how to motivate these exam-orientated students to realising the value of reflecting on and taking responsibility for their own learning. Since some of the students did not appear to find strategy instruction very motivating, I decided that they perhaps needed more concrete proof of its potential and that I would take the risk of modifying the initial steps of the cycle of strategy instruction. Rather than explaining the project from the start and asking students to vote on whether to become involved in it, I thought it might be interesting next year to gradually discuss strategies as they emerged from the listening material and then reveal the rationale when the success of it had been proven.

Possible links to research findings
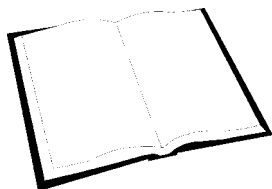
- A number of studies have suggested that learners' background knowledge of the topic plays a key role in determining their ability to comprehend a written or a spoken text. This applies both to their cultural background (Parry 1993) and also to their gender. Bugel and Bunk (1996) for example showed that typically male topics such as cars, sport etc were more readily understood by males than females.

- There also seems some support here for the difference in strategy use noted in the Austrian case study, with males favouring 'top-down' processing and tolerating uncertainty but perhaps being less willing to engage in strategies involving careful, detailed analysis.

- In chapter 1, we summarised Dickinson's review of attribution theory, which suggests that where learners attribute their progress to fixed causes, such as ability, they are less likely to persist in the face of difficulties than if they feel that the outcome is not predetermined and they have some control over it. It is interesting to note the comments on group 2's sense of 'I am in control' in this respect.

Year 2; Group 4; Autumn 1999.
Learning from year 1: the revised cycle

The context, length of lessons etc. was identical to year 1.

The cycle of strategy instruction

Again, the strategy instruction took place in both L1 and L2. L2 was used for the wording of strategies on the checklist. L1 was used to discuss the strategies and learners' use of them.

Exposure

Learners were unaware they were doing something innovative. Neither the idea of strategy instruction nor the cycle was explained to them. Instead over the course of the first sessions, tasks were deliberately selected to highlight the usefulness of certain strategies. They were called 'tricks to combat the examiner/examination'. The 'tricks' were elicited or revealed and were written on the board in the wording of the checklist (to be introduced later only). The individual tricks were practised and TOEFL materials were used to test them in isolation and Cambridge Advanced English / Cambridge

Proficiency Exam materials to test them globally. There was no explicit mention of the fact that these 'tricks' could come together to form a coherent system.

Awareness-raising

When all the strategies I wished to focus on had occurred and been discussed at least two - three times, students were given a brief introduction of the idea of strategy instruction.

Modelling

This had already been accomplished in earlier activities using pause and 'think-aloud' or discussion.

Practice

The checklist was presented. Students were given a listening task and asked to fill in the 'After Listening' section of the checklist and then compare their list with their partner. The goal was to make them aware of how many strategies they were already using and what other strategies they might have tried. They were then given another Listening task and we went through the 'Before Listening' section of the checklist together. Students were outstandingly successful in doing this particular task and quickly saw the point of spending time on the 'Before Listening Strategies'. The checklist was used regularly for the next four weeks until the end of the semester. Students were again given a 'contract' for home practice.

Methods used for evaluating the project

- Comparison of tests before and after the strategy instruction.
- Regular tests during the term.
- Checklists.
- Informal teacher observation; general impression as to how actively they participated when discussing strategies.
- Interview with three students.

Results of the second phase of the project

Tests

Pre- and post-tests

- Pre-test: average: 72%.
- Post-test average: 88%.

This group then started at a level between group 2 (69%) and group 3 (74%) but made progress beyond both groups; group 2 (86%), group 3 (82%).

Regular tests during the term

- Grade average: 4.0. There was a relatively steady increase from 3.5 (first test) to 4.5 (last test); 3.5, 3.7, 4.0, 3.8, 4.2, 4.4, 4.5.

The average grade was slightly higher than group 2 (SI); 3.9 and higher than group 3 (non SI); 3.4.

Checklists

This time, there were more meaningful results in the section on 'In order to improve my performance I will….' than with the previous group, even though the checklist had been introduced later in the term, for example;

I will take the 'Before listening' chores more seriously. I could have prevented a few of my errors if I had done this.

I will learn 10,000 new words!!! You are very unlikely to understand a text or part of it if you do not know the key words!

I won't get stuck and panic if I do not understand the stream of words, but go on listening. That particular section may not be important and may even get clarified later.

I will not write down a single answer during the first listening!!! (I stress that for the first listening you are very unlikely to produce good answers, and writing will divert your attention from listening. It is better to try and understand the gist of the text the first time round, trying to locate whereabouts the answers for the tasks come in it, rather than jump into answering the first few questions – and realise you have missed most of the rest.)

I will try and dare to pay more attention to the context and draw more on my background knowledge (the 'tolerating uncertainty' strategy referred to earlier).

There were only two males in the group this year and I did not observe any differences between how they and the females in the group completed the checklists.

Interviews

Because the checklist and the whole idea of strategy instruction was introduced later in the cycle, some seemed quicker to see the relevance of it, as the following discussion between three of the students and myself indicates. There were still some interesting differences in their responses, however, relating possibly to their learning styles:

S1; It was much better to work with the strategies without knowing what we were doing – otherwise I would have felt deterred by the idea that listening has a theory as well!

S2; Yes, but it was quite nice to see how it comes together, when we eventually got the checklist. It gave it a sort of coherence.

S1; And it'll stick longer, I'm sure. We'll never forget the TICKS on the checklist, but we would have forgotten the TRICKS, I'm afraid …

S2; I don't know. I would have preferred to see right at the beginning where we were heading for. With the tricks I felt like 'here a trick, there a trick' – but who will remember these when it comes to having to apply them? I'll be able to picture the checklist mentally in front of me at the exam (if I have the mental energy and the nerve, Ha-ha!), and will try to mentally go through it before starting on the tasks. But without the checklist I would have just plunged into it and floated along with the text instead of trying to swim, if you see what I mean.

S1; Same here, but you DID get the list, didn't you? For this, you do not have to be given the list right at the beginning. That would make it sound a bit academic, a bit theoretical.

S3; Not at all! Only organized, planned, kind of purposeful! I mean I COULD feel that you (the teacher) knew what you were doing and that what we were doing bit by bit was part of a whole, but I felt annoyed and frustrated that you did not lay it out in front of us to start with, but revealed the puzzle pieces bit by bit.

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Lessons learned

I am not clear why these students were able to make more detailed, specific comments on their checklists. Was it because they had really 'felt' in a more direct and immediate way the value of the strategies? Or was it because, it being the second year round, I was more confident and insistent that it should be completed properly? I had been through it once, so I was not so apprehensive about WHAT I was doing and in WHAT SEQUENCE and at WHAT PACE but was able to concentrate more on HOW I was doing it, and also: HOW I was SELLING it.

Possible links to research
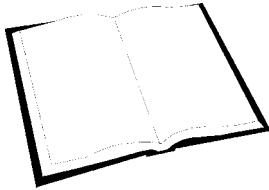
- The students' pleasure at seeing how much the 'Before Listening' strategies could help them reminds us of Dickinson's emphasis on 'control' and Graham's (1997, p. 123) observation that:

  > If pupils are helped to notice a link between the strategies they have employed and the resulting outcomes, their sense of control over their own learning could be enhanced and a powerful source of motivation harnessed.

- Differences in learning styles, outlined in chapter 1, may play a key part in determining whether students like to 'have the complete picture' from the outset or prefer to directly experience the strategies bit by bit and in context and then have the rationale made explicit. It may relate to the concept of field dependence and independence first explored by Witkin (1962) within mainstream psychology. Essentially, field dependent learners see the world as an unanalysed whole and do not attend to particular elements. They also tend to be socially orientated. Field independent learners are more detached and impersonal, able to view the particulars in the field independently of the whole (See Skehan 1998 for a discussion of recent developments in this area).

Consider your own classes and the particular students within them. Do you think that they would respond better if the purpose of the strategy instruction was made explicit from the outset or would it be better to introduce them to the strategies gradually as 'tricks' and only later pull them together into a coherent system? As their teacher, which approach would you be more confident with?

Listening strategies in the secondary school context

The project in this chapter was for more advanced students. But listening strategies are also important for younger learners. Consider the suggestions below to see if you might use them with younger pupils. As modelling listening strategies is particularly difficult, it is on this step of the cycle that we will focus. We will just illustrate the teaching of four strategies. Suggestions for modelling the others can be found in Grenfell and Harris (1999).

Identifying the type of text and the topic

Compile your own own tape, choosing short extracts from the tape accompanying the coursebook; for example railway announcements, songs, conversations and a news item from the radio. The first time you play it, just ask pupils to identify what kind of text each extract is, encouraging them to use clues such as background noises, tone of voice, speed of delivery, jingles and so on. The second time ask them to try to get a very general idea of the topic of each extract. At first provide some options; is it a conversation between friends or in a shop? Is it shopping for clothes or shopping for food? With later extracts, however, encourage them to jot down key words they recognise and try to work out the topic on their own.

Predicting and looking out for cognates

Once pupils know how to identify the type of text and the topic, they can discuss with you in their mother tongue all the words and expressions they can predict might be said in that situation. For example, if this is a railway announcement, what kinds of things might they hear? These are listed on the board. They then brainstorm all the words on the topic in the target language with which they are already familiar, matching them, where possible, to the mother tongue list on the board. Finally, they listen again for the words that are actually said. One pupil can even come up to the board and tick the words as they are mentioned. Another could have the task of adding any cognates that they recognise.

Making sensible guesses

Having identified the familiar words, the next step is for pupils to use their common sense to guess the unfamiliar ones. It is worth giving a few examples first. If you recognised the number '38' and you know the person is shopping for clothes, what might the rest of the sentence mean? Using 'think-aloud' can be very helpful for modelling this strategy.

Using grammatical clues

This is quite a difficult strategy that will need plenty of practice. Depending on the level of the class, at initial stages, it might involve the teacher simply saying verbs in the present and the past tense and asking pupils to listen carefully and jot down which tense it is. In the context of a tape extract, she may want to replay a particularly important sentence or even write it on the board to draw pupils' attention to it. Indeed, it can be helpful to finally give pupils the transcript and ask them:

- if they can work out the meaning of anything else they have not understood so far;

- to check *'if my first guesses were right and made sense or I need to think again'*;

- which strategies they could have used to help them earlier, so that they become more aware of their own individual patterns of strategy use.

General Practice

Although the steps in the modelling process may have to be repeated a number of times with different recordings, as soon as possible, learners need to work in groups rather than as a whole class. This allows them to control which section of the tape to play again, to pool ideas for familiar language and to use the strategies for themselves. The checklist of listening strategies provided in the Appendix can remind them of the different strategies they can use before, while and after listening. Chapter 10 offers some additional ideas for introducing pupils to listening strategies.

How to teach learning strategies: the university context

A summary of common themes and issues

In these projects, the teachers were constantly willing to take risks, to explore and refine new approaches. What allowed them to do this? In part 3, we will explore some of the implications for in-service training. Let us turn now, however, to reviewing the lessons to be learned from the last five chapters. To what extent was teaching at university level similar or different to teaching school pupils? What were the successes? How can some of the issues and problems encountered be addressed? As this is the focus for chapter 8, it may be worth summarising key points.

Positive effects of strategy instruction

Whilst these classroom based projects are different from rigorous research programmes, nevertheless, just like in the secondary school projects, it seems that strategy instruction can lead to:

- improvement in test scores. Whilst it was to be expected that all the students in the Hungarian project would make progress anyway, given that it was an intensive 'listening course', nevertheless those exposed to strategy instruction did appear to make greater progress than those who were not;

- improvement in confidence and sense of control over their own learning;

- increased range of strategies;

- improved motivation for some learners.

Lessons learned

Points stressed by the university teachers that are similar to the secondary school teachers include:

- the value of pair and group work. In the Hungarian project, for example, we saw that the strategy instruction seemed to generate better class dynamics. In the second Austrian project, the students appeared to benefit from the increased amount of pair and group work. They enjoyed sharing strategies when they translated the Catalan story for example and one student commented that he would like further strategy instruction '*but only in team work*'. We also noted, however, that one cannot assume that learners know how to work collaboratively;

- judicious use of the mother tongue may be justifiable. It seems that a flexible approach is the most sensible. Here is what the Hungarian teacher says: *This is kind of common practice at the university, at least in my classes. When we talk about matters like this, I encourage them to say in English anything that they can spontaneously say, even if it means experimenting with English. I advise them to concentrate on WHAT they have to say rather than HOW they say it, so any English with however many mistakes is accepted. Hungarian is also accepted and, of course, any sort of mixture. The latter is the most frequent outcome of my approach, with all the terminology and cliches in English, and most of the rest in rapid Hungarian. There are always a few students who are either confident or dutiful enough to only use English – which is, of course, tolerated as well!*

Other points

- The students in the Austrian reading project seemed more able to cope with grammatical clues than the secondary school pupils, supporting the idea of a developmental order of acquisition.

New issues to emerge from the university projects

Pitching material at the appropriate level

The importance of providing plenty of 'hands-on' experience of how to use the strategies again emerges in part 2 but with further insights from the Austrian project:

- material should be pitched at a level that is not too linguistically demanding, and yet still requires learners to struggle for meaning so that they actually need to use strategies;

- a clear focus on one particular skill area should be provided, so that learners do not feel overwhelmed.

Whilst these considerations were not mentioned in the secondary school projects, we would see them as equally appropriate. So, the case studies in chapters 5 and 6 have provided us with further suggestions for the 'Do's' and 'Don'ts' of strategy instruction, outlined in chapter 1.

Questions common to both secondary and university level

Motivation

Again, the issue of the time-consuming nature of the strategies emerged from the Austrian case study as a factor that put off some students from trying out new strategies. In the second year of the Hungarian case project, we saw that delaying an explanation of the purpose of strategy instruction (whilst ensuring that they experienced a sense of success, when they were finally made explicit) could have a positive effect on motivation for some learners. In chapter 2, we discussed the way providing pupils with an immediate sense of success through regular test results could be beneficial. We noted in chapter 4 that some of the student teachers omitted the action planning step. Where it was included, we suggested that guidance on how to choose the most appropriate strategies for their particular problems may be necessary if learners are to experience an immediate sense that it is worthwhile experimenting with new strategies. *What would such guidance look like and what other approaches can enhance motivation?*

Autonomy

The question of action planning also links to the question of autonomy. In spite of their greater linguistic maturity, these exam-orientated students still seemed reluctant to reflect on their own personal learning styles and to take responsibility for their own progress. The first year of the Hungarian case study, for example, reports on the difficulties encountered in trying to make them assess themselves against their own personal goals. Whilst the 'final entries' on the checklists ('In order to improve my performance next time I will….') were completed in detail by students on the second

year of the Hungarian project, in the main, the 'contracts' across both the Austrian and Hungarian projects were disappointingly unfocussed. Does this mean that even more advanced students may also need guidance in identifying appropriate targets? *How can teachers enable students to develop greater self-awareness and autonomy?*

Personality and attainment

It seemed from the case study of Hungarian students in group 2 that low and middle attainers benefitted particularly from strategy instruction and that some high attainers may run the risk of being complacent. Some differences in learning styles did emerge from both case studies but the teachers in the universities appeared to comment less on personality factors influencing the uptake of new strategies than did the secondary school student teachers, except where they related to gender differences.

Gender differences

From both case studies, it appears that some of the girls had a more conscientious and rigorous attitude to their learning than their male peers. The Austrian male students tended to focus on strategies like going to the cinema or talking with friends, whereas more of the females identified specific strategies like taking notes, highlighting text and rote learning. The Hungarian project reminds us, however, that sometimes a lower anxiety level and a more 'easy going' approach can have benefits in terms of suspending judgement and listening to the text as a whole. There are two issues here; first, in relation to actual strategy use, there seems to be a balance to be struck between 'top down' and 'bottom-up' processing, the most successful students using them in combination. Second, in both projects, the males, on the surface at least, seemed to take the strategy instruction less seriously. *Is the lack of enthusiasm shown for strategy instruction even by older male students still due to peer pressure to be 'cool'? Why is this pressure stronger for boys than for girls? Does this really mean that strategy instruction has nothing to offer them? How can they be encouraged to participate?*

In chapter 8, we will try to explore in more depth some of these issues to emerge from the case studies in the secondary school and university contexts. We will look in more detail at some of the research evidence and also consider practical ways of tackling some of the problems. Before we do so, however, we turn in chapter 7 to our final case study. This is different from the others in number of respects; first because it describes not only the strategy instruction the student teachers received but also how they put it into practice in their classrooms. Secondly, although the skill areas were reading and writing, there was a special focus on developing metacognitive strategies.

Chapter 7:
Developing Metacognitive Strategies –
Student Teachers and their Pupils

The case study here is rather different from the rest. In a sense, it forms a bridge between parts 1 and 2 and the final part of our book. In parts 1 and 2, the focus was firmly on the learners, whether in the secondary school context or at university level. In part 3, the focus is on teachers, their worries and concerns as well as guidelines for pre- and in-service training. It could be argued that this chapter belongs in part 3, since it begins by looking at how strategy instruction was taught to a group of student teachers in Portugal. However, it goes on to report on how four of the student teachers implemented those ideas in their classrooms. It would not therefore have been sensible to separate it into different chapters. So this chapter connects both learners and their teachers. There is one other reason why we see it as a bridge. Out of each chapter in parts 1 and 2, the issue of the learners' metacognitive awareness (or rather their lack of it) has emerged. We have seen the problems they have experienced in completing appropriate action plans or contracts, for example, or in assessing their own progress. The prime focus for the case study here is metacognitive strategies. As such it may provide some invaluable insights, before we try in chapter 8 to pull together all the lessons we have learned.

Skill area	Reading and writing strategies with a particular focus on developing metacognitive strategies.
Trainee teachers	Carla Vicente, Dulce Marques, Joana Silva and Sandra Campos.
Context	The module on learning strategies was taught at The Faculdade de Ciências Sociais e Humanas, at the University of Lisbon. The faculty offers pre-service teacher training for graduates on a 2-year programme. The second year is the practicum.
Target group	16 trainee teachers, of whom 6 had chosen, often for financial reasons, to already work part-time in secondary schools.
Number and length of lessons	One lesson a week for five weeks from April to May. Each lesson lasted two hours.

| **Constraints** | The proximity of the exams meant that only four of the student teachers, already teaching part-time in school, offered to try out the ideas and give the university tutor feedback on what they had attempted in their classrooms and pupils' responses to it. |

The cycle of strategy instruction in the university context

Awareness-raising

The students were given a set of common daily situations to solve, for example, having to reach a certain destination when the traffic is heavy. They were asked to verbalise how they thought in order to solve such problems. They were then invited to transfer the notion of problem solving to language learning situations like learning grammar, and to spell out how they organised themselves to learn. During the feedback, differences in learning styles were stressed. The difference too between 'learning processes' compared to 'learning products' was highlighted and teacher' tendency to overemphasise the latter with inevitable consequences for the quality of pupils' learning was discussed. The concept of metacognition was introduced and related back to the initial problem solving activity; becoming aware of and controlling one's own learning. The students were then invited to answer the following questions, in the form of a brief questionnaire.

- How did my teachers used to teach me?

- Did they aim to foster both learning processes as well as learning outcomes or mainly the latter?

- Can I say that at that time I used learning strategies regularly? Which ones?

- Do I find it possible to teach learning strategies to my pupils?

The session ended with a short review of the literature on strategic learning, outlining the central principles as a source of future reference.

Modelling

The tutor explained that many language learners lack strategic knowledge of study skills in general and effective reading and organised writing strategies in particular. He emphasised that it is not just a matter of knowing about learning strategies, it is a matter of knowing which strategies to use with which task; in other words, the metacognitive strategy of planning and controlling one's own learning.

The following study skills were modelled by the tutor 'talking aloud':

- skimming;

- summarising;

- note-taking;
- outlining.

For example, for note-taking the students' task was to read a text and make notes.

Step 1	Definition of the skill	*What does note taking consist of?*
		It is listing key ideas or facts.
Step 2	Problem definition	*What do I have to do?*
		Read the textbook section.
Step 3	Focussing attention	*Look for signals in the section; bold print, italics, numbered items etc.*
Step 4	Plan of action	*Now I rewrite my notes in the correct order.*

He modelled what 'important facts' are by constantly referring to the text under study: *'important facts are those that go with a key point, explain a key point, say where or when it happened, show how one key point relates to another or explain why a key point is important'*.

'Finding the key topic sentence in a text' was modelled using ideas from MacNeil, 1987.

What is it that I have to do?	Problem identification
I have to find the key sentence of this paragraph.	Focussing attention
The topic sentence is what the paragraph is about. I start by looking for a sentence that sums up the details or tells me what the paragraph is about.	Plan of action
I haven't found it.	Evaluation
That's all right!	Self-encouragement
The topic sentence might be a definition or a combination of a question and answer.	Revising plans
I'll try my new plan.	Coping

Writing for a purpose was modelled in a similar way, using the guidelines in Figure 7.1.

Figure 7.1: Writing strategies

1. What pre writing strategies will help me develop as many ideas as necessary to think about the task assigned? (PRE WRITING!)

remembering observing listening reading (other)	gathering information

brainstorming listing outlining	developing ideas

2. What particular strategies shall I use to organise ideas and communicate in writing? (WRITING!)

describing	explaining	stating cause-effect relationships
sequencing	predicting	derive implications
classifying	justifying	evaluating
(other)		

3. What particular strategies shall I use to evaluate and review written form and content? (RE WRITING / REDRAFTING!)

working by myself	working with a partner
interacting within a group	conferencing with teacher

After some initial scepticism, the students soon came to realise the value of 'thinking-aloud'; of making visible the invisible that happens in one's mind while one is doing a task. They commented that by modelling it, the tutor had not only helped them become

more aware of their own thinking processes, he had shown them how they could do it in the classroom.

Practice

In the next session, practice was provided in two stages. The students were given another text in which to find the key topic sentence and another brief writing task. Using the prompted steps already provided, they had first to 'think-aloud' what was going on in their minds. The second time, however, they thought through the steps silently to themselves.

In subsequent lessons, the same procedure; modelling, overt thinking, covert thinking was adopted with various reading comprehension tasks and new strategies; finding support details for the main sentence and making inferences for example.

After some time, nearly all the students were introducing variations to the prompt questions outlined in the steps, creating, as it were, their own 'model'. This lead to a useful discussion as to how pupils too could also become gradually more autonomous.

Action planning

In the remaining sessions, the emphasis was on encouraging students to identify their own plans of action, that met their individual needs, and to develop the metacognitive strategies not only of planning but also evaluating and monitoring their own learning. Activities included:

- thinking-aloud while doing the task – judging the pros and cons;

- thinking-aloud after the task was done – judging the pros and cons;

- designing classroom materials for awareness-raising and action planning like diaries (Figure 7.2) and learning evaluation sheets of different kinds (Figure 7.3) to be filled in during the last minutes of every lesson.

They also:

- observed three lessons given by three experienced teachers with a view to identifying their use of strategy instruction;

- interviewed two very experienced teachers for the same purpose;

- helped to analyse a questionnaire on strategy instruction, given to 20 practising teachers.

Figure 7.2: Diary guidelines

Unit: _____ Text: _____

Date: _____

Instructions: Think over what you did while you were reading the text. Use the questions below as guidelines to your answers. Write at the back of this page if needed.

1. Did the text interest you? Be specific.

2. What did you already know about the subject of the text?

3. Can you say that you concentrated on your reading?
   How can you be sure about it?

4. Are there any words or phrases difficult to understand in the text? Which?

5. What did you do to try to understand those?

6. Which ideas in the text – main ideas, supporting ideas, details – do you remember?
   List them under appropriate categories.

7. Did the information in the text change your knowledge of the subject? If so, in what way?

Name: _____ Class: _____ No.: ___

Figure 7.3: Learning evaluation sheets

No. 1

Lesson _____

What did we do? _____

What was puzzling to me? _____

Name: _____ Class: _____ No.: ___

No. 2

Topic of today's lesson: _____ Date: _____

Topic of last lesson: _____

Task I had to do: _____

How did I do? - tick your choice in the list below.

I remembered the last lesson   I knew how to do it

I knew what the topic was today   I worked hard all lesson

The work made sense to me   I asked for help

I asked some questions   I finished the work properly

Name: _____ Class: ____ No.: ___

No. 3

End of week summary

Two important things I've learned this week are:

(i) _____

(ii)_____

One thing that I did well in my reading is: _____

One thing that I did wrong in my reading is:_____

One thing that still puzzles me is: _____

Something I would like to know something more about is: _____

_____

Name: _____ Class: ____ No.: ___

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Strategy instruction in the secondary school classroom

Four of the six student teachers, who were already involved in some teaching in school, offered to put into practice some of the ideas. They did it independently, without the tutor's supervision. However, three of them planned together what to do in their classrooms and how to go about it.

The students:

- used modelling in at least three lessons each;

- practised thinking-aloud and had their pupils do it during and after carrying out tasks;

- encouraged pupils to modify their initial reactions when assigned a task, so that they planned in advance how they were going to tackle it;

- discussed with their students which strategy to use in a particular task and why, having them consider alternative strategies for the same task;

- tried out learning evaluation sheets;

- tried out the writing of learning diaries.

Methods used to evaluate the project

- oral feedback to the tutor from the four students who used strategy instruction in their classes;

- pupils' learning evaluation sheets and diaries;

- tape-recordings of some lessons.

Results

The amount of lessons in which strategy instruction in reading comprehension, writing and study skills could be put in practice, as well as pupils' metacognitive awareness and control of learning fostered, was insignificant, compared to the total number of lessons given throughout the school year (only 10 in a total of 95 lessons for each class). Over the course of the year, pupils' marks improved by some 30-35%. However, it is clearly not possible to attribute this progress just to the limited amount of strategy instruction undertaken. However, the oral feedback provided by the four student teachers on pupils' responses to those lessons supplies food for thought.

The student teachers' views

- After their pupils' initial surprise, they embarked on the 'new approach' (to use the student teachers' words) willingly, though some minor cases of indiscipline occurred in two lessons in two classrooms. In general, their interest developed more and more as lessons proceeded.

- The learning evaluation sheets provided the students with useful feedback. Most of their pupils responded positively by filling in the forms, often answering the more open-ended questions, suggesting that they did make the learning evaluation sheets 'their own'. The learning diaries were much less successful; the boys in particular hated it and most girls found it boring, only a minority of them found it positive. It was for this reason that the students replaced the learning diaries with learning evaluation sheets, which seemed to interest the pupils most.

- Thinking-aloud *during* the task was adopted by 60-70% of the pupils, thinking-aloud *after* the task by well over 90% of them.

- Identifying in advance what was to be done in assigned tasks in the classroom was adopted by most pupils as a general procedure. A reliable indicator of their willingness was the fact that, after some time, the teachers tried out assigning tasks without urging pupils to first identify what was at stake, as if having forgotten to do so! And promptly pupils 'reminded' them about it.

- The discussions about which strategy to use in a particular task and considering alternative strategies for the same task were also positive. Pupils' interest and participation is evident in the tape recordings of the classroom; *'It's funny, I also did it but in a different way', 'I think that is not the only way to say it, what about...?'*

Typical of the four students' impressions is this remark*: 'most of my pupils embraced the new approach, participated more and better in classwork, seemed to feel more confident and worked more willingly with their peers.'*

Pupils' views

- *Nobody ever showed me what to do before. Teachers always say 'Here, open your book on page n and do the exercise no. x!' Now with you I start by finding out what there is to do first by reading carefully every word of the instructions ...*

- *Yeah, and you teach us some tricks to understand what there is in the instructions! Now we know about this cause-effect relationship stuff! Now we know what comes first in these two, because we talked about it together ...*

- *And we've found it out with examples out of the stuff we're studying, with things of our own ...*

- *No one had shown me before how to do what there is to do, think of ways to do it – the best or the quickest way. And, super – you really showed us how to do it, not just the usual 'You do this and that' or give guidelines. You do it exactly as if you were one of us!*

Three of the student teachers reported being approached by teachers of other subjects in the school. It appeared that the pupils had told them that they should do as their English and German teacher did in their lessons, because they could learn quicker and better if they did likewise!

Lessons to be learned

- Writing a diary may be inappropriate for secondary school pupils; or at least they may need a more gradual, structured introduction to it than was possible in the short period of time the student teachers had available. We explore this point in more detail in chapter 8.

- All four students reported feeling increasingly confident in their use of modelling. However, they felt that they needed more time to experiment with the teaching of learning strategies, to know more about trends and research results in the field. They also felt that something might have been missing in their performance as novice teachers, namely stronger classroom management and 'powers of persuasion' so as to avoid some of the indiscipline that occurred, mostly in the early think-alouds. We have already seen the importance of finding ways to motivate learners and we return to this point in chapter 8.

Possible links to research findings
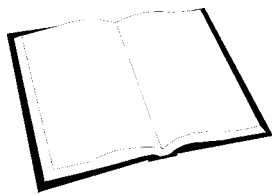
- We get a strong sense from the pupils' comments of just how confusing many lessons must be for many of them. There is a substantial difference between telling learners how to do whatever there is to do and doing it in an explicit way before them. And such a difference seems to make all the difference as far as the teaching of learning strategies is concerned. It reminds us of Rubin's statement in chapter 1 of how many learners simply: *'do not have a clue as to how good learners arrive at their answers'*.

- The emphasis in this project on developing metacognitive strategies, on the process and not just the product, reminds us of Dewey's statement, made as early as 1916:

    Were all instructors to realise that the quality of mental process, not just the production of correct answers, is the measure of educative growth, something hardly less than a revolution in teaching would be worked.

- O'Malley *et al* (1985) suggest that learners' ability to transfer strategies from one task to the next is greatly enhanced, if cognitive strategies are paired with appropriate metacognitive strategies. There is also some evidence that retention is improved. There was not enough time for the student teachers to carry out any such long-term research. Nevertheless, the pupils' responses to their teaching approach was very positive. It seems to reinforce the tutor's final remarks: *Does the awareness and control of learning processes last or is it to 'melt away' as so much of the 'content' items (vocabulary, structures etc) learned every day? Although so much of this knowledge is applicable to whatever subject in the curriculum, we*

should not assume that it will be transferred but make it explicit and create opportunities for it to happen.

Teachers' use of strategy instruction

1. Questionnaires

The questionnaires completed by 20 professional language teachers revealed, amongst other things, that:

- 75% of the respondents' teaching is aimed primarily at learning outcomes rather than processes;

- 90% rate content teaching much higher on a scale 1 (-) to 5 (+) than strategy instruction;

- 90% cannot say whether their students use learning strategies regularly;

- 30% think that it is possible to teach learning strategies to their pupils while 50% say 'perhaps' and the remaining 20% say 'no'.

Clearly the teaching of learning strategies has not been a priority for a number of teachers. However, it seems commonsensical to state that the more one invests in learning *processes* the more chance one has to obtain better learning *outcomes.*

2. Interviews

Although the teachers who opened the doors of their classrooms for observation were not the same as those who agreed to be interviewed, one cannot help thinking that perhaps what is said is different from what is actually done. The two long-standing professional teachers who were interviewed professed to engage in strategy instruction. Yet the classroom observations of the three other experienced teachers by the student teachers revealed that there was no teaching of learning strategies at all; *and most of the pupils in those classrooms needed a strong push in that direction* (in the words of the student teachers). Part 3 will look in detail at teachers' concerns and how best they can be supported. For now, we will turn to pulling together what has been learned from the first two parts of the book. This chapter has explored ways not only of teaching specific strategies but of giving learners, even secondary school pupils, greater understanding and control of their learning. It has shown how even metacognitive strategies can be integrated into everyday classroom tasks. What are the implications for the findings from the other case studies?

Chapter 8:
Summary of the Projects; Lessons to be learned

In the last six chapters, we have seen the cycle of strategy instruction in action across a range of countries, languages and age groups. We have described the kinds of materials and activities the teachers used and indicated learners' responses, both positive and negative. We have tried to relate these experiences to the initial four questions (outlined in chapter 1) that we set out to explore when we started the project and to the relevant background research literature. The last chapter was somewhat different both because it bridged the gap between learners and their teachers and it gave a greater focus to metacognitive strategies. In the final chapter of part 2, we want to take our project one step further by exploring what the lessons we have learned mean for our future practice in the classroom. We again return to the research literature to see if it can guide us in resolving them.

Because the preceding chapters offer a number of different case studies, it may be worthwhile starting this chapter by providing a brief summary of 'snap shots' of the successes, before going on in more detail to suggest ways of tackling the issues that emerged from the projects.

Successes

How well did the examples of strategy instruction described meet the claims we made for it in chapter 1? Here, we observed that many of our learners may lack the strategies that allowed us, their teachers, to develop into successful linguists. We argued that by explicitly teaching such strategies, we might enable learners to:

- *widen the range of strategies they used.* In the secondary school 'reading' case study in chapter 3, we saw that 88% of the class reported regularly using at least three new strategies that they were not using before. And in the memorisation case study, pupils' comments included, '*It's a wider range of strategies which I never new*' [sic] and '*they were very different from what I usually do';*

- *make greater progress.* The memorisation study showed that the test average for the class improved following strategy instruction. The Hungarian project described in chapter 6 suggested similarly positive results;

- *have a greater understanding of their learning, leading to improved self confidence and possibly even improved motivation.* The teacher in the Hungarian project commented on group 2's '*sense of 'I am in control' and a strange intelllectual poise, resulting from the general feeling that we are doing something in an intelligent way*'. Twelve out of thirteen students in the Austrian case study in chapter 5 reported that strategy instruction had made them more confident about their learning. The pupils in the first case study on Communication strategies stated that following the strategy instruction, their confidence in speaking had improved:

'Using fillers made you sound more French, instead of just stupid' and *'people who normally would not have said anything had all tried speaking'*;

▪ *be better equipped to cope with the demands of the new language without the constant support of the teacher.* One of the students in the Hungarian project wrote that now: *'I won't get stuck and panic if I do not understand the stream of words but go on listening'*;

▪ *take more responsibility for their own learning.* Some, at least, of the Austrian students' contracts and the Hungarian students' entries on the checklist suggested that they were able to make detailed, specific plans for how to improve their progress. Even the Portuguese secondary school pupils completed the lesson evaluation sheets successfully and commented: *'and we've found it out with things of our own'*.

It seems too that strategy instruction may *make the learning process less painful* and possibly even enjoyable. In the 'reading' project in a secondary school, 88% of the pupils said they found reading easier, after the strategy instruction. In the project in the Austrian university, students' comments included *'not fed up so fast'* and *'learn new vocabulary faster'*. In the memorisation project, 11 out of the 15 pupils (73%) said that they liked learning their vocabulary more now, as a result of the strategy instruction.
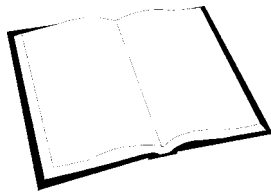
The findings of these small scale action research projects seem to fit into the increasingly promising picture of the effectiveness of strategy instruction described by McDonough (1999, p. 13):

> Since McDonough's (1995) review, which was discouraging, a number of better controlled interventionist evaluations of learner training schemes or strategies-based instruction have appeared, and they have begun to demonstrate the advantages of this kind of language teaching approach. Dornyei (1995) investigated the teachability of communication strategies through focused instruction. His results, though mixed, show that it is possible to train students to use certain communication strategies effectively, and that this influences their fluency positively (for instance, less fluent learners were able to use time-gaining fillers and thus became more fluent, at least on a simple conception of fluency.)

> The largest controlled study to date is Cohen, Weaver and Li's study (1996). While the results do not go all the Experimental group's way, the study provides a firm basis for the claim that strategy-based instruction makes a measurable difference in both how students perform (that is, their performance strategies and modes of action) and in how *well* they perform (that is, the quality of their performance of the set tasks).

Encouraging though these case studies are, the accounts also raised a number of issues and problems. It is on these that we will focus for the rest of the chapter, looking at the lessons to be learned from the teachers' experiences, what research can tell us about them and suggesting possible ways forward.

Lessons to be learned

1. The need for extensive practice

None of the projects we have described lasted for more than several months. It is therefore impossible to ascertain the degree to which the learners had fully assimilated the strategies to the point that they could automatically apply them to any new task. What we do know, however, is that the teachers, especially in the secondary school contexts, felt that pupils needed more time and more extensive practice and that they had had to 'fade out the reminders' too fast. The third test result in the memorisation project was no better than the second, for example, and the teachers felt that this was because they had not reminded the pupils to use strategies. The results improved for test 4, when the teachers had brainstormed pupils' opinions of the strategies. In the secondary school 'reading' case study, the student teachers felt that the pupils were still at a stage where they had to make a conscious effort to use the strategies and this may have explained why, although 88% found reading easier, only 12% had reached the stage where they found it more enjoyable. In the communication strategy case study, we noted that such strategies, in particular, may take longer to assimilate, since there is little time for reflection in spontaneous speech.
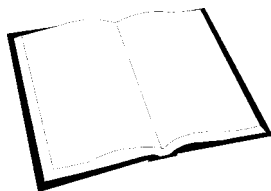
It is increasingly clear that strategy learning requires continual and extensive training if it is to become part of a student's tool kit.

Rubin 1990, p. 284

Practical implications: finding the time

If strategies need lots of practice, then inevitably there is the issue of how to make time for it in what is usually an already overcrowded curriculum. Teachers in some European countries have a national curriculum to follow and all teachers have a responsibility to ensure their learners succeed in examinations. A detailed description of how the cycle

of strategy instruction can be integrated into the scheme of work is provided in chapter 9. However it may be worth pointing out three considerations here:

- we have seen from McDonough's (1999) review that there is growing evidence that strategy instruction may improve performance. So time spent on it is not time wasted;

- whilst it may be tempting to spend a lesson on helping pupils to understand a particular reading or listening text, it may be more beneficial in the long term to teach them the strategies they need to tackle *any* text;

- we have seen in the Austrian case study that strategy instruction is most effective when integrated in to everyday classroom activities, rather than a 'bolt-on addition'. Learners need plenty of 'hands-on experience' so that they can immediately apply what they have learned about strategies to a typical task. So although the initial awareness-raising activities and modelling of new strategies may take up one or two lessons, opportunities for practice can arise quite naturally during normal everyday lessons. That said, we have seen that there is a particular value in pair and group work.

2. Pair and group work

It was to be expected that the student teachers in the communication strategy case studies felt that they should have provided more pair and group work, since the focus of their project was on speaking. However, its value also emerged from other case studies. One of the Austrian students, for example, commented that, '*I will try mind images because this seems very strange to me but Dani has been so successful with it.*' Working in pairs or groups has a number of advantages over teacher-centred input:

- learners may be more convinced by each other's positive opinion of the value of a certain strategy than the teacher's exhortations to use it;

- learners have to reflect on and make explicit the strategies they are using. The language they use to do this and the examples they give may often be more accessible than the teacher's attempt to describe a strategy;

- learners can learn from each other's learning styles. In Grenfell and Harris (1999) we describe two secondary school pupils. Nick works quickly and confidently, he goes for the overall meaning of the story ('top-down' processing) but pays inadequate attention to detail, failing to confirm any initial guess about what the text is about by double checking it against other clues. Gary is less confident; he uses word for word translation, often giving up when he cannot understand the first few words of the text. If these two pupils were invited to work together, 'thinking-aloud' what was going on in their heads, they both could benefit by using strategies in combination rather than isolation;

- learners begin to take more responsibility for their own progress and to be less reliant on constant support from the teacher.

What opportunities are there for such pair and group work? We have seen from the case studies that in pairs or groups, learners can:

- brainstorm what strategies they are already using;

- model for each other 'their' preferred strategies;

- use 'think-aloud' to explain how they are tackling a reading or listening task;

- read a text, each one concentrating on a particular strategy, then share views;

- try out a new strategy presented by the teacher to learn ten new words;

- try out their partner's strategy to learn new words;

- perform a role play where fillers have to be inserted;

- ?

Can you add to the list with other opportunities for group or pair work possible in your classroom?

Practical implications: making how to collaborate explicit

Structuring the task

We saw that in the 'reading' secondary school case study, the student teachers had to refine the group work task; to structure it more tightly, setting out exactly who was to do what, when and within how many minutes. Although this was a more complex task than simply memorising ten new words, nevertheless younger learners in particular may need clear guidelines as to how to tackle any task to be carried out in pairs or groups.

Teaching collaborative strategies

We cannot assume that learners know how to work together effectively. There may be some who 'opt out', some who are 'left out' and some who feel that it is 'cheating' to share ideas. The example from the Austrian project showed how the status of a student within the group determined to a high degree whether his/her contributions were taken seriously or not.
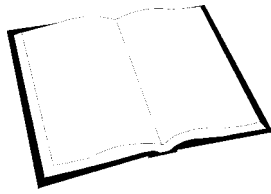
O'Malley and Chamot (1990, p. 139) acknowledge the vital role collaboration can play. They include the following strategy in their taxonomy of learning strategies.

> Cooperation: working together with peers to solve a problem, pool information, check a learning task, model a language activity, or get feedback on oral and written performance.

Like all the other strategies, however, this strategy may need to be made explicit using the steps in the cycle of strategy instruction.

Table 8.1: The cycle of instruction in collaborative strategies

Awareness-raising	Set up a group work task. After 15 minutes, stop the learners and ask them how they are going about working together. Brainstorm the strategies they are already using.
Modelling	Ask learners to think about what makes them comfortable or uneasy when they are in groups in everyday social situations outside school. Discuss also what strategies are needed in the work environment, stressing that, even if they do not particularly like each other, adults need to be able to work together effectively! Ask them to consider the effects of noisy group work on others in the classroom, etc.
Practice and action plan	Learners draw up a list of 'ground rules' for working together. Figure 8.1 shows a list produced by a class of 13-14 year olds in a London inner city school. The list is signed by each group member and displayed on the walls of the classroom. The teacher may want to add some of her own ground rules eg 'ask three other people / look up in a dictionary before you ask the teacher'.
Further practice	When groups are not functioning effectively, the teacher reminds them of the ground rules. S/he also ensures that learners frequently change groups with the aim of ensuring that over the course of the year they have worked with everyone in their class.

A good starting point is to tell learners that they may work with one friend but they should work with two other people they have not worked with before.

The choice of grouping may be determined:

- by the teacher, according to behaviour, attainment etc;

- at random (eg through the use of games such as numbering the class from 1-4, then grouping all the 1's together, all the 2's etc);

- according to friendship groupings;

- according to interests (learners wanting to work on a similar project);

- according to needs (learners who feel they need to concentrate on similar skill areas, or levels of difficulty within skill areas etc).

Evaluation   Learners are asked to assess their ability to collaborate.

Some of these last suggestions for different ways of grouping the class imply a less teacher-centred approach for organising the classroom and a degree of self-awareness on the part of the learners. We will discuss in the final sections of this chapter how important such opportunities for reflection and independent learning are.

Figure 8.1: Ground rules

Our own rules
e.g.:

1. no bossing

2. give everyone their chance to speak

3. Help each other
4 Work hard
5 Don't mess around and distract other people.
6. Give people a chance to express their ideas.
7. Work quietly
8 Aim for complete work
9 Wait for others to finish
10 Be in the lesson as much as possible
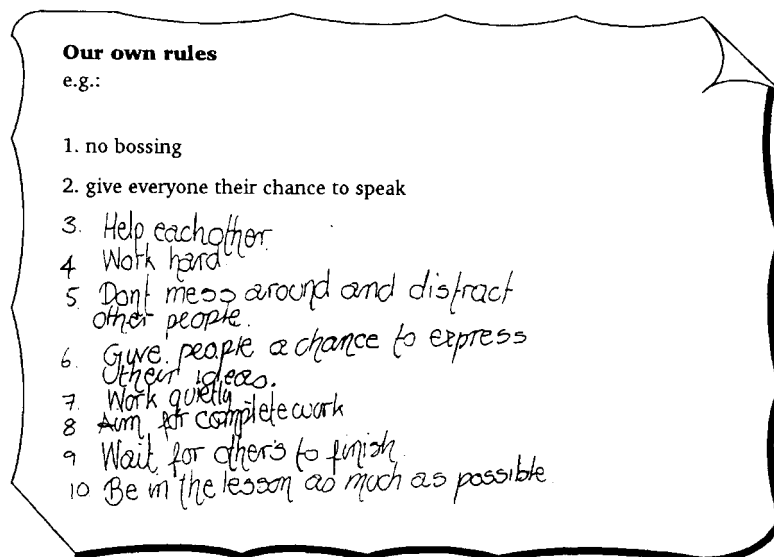
3. Motivation

Although some learners clearly responded well to the strategy instruction they were offered and their confidence and motivation increased, others were more reluctant to experiment with new strategies. Clearly motivation to learn a new language is a huge issue, which cannot be fully addressed in this book. We must therefore content ourselves with those areas which most directly relate to strategy instruction. We saw in the introduction that some research suggests that high attainers may be more willing than low attainers to adopt new strategies. The picture that emerges from the case studies is rather more complex, suggesting that personality and gender may also be significant factors. This appears to be in line with the conclusions reached by Grenfell and Harris (1999).

Table 8.2 shows some of the differences in receptiveness to strategy instruction noted by the student teachers.

Responsive low attainer	Unresponsive low attainer	Responsive high attainer	Unresponsive high attainer
Viet (memorisation)			
Helen (reading)	Anne Marie (reading)	Amy (reading)	Lisa (reading)
Ashley (communication)		Andrew (communication)	

Personality and learning styles

The teachers sometimes contrasted words like 'extrovert', 'risk-taking' with 'anxious', 'reserved' to compare learners who did try out new strategies to those that did not. The Hungarian project suggested that, although the 'laid back attitude' of some of the males could be detrimental, it also had positive side effects in terms of a lower rate of anxiety and not such an urgent need to instantly 'reach the answer' without reading through the rest of the text. Learners also clearly have their preferred ways of learning. Some of the Austrian learners explained that they did not record words onto cassette for example because they were not the 'auditory type' or that hearing the Catalan story read aloud did not help them. This clearly raises the issue of:
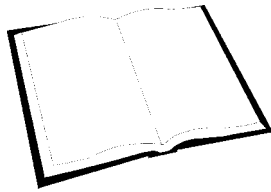
> The extent to which strategy instruction should be directed towards capitalising on pupils' existing learning styles by making them aware of their own preferred ways of learning or should seek to alter their approach to learning. There would seem to be an argument for at least providing them with opportunities to become more self-aware and to expand their repertoire…. However, while it is one thing to encourage learners to try different strategies, it is quite another to change a 'shy' 'reserved' personality into a 'confident risk-taker'.
>
> Grenfell and Harris 1999, p. 140

We will discuss in a later section how other experiences from the case studies support the notion of expanding learners' repertoire beyond their own preferred learning styles, and some suggestions for how this might be achieved.

Gender
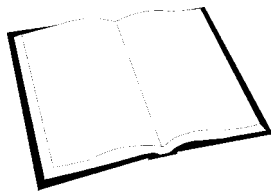
The evidence here is complex and it is not appropriate in this book to discuss in depth recent international concerns about boys' underachievement. Mahony (1997) indicates a range of possible social and economic factors that may be effecting boys' apparent lack of motivation and academic success, including changes in patterns of employment. The displacement of the 'masculine' manufacturing base by the 'feminine' service sector, requiring high levels of communication skills, may mean that boys are still clinging to the 'macho identity' associated with manual labour, when there are few such jobs available. 'It is the world that has changed not the boys and one problem is that there is no longer a fit between many of them and it.' (p. 7)

The case studies present quite a confusing picture, all the more so because the data collected was not always analysed by gender. So it is not possible to see any potential differences, for example, between high or low attaining boys. Nevertheless, the overall patterns do not provide us with enough evidence to support Macaro's finding (1997) that boys appear to respond particularly favourably to strategy instruction. On the one hand, the Austrian and Hungarian projects both suggest that the males were generally less receptive to strategy instruction than their female counterparts. They tended to adopt the 'easier' strategies of going to the cinema or talking with friends, whereas some of the conscientious females identified specific strategies involving rote learning,

note taking etc that Graham (1997) had observed. We also noted that the low attaining boys in the second communication strategy project were diffident about the value of strategy instruction. On the other hand, the boys in the first communication strategy project responded positively and we saw in the memorisation project that although the boys started at a lower level than the girls, in the final test, they overtook them. It is still not clear whether the need to appear 'cool' dictated some of the males' negative responses in questionnaires and interviews. As Barton (forthcoming) points out (in relation to boys' attitude to speaking tasks):

> Older boys' reluctance to speak publicly in a foreign language may be attributed to peer pressures operating on male adolescents which cause them to interpret demonstrations of co-operation with the teacher, or academic diligence, as a threat to their image and status in the group.

Further studies are needed preferably where learners are interviewed on their own rather than in groups, and looking at differences between high attaining and low attaining boys. For now, in relation to the action planning discussed in the later section in this chapter under 'A structured approach to developing metacognitive awareness', it may be worth referring to Harris' study (1998). Here she summarises research from a number of areas which suggest that boys in particular may benefit from clear and explicit guidelines as to what is expected from them and how to go about it.

It seems likely, however, that any long-term solutions to boys' underachievement will have to take into account the rapidly changing social and political world in which our learners are growing up. Particular innovations in the teaching of one subject or another are unlikely to be sufficient to tackle problems that arise from outside the educational domain.

Whatever may be the pressures on the boys, whatever may be the differences in personality, it seems that the teacher in the Hungarian project may well have put her finger on a key issue. She reported that having gained in confidence the first time she attempted the strategy instruction, the following year, she was more able to examine 'how she was selling it'. It is to this issue that we now turn.

Practical implications: the power of persuasion

Low attainers

It may be crucial in the awareness-raising stage of the cycle to persuade pupils that it is worth their while investing time and effort in trying out the new strategies. Jones *et al* (1987, p. 56) point out one important way of doing this:
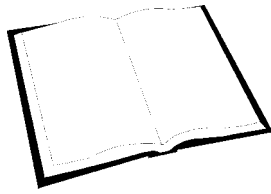
> One of the principal goals of strategy training is to alter students' beliefs about themselves by teaching them that their failures can be attributed to the lack of effective strategies rather than to lack of ability or laziness.

Here we may recall the reference in chapter 1 to attribution theory, which stressed how important it is for learners to feel that success in their learning should be attributed not to fixed causes (such as ability) but to areas over which they *can* take control. The teacher may need to devote considerable time to explaining that there is nothing magical about being able to learn a language, everyone can do it; it is simply a matter of knowing which tools to use when. For these low attaining learners, the terminology the teacher uses will be particularly important. S/he may want to refer to 'tactics' or 'tools' and to ensure that any checklists of strategies are expressed in 'user friendly' words.

Regular feedback on test results can also provide a source of motivation, as we saw in the bar charts produced by pupils in Johanna Smith's memorisation project. One wonders if some of the pupils in the first memorisation case study would have been more motivated, had they had the test results each week, rather than at the end of the project.
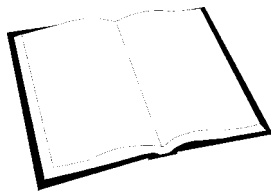
> If strategies are presented in such a way that learners experience immediate success, they are more willing to use them.

> Chamot and Rubin 1994, p. 773

High attainers

We have seen that there is a danger that some successful students may be complacent, believing that '*I am doing fine anyway, so why should I bother?*'. In the Hungarian listening project, we saw how the teacher decided to alter the sequence of steps in the cycle of strategy instruction to see if it improved motivation. Instead of starting with awareness-raising, she first gradually introduced the students to a number of 'tips' for passing the exam, without any explicit reference to strategies. Such an approach is likely to appeal to the high attainer, who is often quite competitive and keen to do well. Then she pulled all the 'tips' together in a checklist, asking them just to focus on the

'After listening' section of the list, so that they could see how many of the strategies they were already using and what others they could have tried. The students were very successful in this task and so quickly saw the point of using the 'Before Listening' strategies and presumably the value in trying out something new. Again, there is something here about giving the students the experience of 'immediate success'.

The process of reflecting on learners' responses and being flexible enough to adapt initial plans is also evident in what one student teacher, Kay, did to provide additional motivation for her class of 11-12-year-old pupils in memorising their German vocabulary. She had followed the first steps of the cycle, raising awareness, modelling new strategies, providing pupils with a checklist and asking them for their next learning homework to write down which strategy they had used to learn the vocabulary. However, she discovered that only two pupils had tried something new. So she decided that she would have to review her plans. After the next learning homework, she provided pupils, as usual, with a list of the strategies the class had used but this time she added the name of the pupil who had used the strategy and showed the mark out of 10, s/he had scored, for example:

> I tried to memorise the work with the picture next to it. Then I covered up the word, looked at the picture and tried to write down the word and say it to myself.
>
> Peter's way; 8/10

Some time later, she set another learning homework and again asked pupils to choose a strategy they had not used before. She asked them however to add the name of the pupil whose strategy it was, for example:

> I wrote the words out over and over again.
>
> Jim's way; 7/10

Finally, the class discussed, in groups of 3-4, which strategy they had found produced the highest scores and helped them to learn more efficiently. Each group was then asked to reach a consensus on the 'top three' memorisation strategies. Kay observed that: '*the information giving the name of the pupil and the mark scored seemed to encourage more pupils to experiment with strategies other than their own*'.

Kay's other observation is also highly significant: '*it should be noted that during the final discussion some pupils realised that they needed to know, in advance of their homework, how the teacher intended to test them. If for example, they were to be given a written test, writing out the words was a more appropriate strategy than asking a friend to test them orally*'.

This leads us to the whole question of the extent to which strategy instruction should limit itself to teaching specific tactics or whether it must also involve fostering a much deeper understanding of the learning process and more guidance on how the individual learner can take charge of their own progress.

4. Autonomy

It is interesting to note that only two of the case studies carried out by the student teachers in the UK secondary schools included the action planning stage, even though all the steps in the cycle had been discussed with them in their lectures at the university. Could it be that for understandable reasons, these beginning teachers were reluctant to 'let go' of their control in the classroom?

We have also seen that even where action plans or 'contracts', were adopted, some learners rejected some strategies not because they were ineffective but simply because they appeared too time consuming. Others opted for strategies because they 'looked fun' or were associated with leisure activities, without any indication that they had really reflected on their learning needs. In Johanna Smith's project, one pupil even did not know why he was choosing a particular strategy. There are two issues here. The first returns us to the question of motivation. If learners like Anne Marie in the UK 'reading project' opt for the 'wrong' strategies, that merely suit their existing learning styles rather than helping them to address their particular problem, then they are unlikely to experience a sense of success and may rapidly stop experimenting with strategies. The second issue is related to autonomy. The action planning stage of the cycle is pointless, if it is not used as a tool to help learners become more actively engaged in understanding and taking responsibility for their own learning.

Chapter 1 set out the higher level, overarching strategies of planning, execution, evaluation and repair, stressing the value of developing learner's metacognitive awareness. As O'Malley *et al* (1985, p. 561) note:
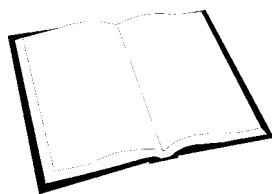
> Students without metacognitive awareness are essentially learners without direction or opportunity to review their progress, accomplishments and future directions.

We also observed in chapter 1 that learners with metacognitive awareness are more likely to transfer strategies from one context to another. Chapter 2 revealed that one low attaining pupil had not realised that the memorisation strategy of look-cover-test-check that he had learned in English could be transferred to the learning of Spanish.

Metacognitive awareness also appears to make a direct impact on learners' achievement. Vandergrift (1997, p. 387) notes the relationship between high school students' performance in listening tasks and the deployment of metacognitive strategies:

> The use of metacognitive strategies, such as comprehension monitoring, problem identification, and selective attention appeared to be the significant factor distinguishing the successful from the unsuccessful listener.

How can we help them develop this awareness? How can we help them move beyond their own preferred learning styles? Do learners need more explicit guidance to develop metacognitive strategies than we have assumed? Pupils did not respond favourably to the learning diaries that the student teachers in Portugal gave them, but they did complete the learning evaluation sheets enthusiastically.

Before we can answer these questions, we must first consider another of the lessons learned from the projects, which, on the surface at least, might argue against the possibility of developing learners' metacognitive awareness, at least for beginners, in spite of the promising results from the Portuguese case study.

5. Integrating strategy instruction into the scheme of work? Which strategies to teach when?

In chapter 9, we will see an example of how the cycle of strategy instruction can be integrated into a series of lessons, without taking up too much time. Here we focus on an issue related to the overall planning of the scheme of work; which strategies to teach when. In the first Austrian case study, the teachers found that it was counterproductive to try to cover too many strategies at once. Their second year of strategy instruction, where they focussed much more specifically on reading strategies appeared to yield more successful results. This second year too made it clear that it was important to provide plenty of 'hands-on' experience and we have seen other arguments for integrating strategy instruction into everyday lessons. There are, however, a number of questions that teachers must address, when considering how to do so. The first relates to 'what is easy to teach' and the second to 'what is easy to learn', although there is clearly overlap between the two.

What is easy to teach?

'Where should I start?' is a question that teachers often ask us after in-service sessions. The research literature does not suggest a sequence of skill areas but as a 'rough and ready' guide, from our experiences, it seems sensible to start with *memorisation strategies*. This is because it is relatively straightforward for pupils and the teacher to describe different ways of memorising vocabulary. Also, unlike speaking or listening, pupils are not under pressure to immediately produce or understand the language. They have time to consciously focus on their strategy to learn a particular word.

Reading strategies are slightly more complex, particularly in terms of modelling how to use the strategies, but again at least pupils have time to look at particular words or phrases and deliberately try to implement the strategies.

Listening adds a further complication; not just are the strategies difficult to model but:

- it is fleeting. In real life, the language comes at you very fast and then is gone;

- there is no written support. Most learners initially find it hard to break down the stream of sounds into isolated words.

The time constraints, in particular, mean that it is very difficult for pupils to both listen, understand and write an answer, whilst at the same time consciously thinking about how to mobilise their strategies.

Strategies for checking written work have not been illustrated in these case studies but some suggestions can be found in chapter 10. They may or may not be harder to teach than listening strategies. On the one hand, pupils are not under the same kind of time constraints as in a listening activity and can make conscious decisions about the strategies to use. On the other hand, many of the strategies involved in thoroughly checking and redrafting work do imply a familiarity with the language ('does it look right?', 'does it sound right?') and a grammatical awareness that younger learners may not yet have acquired.

We have seen that Bialystock (1990) comments that the take up rate of communication strategies such as circumlocution and approximation is disappointing. Certainly communication strategies may be the hardest to teach and to learn not least because:

- spontaneous speech is difficult to bring under conscious control;

- their development is likely to be determined by personality, a desire to communicate at all costs;

- in the case of circumlocution, a sufficiently large vocabulary is needed to be able to find other ways of expressing the idea for which you lack the word.

The difficulties are all the more apparent if one thinks of beginners. They have not only to listen and understand what is being said to them but also:

- work out what is it that they want to say in their mother tongue;

- trawl through their linguistic repertoire to see if they know the words to say it;

- if they do not, think if there a simpler way of saying it;

- trawl through the repertoire again to see if they now have the words;

- decide on a communication strategy that will help them bridge any linguistic gaps;

- and all in 5 seconds!

Further research is needed here to establish which communication strategies are the most readily accessible; mime, for example, and the use of all purpose words like 'le truc' may be easier than circumlocution. Dornyei (1995) notes some success in teaching 'fillers' and the case studies in chapter 4 (both of them with learners who had already had 3-4 years of language learning) also produced some encouraging results.

Does this then imply that we should focus on memorisation strategies in year 1, reading in year 2 and so on? To suggest this would be to ignore 'what is easy to learn' and the kinds of tasks we present learners with.

What is easy to learn?

In a number of the case studies, we have commented that the teachers' observations appear to support the research that there appears to be a 'natural' developmental order in which strategies are acquired. We noted, for example, that the students in the Austrian study seemed to be able to pay more attention to grammatical clues than pupils in the English 'reading' project. Similarly, it is clear that within any skill area, some tasks and therefore the strategies that are needed are more or less demanding than others. Within reading, for example, using inferencing to guess the meaning of a particular cognate in a hotel brochure is easier than using it to guess someone's underlying attitudes to racism. Even if we were to resolve this problem by saying that some reading strategies are appropriate for beginners and others for more advanced learners, a fundamental issue remains. If we were just to take account of the developmental order, we might be tempted to ignore metacognitive strategies in the early stages, to omit the action planning and evaluation stages of the cycle. Yet to do so would be to deprive pupils of the chance to take control of their own learning and to reduce strategy instruction to yet another mechanical activity in the teacher-centred classroom. Such a graded and gradual approach to strategy instruction may seem 'safer', but it fails to address the fundamental issue of our reluctance as teachers to 'let go'.

We can now return to the question posed earlier of how to introduce pupils to these vital metacognitive strategies in a way that is both accessible for them and unthreatening for us.

Practical implications: a structured approach to developing metacognitive awareness

We saw in the memorisation project that pupils preferred basic strategies like copying words out. Whilst there may be a 'natural' developmental order that cannot be bypassed, it is also clear that mechanical strategies like copying words are less likely to truly engage the brain (and therefore cause the words to be retained) than more time consuming strategies like making word associations. Do our students know this? Do they also know that if their problem is recalling the gender of a word, they will need different strategies than if the problem is remembering the meaning of the word in the first place? Kay's pupils wanted to know in advance of their homework how they were going to be tested, suggesting that they were beginning to move beyond their own preferred learning styles and make the association between the nature of the task and the most useful strategies to adopt. How can we build on these lessons?

Much of the existing literature encourages the use of learner diaries to develop pupils' sense of responsibility and reflection on their own learning (see Dam 1995, for example). Yet the experiments with this in Portugal suggest that, at least within the secondary school content, pupils may have difficulty in using them productively. They may need a much more gradual and gentle introduction. Here we will focus mainly on the metacognitive strategies involved in *planning*, suggesting a step by step approach.

1. Learners are given a checklist of strategies after the brainstorming in the 'awareness-raising' step of the cycle; they tick the ones they already use. This could lead to a discussion of their preferred learning styles.

2. Learners are given a checklist of strategies; they tick the ones they will initially experiment with in the 'general practice' stage of the cycle.

3. Learners are asked to identify:
   - 1 strategy that worked for me;
   - 1 strategy that did not work for me.

This could lead to a further discussion on preferred learning styles.

4. Learners are given guidelines for selecting strategies that meet their needs, prior to completing their action plan.

In the case of memorisation strategies for beginners, it could look like this.

Table 8.3: Memorisation action planning guidelines

My particular problem	The strategy that would help me best
I can't remember what the words mean	Think of a similar sounding word in your mother tongue and do a drawing
I can't remember how to spell the words	Look-cover-test-check
I can't remember the gender of words	Use colour-coding. Underline masculine words in blue, feminine in red, neuter in green
I can't pronounce the words	Put the words to a tune

In the case of reading, it might look like this:

Table 8.4: Reading action planning guidelines

My particular problem	The strategy that would help me best
I panic the minute I see all those words that I do not understand.	Look first for the words you do know and for the cognates.
I try to translate each word and then give up because I have to look up everything in the dictionary.	Read the whole passage through first. Use your common sense to get a general idea of what it might be about.
I read the whole passage and make a guess about what it is about but often I am wrong.	Read it again. Look up key words that you do not know in the dictionary. Then be prepared to change your mind about what it is about.

The discussion here might focus on moving beyond their preferred learning styles and using strategies in combination.

5.   When learners have become sufficiently familiar with the learning process and their own strengths and limitations, they are able to complete an action plan, without preliminary guidance, simply indicating 'the strategies I will try next will be …. because ….' and then commenting on its success or failure.

What we have been aiming for here is a series of gradual steps to enable learners to make informed choices about their choices of strategy, rather than relying on what looks 'fun', or what may be less time consuming or what simply suits their preferred learning style but may be the 'wrong' choice of strategy.

This example focussed on *planning*. Yet it cannot be separated from *evaluation*. To be truly autonomous**,** the learner should not have to depend on the teacher's guidance but to be able to assess for themselves what their needs and problems are by reflecting on how they did a task, what they managed and what they found difficult. Vandergrift (1999) points out ways in which the strategies of *evaluation* can be developed;
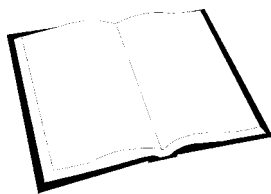
> Students need to evaluate the results of decisions made during a listening task.
> The teacher can encourage self-evaluation and reflection by asking students to evaluate the effectiveness of strategies used. Group or class discussions on the approach taken by students can also stimulate reflection and valuable evaluation. Students should be encouraged to share individual routes to success eg how someone guessed (inference) the meaning of a certain word or how someone modified a particular strategy. Focussing on the process as well as the product of listening can help students to reflect on their learning and can encourage them to consciously adjust their strategies.

Such shared discussion may be particularly important if students are to learn to use strategies in combination; for example to use 'top down' processing to establish an initial guess at the meaning of a reading text and 'bottom up' strategies to confirm or refute that guess.

Vandergrift's focus on the learning process as well as the product reminds us of the emphasis attached to it in the Portuguese case study in chapter 7. This project is particularly valuable in showing us how, just like in the planning stage, beginners may need a gradual and structured approach to evaluating their learning. This need not be a complicated or time consuming process however. The lesson evaluation sheets developed by the student teachers offer some helpful models of how to make it possible. Similarly after a test, learners can simply be encouraged to jot down the areas on which they think they need to work and why.

The Portuguese case study also shows us how, from the very beginning, whether in the planning or the evaluation stages, metacognitive strategies can be successfully paired with cognitive strategies and integrated into the scheme of work. As one pupil commented; *'no one had shown me before how to do what there is to do, think of ways to do it.'*

Try giving the action plan in step 5 to your learners, without any discussion of the earlier steps. Then give it again after having gradually covered steps 1-4, using it as a tool to measure any improvements in their self-awareness. Do boys in particular seem to benefit from the gradual, structured approach? Which boys – low or high atttainers?

Ways forward; vision and reality

Dare we go one step further? Supposing a student has correctly identified an area of weakness. Supposing they have also identified the strategies that can help overcome it. Does that imply that they might also be able to make informed sensible choices about the particular tasks they should attempt and how they will approach them? Might they want to work with others in the class who have identified similar needs? How many of these opportunities for autonomous learning could a teacher-centred classroom offer them?
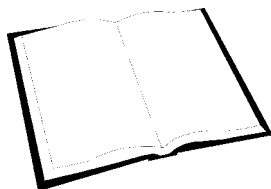
Little (1997) argues that:

> If the pursuit of autonomy requires that we focus explicitly on the strategic component of language learning and use, the reverse should also be the case: focus on strategies should lead us to learner autonomy.

He presents us with a vision of the classroom, based on Dam's projects (1995), where learners choose what tasks they will undertake and are constantly engaged in working collaboratively to plan and evaluate what they have done. He argues convincingly for the use of the target language for all such negotiations so that learners are using it for truly communicative purposes. Their motivation and their 'deep learning' is increased as they put together their own internal knowledge and sense of personal identity with

the new language through which they begin to express themselves. It is where the 'savoir', the 'savoir faire', the 'savoir être', and the 'savoir apprendre' of the Council of Europe Framework (p. 11) come together.

We have seen how the teachers and student teachers, struggling against time constraints, pressures of examinations and their own anxieties about 'trying something new' have made decisions as to when the use of the mother tongue is justified, have explored new ways of organising the classroom to make more room for pair and group work and have begun, albeit tentatively, to hand over more control to their learners. In many European countries, teachers are faced with an ever increasing set of demands that they must meet. In part 3, we will look at some of the questions that worry teachers and explore how best to support them in moving forward.

Part 3:
Ways Forward

Introduction

We ended part 2 with a vision as to what the autonomous classroom could look like. At the same time, we also recognised the constraints and pressures operating on many teachers right across Europe and the concerns and difficulties they have in implementing strategy instruction in their classrooms. Indeed, one of the aims of our projects was to give us some indication as to what conditions are needed to introduce this kind of work successfully into the classroom; some potentially useful 'ways forward'. Part 3 describes some of the conclusions that we reached.

- Chapter 9 is devoted to 'questions and answers'. It focusses on some of the most common questions teachers have asked us, often at the end of an in-service training session we have run, including how to fit strategy instruction into an already overcrowded scheme of work.

- Chapter 10 starts by suggesting principles and practical guidelines for planning such in-service training sessions, drawing on the results of a questionnaire given to teachers following such a session. A summary of the results, along with some comments on them ends the section.

- Chapter 11 briefly describes how strategy instruction can be integrated as a continuous strand running through a pre-service training course and then summarises and comments on a questionnaire given to the student teachers at the end of such a course.

We said, at the start of the book, that it was designed to enable the reader to select the chapters or sections of chapters that s/he would find most relevant. It is sometimes quite reassuring to find that it is not 'just you' who is having difficulties in implementing a new development in language teaching! If you would like to read in more detail exactly what the teachers and student teachers said, you could turn to the ends of chapters 10 and 11 before reading on.

Chapter 9:

The Reality of the Classroom; Teachers' Concerns

- Do you know if your pupils are using strategies to improve their language skills?

- Do you know if your pupils have acquired more strategies within the last couple of months?

- Do you encourage your pupils to talk about how they plan and evaluate their work and which strategies they need to adopt in order to make progress?

- Do you train your pupils in learning strategies?

- Do you do it systematically?

> Strategy training is more fun and gives better results.
>
> (An Icelandic secondary school teacher)

> Pupils find the use of strategies complicated and even silly.
>
> (An Icelandic secondary school teacher)

Introduction

The above remarks were made by two Icelandic language teachers nine months after having participated in an in-service course on strategies for memorising vocabulary. We think that their views may reflect the controversy and uncertainty which follows in the wake of introducing new ideas into one's classroom. In the case of strategy instruction the controversy may be even more problematic. Contrary to many new teaching and learning ideas, strategies are not new in the sense that every teacher has probably been using strategy instruction, to some extent, just like every language learner has been using strategies, whether consciously or unconsciously, in their struggle to aquire a new language. This may make strategy instruction more difficult for both partners in the beginning.

Now some comments from questionnaires completed recently in UK and Iceland by teachers who were working with strategy instruction for the first time.

> Strategies take time from helping pupils to do well in exams (UK).
>
> I am concerned that classes may not be interested (UK, Iceland).
>
> Pupils do not see the point (Iceland).
>
> Pupils are stuck in their own techniques (Iceland).

Fitting strategy instruction into the already crowded scheme of work is difficult (UK, Iceland).

- Do any of these comments sound familiar to you?
- Are any of these comments appropriate to the context in which you work?

The initial problems may possibly be of similar character among teachers and pupils across the world who are trying out new techniques. The answer to the question of how to overcome these problems is not an easy one and we are here touching on the very problematic field of why teachers change or do not change their teaching procedures.

Whether you have got interested in introducing learning strategies into your classroom through a course/workshop or read about them in journals or books, the first steps will be the same or similar. A good starting point might be to look at the checklist at the beginning of this chapter and add the sixth question: *Do I think it is a good idea to train my pupils in the use of strategies*? This is the most crucial question. Often teachers go to in-service courses and feel they really ought to try out the new ideas for the sake of trying without really believing they will lead to better results.

It is always difficult to introduce new techniques in the classroom and at times it may even be painful for both the teacher and the pupils. It means going from the known to the unknown, from the predictable to the unpredictable; it means taking risks. This we have to bear in mind and remember that once is not enough and that both the teachers and their pupils have to get used to the new approach. It is worth remembering though that being critical and innovative in one's classroom adds a flavour to our teaching and may give greater job satisfaction. As Hopkins (1993, p. 7) puts it:
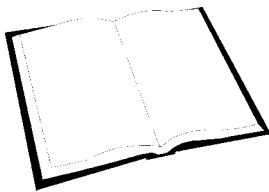
By becoming self-conscious, collaborative and critical about their teaching, teachers develop more power over their professional lives and are better able to create classrooms and schools that are responsive to the vision they and we have for our children's future.

Some commonly asked questions

In seeking to address here some common questions about strategy instruction, we are not proposing that there are any 'easy answers'. We do, however, hope that our suggestions might provide some practical, sensible ways forward.

1. 'I'm quite nervous of doing something new, and concerned that it will all go dreadfully wrong, that pupils will become disruptive and their exam results will suffer'

This is what Ildikó Pálos, the Hungarian tutor in chapter 6, wrote about her experiences:

> When I courageously plunged into the first project, I had just heard about Learning Strategies and how teachers could exploit them. I had just come home from an international gathering in Graz. Although by the end of the seminar I had became a keen supporter of explicit strategy instruction, and although I was introduced to a very simple and easy-to-follow method (the Cycle), I was thrilled but also somewhat daunted by the prospect of having to implement it starting the next week. I was thrilled not only because I found the whole idea fascinating and exciting, since it fitted in with beliefs and ideas that I had been holding, sometimes not even consciously, but also because as soon as I hear something that I fancy, I feel an instant urge to try it out as soon as possible! But my university groups of students change every semester. So I was slightly apprehensive about the idea of trying out something new with students I had never seen before, let alone had established any kind of rapport with, in the limited context of listening classes and with the responsibility of preparing them for the end-of-year exam. What if the method does not work? What if you need more time for these things to develop? I cannot just decide to devote more time to it because it interests me. What if I fail in implementing the cycle? Won't I put them at a disadvantage as compared to the other groups?
>
> Nevertheless, I plunged into the experience – and I feel I won! At least, I won the battle with my own conscience, as I definitely did not put my group at a disadvantage. Their test results showed that my group improved in their listening skills, and that their final tests were no worse than those of the control group. This gave me tremendous confidence. The second time, when I repeated the experience:
>
> 1. *I was fully reassured that I was doing the right thing, at least not something harmful;*
>
> 2. *I had been through it once, so I was not so apprehensive about WHAT I was doing in WHAT SEQUENCE and at WHAT PACE but was able to concentrate more on HOW I was doing it, and also HOW I was SELLING it.*

We will return later to the reassuring fact that 'second time round' is easier. It can also be reassuring, however, to know that, however experienced the teacher, 'taking the plunge' is always frightening. The following are some 'tips' that might help you get started.

It can be a good idea to begin with just one class. You choose the one you are most comfortable with, that create the least difficulties in terms of discipline and so on. They do not have to be your 'brightest students' as we have already seen that they do not always see the value in strategy training as they are 'doing fine' already. Begin with strategy instruction in just one area, eg memorisation or reading or listening, again depending on what you feel is easy to explain and try out.
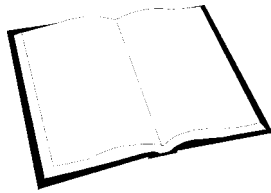
As Chamot, Barnhardt *et al* (1999, p. 42) suggest in their helpful guidelines:

> Start with strategies that the teacher understands well and finds effective. Teachers new to strategies instruction can build their own and students' confidence by using strategies they believe in. Confused explanations of a strategy may only lead to unsuccessful attempts at using the strategy. The goal is for the whole class (teacher and students) to experience the effectiveness of strategies instruction.

It is, in our experience, important to start with awareness-raising exercises. You will find a number of examples of awareness-raising exercises in part 1 and part 2, but to give an example here you could start with strategies which are relatively easy for students to identify like memorising vocabulary. In all likelihood, the majority of students are already using one or more strategies for learning new words although they may not be aware of using them. Therefore, a good opening would be to give them examples of some of your strategies and then ask them to think about what kind of strategies they are using when they are learning new words. This we can do as a whole class brainstorming activity which is non-threatening for the individual student. The teacher (or a student) can then write the strategies on the blackboard for the whole class to copy and try out. The purpose of this exercise is twofold: to make students aware of their own strategies and also aware of that there is a wealth of strategies available to use for this particular purpose.

2. 'Strategy instruction takes time from the already crowded scheme of work'

After her own successful experiments with strategy instruction, Ildikó Pálos was invited to run a short in-service session with a group of Hungarian teachers. She observed:

> The teachers were enthusiastic and seemed to think that it was something wonderful but they wished they had more time to research it and try it out. More time both in terms of time to devote to class preparation, and also in terms of class time, which I tried hard to convince them about: that in the long run it SAVES TIME!

If you try to teach strategies separately, yes, of course, it will take up time. If you integrate it into your normal lessons, it need not. It is important to bear in mind that learning strategies are not extra material you have to cover *in addition to* all the other material. Because strategies are skill based, you as a teacher are providing your students with *tools* which will help them to do better and that they can practise each lesson.

Let us see what it looks like in the classroom and what extra time is involved. Table 9.1. offers some suggestions for integrating the teaching of listening strategies into the scheme of work in the context of the topic 'Hobbies'. You may find it useful to refer back to the stages of the cycle outlined in chapter 1. Harris (1997) provides a similar example for the integration of the teaching of strategies to memorise grammar rules. Clearly teaching methods will differ and the suggestions only provide the 'bare bones' of each lesson in relation to listening activities. There will, of course, be the usual speaking, reading and writing activities also going on. Nevertheless they hopefully show how the cycle can be part and parcel of everyday lessons and need not take too much extra time. Lesson 3, for example, is the only lesson in the sequence entirely devoted to strategy instruction. Most of the other activities may only take 5-10 minutes of the lesson.

Table 9.1: Integrating listening strategies into the scheme of work

Lesson	Activities	Stage of cycle
1 and 2	Teach/revise vocabulary and structures of the topic 'hobbies' (present tense)	
3	Play tape where various speakers identify their favourite hobbies and check answers.	
	Ask pupils what they did when they did not understand words or phrases in the tape.	Awareness-raising
	Brainstorm a list of listening strategies.	
	Model strategies such as 'identify the text or topic', 'predicting likely words', 'make sensible guesses' etc (see chapter 6 and the suggestions in chapter 10).	Modelling of some new strategies

4	Teach/revise vocabulary and structures of the topic 'hobbies' (past tense).	
	Play tape. Each group of pupils focuses on one specific strategy and feeds back what they have understood to the rest of the class.	General practice and modelling of other new strategies
	Teacher models the strategy of 'using grammatical clues' (past and present tenses). In pairs, pupils are given transcript of the tape and identify what other strategies they could have used to help them overcome any difficulties.	
5	Give pupils a typed up checklist of the listening strategies identified in lessons 3 and 4.	
	Play a more complex tape. Pupils in pairs compare their answers and how they arrived at them.	
	Teacher plays tape again and checks answers. S/he prepares them for the action planning stage by asking them about their learning style. Do they tend to try to translate every word and then panic or do they make a rough guess at the overall meaning and then fail to check back carefully to make sure their initial guess was correct?	Action planning
	Homework; to fill in action plan	
6	New topic. Teacher teaches new vocabulary and structures.	
	S/he plays tape and asks pupils to apply the strategies they identified on their action plan.	Focussed practice

7	Teacher returns action plans with comments. During individual or group work on the new topic (eg reading/writing activities) she discusses action plans with individual pupils, who chose inappropriate strategies.	
8/9	Further work on the new topic including tapes where pupils are reminded to use the strategies they identified on their action plans. Ideally there are opportunities for pupils to listen to tapes in groups or take cassettes home to listen to for homework, so that they can play back over and over again the sections they personally found hard.	
10	New topic. Discussion; how are pupils now finding listening to tapes? Have their marks improved? What strategies do they now need to concentrate on? For example, if they tended to panic if they did not understand each word and are now more able to listen for the whole gist, are they ready to listen out for grammatical clues?	Evaluation and further action planning

The aim here is that in the end, your students actually *gain time*. Instead of being able to understand each specific text but only once you have patiently worked through it with them, they have a multitude of strategies enabling them to tackle new texts on their own.

3. 'There are so many strategies in each skill area that my pupils need. How can I decide which strategies to start with?'

There is no easy answer to this. Within any one skill area, some strategies are more complex to use than others, some are more difficult to teach than others and some strategies are more time consuming than others. So it is not as easy and straight forward as saying 'teach memorisation strategies to beginners, teach reading strategies in the second year etc'. We can however talk about different levels of complexity of strategy. You start at a fairly simple level and when your students have some command of that strategy, you introduce the next level. We probably need to tackle it as a spiral, teaching perhaps basic reading strategies early on but then introducing more complex ones when pupils are ready for it.

Table 9.2 summarises the suggestions made in chapter 8, in terms of which strategies seem, from our experiences at least, to be the easiest to teach. Whilst not based on any empirical research, we believe it would be foolish to ignore teachers' intuitive reactions.

Table 9.2: Guidelines for 'what to teach when'

From easy to harder steps	Skill area	Possible Reasons
1.	Memorisation	These are very much conscious actions that we do to learn words and therefore it is easier for pupils to explain what they already do and teachers to model new strategies.
2.	Reading	Although some of what successful readers do is at an unconscious level, at least with reading (unlike listening), there is time to go back to a hard word or phrase, reflect on the strategies to try etc. Teachers can show the texts and work through them one step at a time, modelling how to tackle them.
3.	Listening	This is more fleeting than reading but as a receptive skill is more under control than spontaneous speech.
4.	Checking written work	Much of what we do here is dependent on a certain level of grammatical knowledge.

5.	Communication strategies	These are hard to use since we don't have time when we are 'stuck' to think 'now what strategy shall I use?' as we are faced with someone who expects an immediate response! They are also hard to teach, since they are in part dependent on teachers providing listening materials which model what the learners should be doing. That said, we have seen in chapter 4 how some student teachers tackled teaching 'fillers' successfully.

The helpful guidelines by Chamot, Barnhardt *et al* (1999, p. 41) include some of the suggestions we have already made but they also add the following.

Selecting Initial Strategies to Teach

- Start with strategies that have the widest applications in the class. Think of how to adapt the strategy for reading, listening, speaking and writing and for the learning content.

- Determine which strategies could help with specific current challenges that students are facing, and start with the strategies they need most.

So think of your most amenable class.

- Which of the skill areas do they most need support in?

- Which strategy or strategies would you feel most comfortable about teaching them?

- How could you integrate it into the scheme of work?

You may find it helpful to refer to the guidelines for 'action planning' for teachers in chapter 10, Figure 10.3.

4. 'I am concerned that the class will not be interested'

There is no reason why students should be interested at the beginning. As we have seen, this is an idea you have to sell to your students. Often students are quite practical and they have to be able to see the value in making an effort to increase their use of strategies. We believe that metacognition is a key word here; making students aware of what strategies they are already using and what a wide range of strategies they can choose from in order to enhance their learning.

Our projects suggest that it is also important to use mini tests to literally show them that they do remember and understand more if they use a variety of strategies. Vocabulary tests can be useful for this purpose and listening exercises can be striking if used in a certain way. You play an extract once, without any preparation and then play it again after having equipped your students with tools to extract meaning from the text. So they experience a great sense of success when they hear the text again (a detailed description of this technique is given in chapter 10). As Graham (1997, p. 123) reminds us:

> If pupils are helped to notice a link between the strategies they have employed and the resulting outcomes, their sense of control over their own learning could be enhanced and a powerful source of motivation harnessed.

It is also worth pointing out to your students that strategies you learn for one language, eg English or French can be transferred to other languages and even other subjects. Memorisation strategies can help in practically all subjects, for example.

5. 'I believe that as much as the lesson as possible should be in the target language. Yet surely students, especially younger ones, need to use their mother tongue if they are to discuss how they go about their learning?'

At the end of chapter 8, we saw the importance attached by Little to students using the target language to plan and evaluate their learning together. At the same time, we also saw in chapters 5 and 6 that even with advanced learners, the university tutors found it essential to permit some discussion in the mother tongue. Perhaps the key words here are 'gradual' and 'realistic'. To work through the entire sequence of steps that follows may only be possible, where the teacher has the class over several years. During a short course, even the first few steps would be an achievement.

1. The most important thing to begin with is that teachers and pupils feel confident about what they are doing, so the first time strategy instruction is attempted, the mother tongue may well be used.

2. As students (and their teachers) become more familiar with strategy instruction, checklists can be typed out in the target language, with pictures accompanying each strategy to ensure comprehension.

3. The next step might be for the action plans to be completed in the target language. Here teachers might discuss the guidelines and brainstorm suggestions in the mother tongue, but again translate them into the target language, with posters round the walls to support students.

4. Only when students are confident with stages 2 and 3, possibly carried out over a range of skill areas and an extended period of time, might the teacher begin to encourage students to attempt brainstorming strategies in a new skill area in the target language. By now they should have acquired at least some of the structures and vocabulary they will need to discuss their learning.

5. The final stage where students are choosing and evaluating tasks is an ambitious one. The teacher will have to predict and even practise the language involved for such negotiations to take place and provide posters on the walls with the most useful phrases.

6. 'I do not get any support in school to try out new things and I have no one to share my problems or successes with'.

In the Austrian reading project, described in chapter 5, the two tutors were able to support each other by sharing ideas and materials, disappointments and successes because they worked in the same institution. They also found it useful to review the results of the first year with the rest of us at our first meeting in London:

> What helped us in the second year was the feedback and input from the group in London, all the encouragement we got there. We decided to throw away all the material from the first year and make a fresh start, using materials and techniques other members of the group had been successful with.

But how often do teachers get the opportunity to share their practice? There is some evidence that departments with coherent and co-operative teachers yield better results, a message worth spreading. If you cannot get the whole department to join you in this venture, try to get at least one colleague to explore strategy instruction with their classes too. Now that the Internet is becoming increasingly more common, this colleague does not even have to work in the same school, not even in the same country as we have experienced through the co-operation with our projects.

Even though it is not always possible to find someone to share things with, introducing strategy instruction is, in a way, more simple to do on your own than many other innovations. The reason being that strategies are not a skill students will be tested on directly (albeit strategies do help them in their exams), so if you start slowly and carefully this is not going to affect your co-operation with the department.

- Is there some time in your school, perhaps an hour or two every couple of weeks, allotted for sharing good practice or in-service work?

- If not, could this be arranged? It could make a great difference for teachers who are trying out new things in the classroom.

- If you are a school mentor, have you thought of involving your student teacher in supporting you? Some brief suggestions are given in chapter 11.

7. 'My pupils are stuck in their own techniques'

Pupils in general tend to be conservative and quite set in their ways and it has to be stressed that once is not enough. We could perhaps say that pupils need to be drip-fed. It is also worth mentioning that teachers need to get used to using new techniques as well as their students. As we have seen, the colleagues from Austria and Hungary in chapters 5 and 6 all reported that the experiment went much better the second time they tried strategy instruction. They tried it with different groups each time, so it was new for the learners both times but not for the teachers. After the first experiment the teachers reflected on what went wrong and changed the approach accordingly. This gave them a feeling of confidence which they did not have the first time.

In yet another project in Iceland an observation showed that different groups of students who were being taught by a teacher who was in her third year of systematically using strategy instruction in her teaching were using a much wider range of strategies for learning vocabulary than students with a teacher who was trying this for the first time. All the students were the same age and at a similar level of language proficiency.

It is understandable to give up after the first try, especially if things do not go exactly as you had hoped. But it is worth reflecting on what went wrong and why and most important what you can learn from the experience

Although the next chapters focus on pre and in-service training, you might find them useful, as they report on other difficulties that teachers and student teachers experienced in implementing the cycle of strategy instruction.

Chapter 10:
In-Service Training

- How do you run in-service courses on strategy instruction?
- What are the difficulties teachers experience in implementing the ideas that you have put forward?

In this chapter, we will try to relate some of the difficulties teachers experience in implementing strategy instruction to their implications for in-service courses. The guidelines for in-service training (section A) are based on the results of a questionnaire given following a session one of us ran and also on other less formal feedback we have received. A summary of the results of the questionnaire is provided at the end of the chapter (section B). We are aware that the guidelines run the risk of 'stating the obvious' but we hope you will find at least some of the suggestions helpful, whether you are a teacher trainer yourself or a teacher wishing to share what you have read with colleagues in your department. It goes without saying that the guidelines can also be used for a 'one-off' session with student teachers, although in the next chapter, you will find ideas for integrating strategy instruction throughout a pre-service course.

Section A: Some guidelines for in-service training

Perhaps it is no accident that the following suggestions bear remarkable similarity to the steps in the cycle of strategy instruction, but this time in relation to working with teachers, not learners. There may be common principles at work here about the nature of active learning.

1. Putting teachers in pupils' shoes: awareness-raising

Across Europe there are different models of teacher education both pre- and in-service. The greatest difference with regard to language teaching is perhaps in initial teacher education, where the students either learn the target language they are going to teach simultaneously with language pedagogy or they learn the language first and the pedagogy afterwards. The first model has certain advantages with relation to introducing strategies. Because the student teachers are in the process of learning a language themselves, they can become aware of their own strategies and widen their repertoire at the same time as thinking about how to teach them to their future pupils. They are quite literally 'put in the pupils' shoes', experiencing at first hand, the benefits and problems of strategy instruction.

This experiential approach is equally essential within in-service training. In other words, in order to 'infuse' teachers with the necessary understanding and confidence to

take up strategy training in their teaching, it is important to try to find ways to let them 'feel the strategies'. This is all the more important as one of the problems with good language teachers is that they are good language learners. So, because, they have unconsciously internalised a wide range of strategies, they experience considerable difficulty in 'bringing them to the surface', in understanding what strategies are and the role they play in successful language learning.

Implications: the value of a language no one knows

Rather than a lengthy rationale for the value of strategy instruction, we have found that it is best to offer teachers an immediate practical experience of what they are and how useful they can be. This can be done in any one of the following ways.

Reading strategies

Give them a reading text in a foreign language they do not know but is related enough to languages that they do know for them to be able to grasp its meaning, if they use effective strategies; the Dutch poem in chapter 2 or the Catalan story in chapter 5 for example. Dutch is very suitable language, if the participants know any Germanic languages. Here is another example;

> De pijnboompitten uitsprejden op een bakplaat met vetvrij papier, licht roosteren in de oven en dan mengen door uw salade. Eet smakelijk

We give teachers this text without any layout or help except the words and the punctuation and ask them to tell us first what kind of text it is and then to try and translate it. We have used the 'one, two, all method' with this; that is teachers start on their own, trying to understand the text and then they compare in pairs and try to decipher the rest. Finally the whole class pools their ideas, listing the strategies which they used. It is interesting to experience the array of strategies teachers come up with in such a short text. In the end we show them the package with the pinenuts on it and we discuss how it would have helped if they had seen the package beforehand. Because they are mature and experienced language learners they use strategies from all levels, knowledge of the world, cognates, grammar, sentence structure etc.

Listening strategies

Here is a similar description of how we introduce listening strategies to teachers. We choose a language, which the participants should have some possibilities of understanding either due to some prior knowledge of the language (in which case we choose a text above their proficiency level) or they understand due to its close relation to their mother tongue.

1. The instructor plays a tape with a difficult dialogue about 'diving' without any introduction or pre-questions.

2. Then s/he stops the tape and asks how much the participants understood. They probably say nothing (at least our teachers do).

3. The instructor says that s/he is going to introduce them to some strategies for listening and shows them an OHP (colour) picture with a diver diving underwater.

S/he then asks the teachers to brainstorm vocabulary about the picture, writing *diving* at the centre of the blackboard.

4.   Teachers brainstorm ideas about what they see in the picture; who it is, what s/he is doing, what s/he might be looking for etc. The instructor elicits the vocabulary, which they will encounter in the text and forms a spider web on the blackboard. Sometimes s/he has to help the participants by offering a new word in the target language and the whole class helps to translate it.

5.   The next step is that the instructor gives the teachers a few questions on the text and goes through the questions. She now asks what they think the text is about and what they think they will hear, thus developing their strategies for predicting.

6.   Finally s/he plays the tape again and asks them to answer the questions (in the mother tongue as they may not have the language proficiency to answer the questions in the target language).

The immense difference between the first and the second listening is striking and makes the participants acutely aware of the importance of strategy use. The final step is therefore to have them analyse the strategies they used to make the text comprehensible.

Seeing how the instructor introduces strategies and experiencing the use of it first hand, makes it memorable for the teachers and enhances their understanding not only of the importance of strategy instruction for comprehension but also of how to go about it in class. The awareness-raising exercise also serves to build their confidence.

2.   From teaching pupils to helping them learn: modelling

Chamot, Barnhardt *et al* (1999, p. 175) report that:
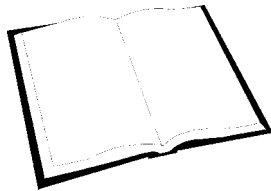
> One of the greatest challenges for teachers was shifting away from implicitly applying strategies in activities to explicitly teaching students to apply strategies for themselves.

Often when we ask teachers to make a list of what they did to learn their vocabulary when they were pupils, what they do is start talking about how they go about *teaching* vocabulary; what games they use etc. This may be part and parcel of the reluctance to 'let go' that we described at the end of chapter 8, to think of how to help their pupils learn independently rather than spoon feeding them. Again, this points towards the importance of an experiential approach; this time in terms of making the teachers aware of strategies that they themselves have not used before. In this way, they realise at first hand that their pupils may not have been using them either.

Implications: the value of realising what you do not know

Having raised their awareness and collected some of their ideas for strategies, it is often helpful to introduce them to a new one. In our experience, about half of the teachers in our sessions fail to spot the clues from the little picture in the Dutch poem. Similarly some teachers are not aware of the memorisation strategy of word/visual association. By showing them these strategies, we are:

- modelling how *they* could model it to their learners;

- making a direct link to them as learners, in other words that this was a useful strategy they lacked.

The 'think-aloud' technique can be used in a similar way. The instructor models it and then invites teachers in pairs to read aloud another text in the target language. When they encounter a word they do not understand, they have to talk about it to each other. This again allows them to experience at first hand that their partner may have strategies that they lack and vice versa. Alternatively it can be used as part of awareness-raising, with the instructor collecting afterwards all the strategies eg context, cognates, prefixes, suffixes etc the teachers used and listing them on the blackboard or OHP.

3. Practice: integrating strategy instruction into the scheme of work

One of the findings of our projects was that learners need more practice than we had anticipated. The same is true for teachers.

We have already seen the difficulties teachers experience in shifting from teaching the pupils to helping them learn. Chamot, Barnhardt *et al* (1999, p. 175) also report that:
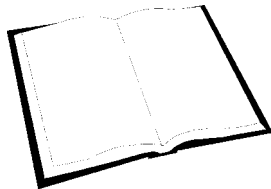
> Another critical shift was from teaching strategies as a separate entity to integrating strategies into the language curriculum. Teachers also struggled with determining an appropriate scope and sequence of strategies to teach at various levels.

A student teacher in one of our projects reported:

> We did not get enough practical examples. I thought I had understood it at university but in the end I was not confident enough about how to do it in the classroom.

Implications: From understanding to 'doing'

Having discussed the first stages of the cycle, teachers need:

- some concrete examples of teaching materials to use in the practice phrase;

- to experience for themselves the value of working in groups during the practice phase;

- to apply their new knowledge to another context.

We usually find that it is best to work initially with one skill area eg reading. So we might do the awareness-raising step with the Dutch poem, model other strategies using 'think-aloud' and then show them some of the materials and ideas for the practice stage seen in parts 1 and 2.

We might then even run through the cycle again using a different skill, like memorisation. Finally though, just like with the pupils, the participants will need direct practice for themselves, rather than just suggestions from us. There are two steps in this process, moving from providing some support to encouraging teachers to devise their own materials and ideas.

■ Step 1

In this stage, we take yet another skill area; for example strategies for checking written work. We start by saying how frustrating we find it that pupils (or our own children!) say that they have checked their work but in fact when they give it to us, there are many mistakes. Even more frustrating is the fact that they seem to be able to correct the mistakes, once we point to a word and ask 'is that right?' We then ask the teachers to think about what they do when they check anything they have written, especially in the target language. They may need some prompting in this, as the process is more complex than it seems. As successful learners, we often read the text through several times, using a different strategy each time:

- Sense monitoring – does it make sense? Have I said what I wanted to say?

- Visual monitoring – does it look right? In English for example, we might ask ourselves if solicitor has one 'l' or two, if accommodation has one 'm' or two.

- Auditory monitoring – does it sound right? In French for example, a near-beginner might ask themselves; 'is it j'ai allé' or 'je suis allé?'

- Style monitoring – 'do I want a formal or informal tone?'

- Problem identification – 'what are my usual mistakes? What am I still not sure of?'

- Resourcing – 'I need to look this up in the dictionary/grammar book'.

(adapted from O'Malley and Chamot, 1990)

Having discussed these strategies with the teachers, their task is to put the following teaching activities in the right order; in other words, to match them to the steps of the cycle of strategy instruction. For example, activity 2 is suitable for awareness-raising.

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You might want to try reordering the activities in Table 10.1 yourself! Note that 'modelling' is usually an activity the teacher does with the whole class. 'Practice' is carried out in pairs or groups or for homework. The answers are provided on p. 158!

Table 10.1: Activities to teach strategies for checking written work

Stage in cycle	Activity
1. Awareness-raising	
2. Modelling	
Modelling 'does it make sense?'	
Modelling 'does it look right?'	
Modelling 'does it sound right?'	
Modelling 'the right style'	
Modelling 'paying attention to familiar mistakes, looking things up'	
3. Focussed Practice	
3a.	
3b.	
4. Action planning	
5. Further General Practice, fading out of reminders	
6. Evaluation	

1. Pairs of learners given list of words and asked to circle correct version eg
   je m'appelle   *je m'apple*
   campange   *campagne*

2. Class given homework over holidays of writing an essay on 'An interesting/ disastrous weekend'. Lesson begins by asking pupils to spend 5 minutes checking their work, then to check their friend's. Class then brainstorms how they go about checking their written work.

3. Class given passage to read with errors in it that they must correct. Brainstorm most usual mistakes. List includes adjectival agreements, avoir / être verbs in past tense, gender, verb endings etc. Next to each, pupils make a note of any relevant page references from their textbook, grammar book etc.

4. Class given text and asked to check it. Text includes contradictory statements such as 'je suis fils unique' ('I am an only child') and then later on in the same paragraph 'ma soeur aime jouer au football' ('my sister likes playing football'). Often pupils only correct the grammatical mistakes and not whether the text as a whole makes sense. When they realise that the mistakes do not just lie in the grammar, it can be pointed out that it is not possible to look for such errors and at the content all at once in the first reading. This can lead to a discussion about the need to re-read what they have written with a different focus each time.

5. Each pupil writes a paragraph with five deliberate errors. Given to friend to correct for homework.

6. Teacher reads aloud passage with deliberate mistakes in tenses or gender etc. Pupils have to raise hand every time they spot one.

7. Pupils examine friend's redrafted version of essay on 'interesting weekend' and assign it one mark for language content and one for accuracy.

8. Pupils read two letters and have to pick out the best and say why.

9. Final draft of essay on 'interesting weekend' marked by teacher and returned. Pupils write down list of own weaknesses and useful strategies to help overcome them for next piece of coursework eg *'spelling; to use a dictionary when I am unsure or it does not look right'*. Teacher adds her own suggestions.

10. Pupil and teacher evaluate success of action plans.

11. On completion of subsequent homeworks, pupils must make a note of:

    - an error spotted on each focussed re-reading (eg does it look right?);

    - an error spotted when looked something up;

    - any point they are still unsure of (see Table 10.2).

    After some time has elapsed, class is simply reminded to check their work carefully.

    (with thanks to Linsey Hand, ex Goldsmiths PGCE student)

Table 10.2: Guidelines for checking homework
Put a star * by the special strategies you chose for your action plan.

Strategy	*1 mistake I corrected*
1. Does it make sense?	
2. Does it sound right?	
3. Does it look right?	

4. Checking for my most usual mistakes;
  -
 	
  -
 	
  -	

5. Is the style right?	
6. Looked up	
7. What I am still unsure of	

A similar sequence of activities, in the wrong order, can be devised around the strategies of any skill area. Examples of activities for each skill area and in the right order can be found in Grenfell and Harris (1999)!

'Answers' to table 10.1!

Stage in cycle	*Activity*
1. Awareness-raising	2
2. Modelling	
Modelling 'does it make sense?'	4
Modelling 'does it look right?'	1
Modelling 'does it sound right?'	6
Modelling 'the right style'	8
Modelling 'paying attention to familiar mistakes, looking things up'	3
3. Focussed Practice	
3a.	5
3b.	7
4. Action planning	9

5. Further General Practice, fading out of reminders	11
6. Evaluation	10

■ **Step 2**

Having 'practised' the cycle with some support from us, the final step is more open ended. We invite the teachers to choose another skill area that they want to work on and to group themselves with other teachers who are interested in the same area. They are then given an hour to work out 'from scratch' how they would teach the strategies involved, using the cycle of strategy instruction.

Feedback from each group often leads to a question and answer session, raising the concerns about the scheme of work and the use of the target language discussed in chapter 9.

4. Action planning: what do YOU want/need to do next?

In the course of describing the cycle earlier, we will have already stressed the importance of supporting pupils in identifying the strategies they need to work on to address their own particular problem. Similarly we end the session by suggesting that the teachers too might want to think about a particular class that they want to work with and a particular skill area that they will focus on. We may, for example, ask them to discuss with a partner:

▪ what can I do in the classroom next week?

▪ what can I do after some preparation, perhaps over the holidays?

▪ what can only be done after a discussion with the rest of the department?

Or we might ask them to complete the task sheet in Table 10.3.

Table 10.3: Action planning for teachers

		Notes
1.	What is my most amenable class?	
2.	Which skill area do they most need to work on?	
3.	What are the strategies involved in that skill?	

4.	Which of the strategies are suitable for their level?	
5.	Which are the most useful/ transferable?	
6.	Which are most 'teachable'?	
7.	Which do I believe in most?	
8.	How will I teach them using the cycle of strategy instruction;	
	▪ Awareness-raising	
	▪ Modelling	
	▪ Action planning	
	▪ Practice (pairs/ groups)	
	▪ Evaluation	
9.	How can I fit it into the scheme of work? Is there anybody I can collaborate with?	
10.	What worked and didn't work? What do I need to modify? Who shall I try it with next?!	

To summarise then, Table 10.4 shows what a typical inset session of perhaps roughly 3 hours might look like.

Table 10.4: Summary of typical in-service session

Timing	Activity
5 mins	Brief general introduction as to how strategy instruction can be useful eg for motivation, independence, differentiation, raising standards etc.
5 mins	Teachers in pairs try to translate Dutch poem
5 mins	Feedback
5 mins	Teachers asked to identify strategies they used
5 mins	Feedback
5 mins	Arguments for explicitly teaching strategies eg research evidence on how unsuccessful learners have a narrow range of strategies etc.
5 mins	Explanation of the steps in the cycle
10 mins	Illustration of steps using materials for reading strategies
10mins	Illustration of steps using materials for memorisation strategies
5 mins	Initial questions/concerns
10 mins	Teachers work in pairs matching suggested activities for 'checking written work' to the stages in the cycle of strategy instruction
5 mins	Feedback
	Break
1 hour	Teachers opt to work on another skill area
30 mins	Feedback of ideas
10 mins	Teachers complete their action plans

No session or lesson plans are 'fool proof'. Furthermore, although we may find it useful to draw on other people's ideas, we also need to 'make them our own'. How would you adapt the plan above to cater for the teachers that you work with?

Section B: A UK case study

In the final section of this chapter, we illustrate the rationale for the guidelines by reporting on a UK example of teachers' responses during an in-service session. One of the new factors to emerge is that, just like for pupils, a 'one off session' is not enough. Teachers, like pupils, need systematic and sustained support.

Introduction: in-service training in Britain

In-service training for teachers in Britain is usually organised:

- by the school itself, according to its perceived needs and government priorities;
- by the local education authority, again in line with government priorities.

In addition, modern language teachers may also attend in-service training run by:

- the Centre for Information on Language Teaching and Research (CILT);
- local branches of the national Association for Language Learning (ALL).

In-service training on Learning Strategies

This session on Learning Strategies was for the Cambridgeshire branch of ALL. It was held from 7.00-8.30 pm, at the end of a busy school day in winter, so unsurprisingly, the audience was smaller than usual. There were:

- two experienced teachers;
- two newly qualified teachers;
- three student teachers;
- two language assistants (native speakers from France, Germany or Spain, often doing a degree in English, who spend a year, on a small salary, in British schools, usually working with small groups of pupils);
- three tutors either involved in teaching undergraduate language courses or in teacher training.

The session followed the steps suggested in the last section, focussing mainly on reading, memorisation and listening strategies. In the brief introduction, the instructor related strategies to the National Curriculum for Modern Languages (1999). This includes requirements such as pupils should be taught: 'techniques for memorising words, how to use context and other clues to interpret meaning, how to redraft their writing to improve its accuracy and presentation'. She asked the teachers to consider whether we can expect pupils to acquire such strategies automatically or whether there is a value in making them explicit. Because of shortage of time, the final task where teachers work in groups on a skill area of their choice was not possible.

At the end of the session, the participants were asked to complete a questionnaire. The questionnaires were fully completed by all the teachers, student teachers and assistants and by the university tutor but the two teacher training tutors did not fully completed theirs', because they did not feel the questions were appropriate to their role. Thus, it is only possible to give a picture of the nine teachers and student teachers, all of whom were working in secondary schools, and the one tutor working with undergraduates.

We will present here a summary of the questions and the teachers' responses, along with our own comments, where appropriate.

1. The participants' experience of strategy instruction, before the session

Practising teachers

All four of the experienced and newly qualified teachers had already tried developing strategies with their pupils, as had the university tutor. None of the student teachers had, which is perhaps understandable since they had only just started their main teaching practice. The assistants had not either, explaining that their main role was to work with small groups developing their speaking skills.

The strategies the teachers had taught were memorisation, reading or listening strategies. However, none of them had spent more than about 15 minutes on strategy instruction.

Comment: It's interesting that the teachers focussed on the easier receptive skills and that they had not thought to teach and practise them in a systematic way over a number of lessons. The assumption that it is enough to just 'tell the pupils' about strategies seems to be quite common.

The benefits they reported included giving the pupils *'opportunities to share their difficulties in learning a language'* and in the case of the university tutor, students *'found it helpful to have made explicit the strategies. It increased their confidence and they felt more in control of their learning'*. Difficulties included that *'different strategies suit different individuals'* and that *'using strategies demands effort and pupils need to feel successful, if they are to persevere'*.

Comment: we have discussed in chapter 8 the importance of giving pupils concrete evidence of how strategies can help them.

Student teachers

The student teachers each had slightly different reasons for not yet having tried to develop strategies. Common concerns that they *all* ranked high were:

- they had not been given enough practical examples at the university of how to go about strategy instruction;
- there was not enough follow up support in school;
- they felt that the classes might not be interested.

Whereas one had been very concerned about how to fit strategy instruction into the scheme of work and that it might take time away from helping pupils to do well in their exams, another was more concerned about the lack of opportunities for follow up sessions where she could share problems and successes with experienced colleagues. Similar concerns have been expressed during in-service projects in Iceland.

2. Responses to the session

All participants were asked whether the session had helped them overcome any reluctance they had felt to try developing strategies, and also for any suggestions as to how to improve the session.

The practising teachers' comments included:

- *the session has helped me to 'place' the teaching of strategies within the framework of my general teaching. Having had time to consolidate my general classroom practice (three and a half years), it's given me a timely challenge to tackle the demands of the National Curriculum and to teach strategies in a more organised and less haphazard way;*

- *it's not been a question of reluctance; it's a question of how to fit it all in, given the little time we have to reach the goalposts;*

- *the session has given me the confidence to believe that it is justifiable to allocate time, within the scheme of work, to teaching strategies;*

- *the session was enlightening and thought provoking. I think we should be teaching strategies a little and often from year 7 (beginners). I found the action plan for listening strategies particularly useful.*

Comment: the question of confidence as a teacher and the pressure to achieve results is evident. There has been increasing pressure on teachers in Britain over the last five years to 'raise standards'. Schools are now in competition with each other. One of the key criteria by which they are deemed to be successful is the percentage of GCSE passes at A* to C that pupils achieve (the exams taken on completing secondary school). Current moves towards performance related pay would include this criterion for teachers.

The student teachers' comments included:

- *by experiencing at first hand my own learning, I realised from the session that learners can profit a lot from strategies;*

- *just the notion of setting time apart for examining how pupils arrive at an understanding of text/ conversation was valuable.*

One assistant commented that she would have liked something in the session on communication strategies, as speaking was where the bulk of her work lay.

The university tutor commented that:

- *I have worked hard on strategies for reading but this session has made me realise that a similar systematic approach to other skills would be invaluable. We needed a bit longer so we could cover all the skills.*

One of the newly qualified teachers suggested that she would have liked a follow up session where successes could be shared and further strategies discussed.

Lessons to be learned for in-service training

Drawing on comments such as these and on our own experiences during the projects, it seems that the following principles, that have guided both chapter 9 and section A of this chapter, are important:

- the value of experiential learning. This brings insight into one's own learning and also addresses the inevitable danger that teachers become so focussed on teaching that they stop looking at pupils' learning;

- the need to emphasise a systematic approach to strategy instruction, rather than brief, 'one off' explanations of strategies;

- the need for longer sessions;

- the need for follow up sessions;

- the need for time to collaborate in school;

- the need for 'proof'. Just as pupils need persuading that strategy instruction works, (for example through evidence of improvement in test results) so do teachers. Pressures such as the scheme of work, the emphasis on 'raising standards' mean that they may lack the confidence to 'dare' to try something new;

- the need to feel settled and established as a teacher before feeling 'safe' enough to take strategy instruction on.

It seems clear that teachers, just like their pupils, need more than a brief introduction to strategy instruction. They not only need longer sessions. They need the opportunity to share ideas with other colleagues in the same school and then follow-up in-service sessions, where difficulties encountered can be addressed. This need to share successes and disappointments probably applies to any initiative in language teaching.

Funding for in-service training will vary from one European state to another. What we hope to have done in this section is to provide further evidence of the need for sustained and focussed professional development of teachers. Although the focus of the final chapter is on pre-service training, it may offer some ideas for how teachers' initial experiments in school can be followed up and shared.

Chapter 11:
Pre-Service Training

- Are your student teachers familiar with the use of strategies from their own language learning?

- How do you introduce strategy instruction into your pre-service courses?

- Have you observed your student teachers taking up the ideas and using strategy instruction during their teaching practice? What helps and hinders them?

Chapter 7 outlined a one month module on strategy instruction for student teachers in Portugal. We end part 3 with a report of a project also carried out within a pre-service teacher training course but in the UK. We have included it for five reasons:

- since these student teachers were on a one year course, it describes ways in which any introductory session or module on strategy instruction can be followed up on a longer term basis;

- the projects that the student teachers carried out and presented to their peers could equally well be undertaken by experienced teachers with the support of a teacher trainer;

- it offers further suggestions for how to integrate strategy instruction into pre-service training with a particular focus on enabling student teachers to develop their own language skills, whilst at the same time showing them how they could teach strategies themselves;

- it gives further insights into the difficulties teachers may experience;

- it reminds us of the successes that we have seen in the rest of the book!

The context of the pre-service training

This was a typical full time one year course for students intending to be teachers, who already have a degree in a foreign language. In this case the course was at Goldsmiths College, University of London. Whilst the student teachers may have a good grasp of one foreign language, they also need to develop a second, since most English schools require competence in two languages from their teachers, even if the second language is only at a level to be able to teach it to beginners. About a third of the student teachers each year are French native speakers. Given that the student teachers spend 24 out of 36 weeks in school, the main emphasis of the course has to be pedagogy, yet they need support in working independently on their second language. Strategy instruction allows us, within the limited time available, not only to provide such support but also to model for them how to implement it in the classroom.

Integration of Learner Strategies into the PGCE course

From the outset of the course, students are introduced to learning strategies. Initially this is in the context of developing their second language skills. One three hour session is devoted to helping them to:

- carry out an audit of their needs. Looking at the requirements of the exams their pupils must pass, what grammar, topic areas and so on do they need to work on in order to be in a position to support the pupils?

- identify their own learning styles;

- raise their awareness of strategies, using the Dutch poem in chapter 1 as a starting point.

A checklist of strategies is provided in the support booklet, with detailed examples of memorisation strategies, reading strategies and strategies for checking written work. Students then have to devise their own independent learning programme, completing the relevant sections of the booklet, including which new strategies they will try. The booklet is handed in and written feedback is given during the third week of the course. Support for their learning is provided through:

- a large language resource centre;

- peer teaching sessions, where the students teach each other;

- encouragement to teach their second language in school.

Towards the end of the Autumn term, a further full day session is devoted to learning strategies but this time in the context of how to teach them to pupils. The importance of a systematic cycle of strategy instruction is stressed, again with illustrations of reading and memorisation strategies and strategies for checking written work. The whole of the Spring term is spent in school.

In the Summer term, students return to the university for several weeks. A focus for the forthcoming final teaching practice in school is provided by the Curriculum Development Projects (CDPs). These projects involve them both in devising teaching materials and in evaluating pupils' responses. Students can choose from a number of topics, including Learning Strategies. Projects from previous years have formed the basis for the case studies in chapters 2, 3 and 4. Before they go into school for their final placement, there is a further one day session on Learning Strategies, which reminds them of the cycle in relation to reading, memorisation and checking written work and then introduces them to listening and communication strategies. At the end of term, students return to the university. According to the topic they have chosen, they are grouped together to prepare a presentation to the whole class of the materials and their findings from the projects.

The questionnaire

In July 1999, the student teachers were asked to complete a questionnaire commenting not only on whether learning strategies had helped their language learning (section 1) but also on whether they had incorporated strategy instruction into their teaching (section 2). They were given the checklists of strategies to remind them. The questionnaire, along with a summary of the findings, is provided below. Although the numbers were small (20 students), there are some interesting issues, which are discussed after each question. You might find it useful to compare them to those in chapters 5 and 6.

Questionnaire and findings

Section 1. You as a learner trying to improve your second language

1.   Which new strategies have you tried and adopted?

Number of mentions	Skill area
28	Listening
17	Speaking
15	Reading
5	Writing

Comment: Whilst the booklet did not provide examples of listening strategies, it is understandable that this appears to be the most popular skill area. There are probably more opportunities for students to listen to tapes in the Resource Centre and at home than to write to penpals etc. Listening and speaking practice for those learning French was readily available through the number of native speakers on the course.

2.   Why do you find strategies useful?

- *A good starting point*
- *Can use them in any situation; different topics, texts, conversations*
- *Can be adapted to any topic and easy to remember*
- *Improved confidence, especially in speaking*
- *Motivating; they work and give a sense of achievement*
- *Listening reinforces vocabulary and grammar rules*
- *Reading and listening to pick topic and cognates helps me get the gist easier and quicker*

- *Knowing that I was going to have to teach classes forced me to use the most useful strategies; ie memorisation*

3. Which strategies were the most useful and why?

'Listening for gist' and 'listening using knowledge of the world' were the most popular strategies. A number of them adopted 'listening for unfamiliar phrases and playing the tape over and over', one of them explaining; '*this helped me understand conversations better and spot unknown words. They also helped me to spot known words used in other contexts.*' The students' remarks also suggested a heightened awareness of their own learning that hopefully they might also apply to their pupils. For example, 'reading and identifying the grammatical category of words', '*enables you to reflect on the words and analyse them carefully and this in turn helps you to retain them in your head*'.

Comment: Since nearly half of the group were beginners (that is with only 4-5 years of secondary schooling experience) it is perhaps surprising that the strategies adopted by the students are not the 'easiest' in terms of Chesterfield and Chesterfield's developmental order. 'Listening for unfamiliar phrases and playing the tape over and over again' and 'trying out grammatical rules in a new context' are quite sophisticated strategies. The fact that students adopted them perhaps reflects that they are already successful language learners and also highly motivated in terms of needing to pick up the new language fast in order to survive in the classroom. This second factor is very evident in terms of the strategies they added to those already on the checklists:

- *Listening to and reading material I was going to use with my classes in school.*

- *I know I learn best when it is to present to others. Preparing worksheets (having checked spellings, genders) and then presenting it to the class helps me remember long term as I can visualise the situation in which I encountered the language. Teaching pupils was the most successful strategy I used!*

Other comments revealed their awareness of their own preferred learning styles.

- *Colour coding is useful for me as I have a visual memory.*

The reluctance to move away from preferred learning styles and to adopt the more time consuming strategies that we have seen from pupils was also evident in some students' responses to the next questions.

4. Which strategies did you try but decided not to use?

5. Why do you think they are not useful?

4. Which strategies did you try but decided not to use?	5. Why do you think they are not useful?
Listening; using facial expressions of people in videos	*I need to see the written form to learn vocabulary.*

Memorisation; drawing pictures to match phrases	*Too time consuming.* *For me, a visual image does not help me recall vocabulary.*
Memorisation; putting words to songs, visual representation etc.	*I wanted to try this but I didn't; probably because it was too time consuming and I wasn't trying to learn formally and in a systematic way like this.*

Comment: We have discussed in chapter 8 the importance of clear guidelines to enable learners to move beyond their preferred learning styles and to address their particular needs. Time constraints meant that such guidelines were not offered to these student teachers.

6. Students were asked to tick in the appropriate column

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I think that strategy instruction has improved my performance	25%	50%	25%	
We didn't have enough time to practise using new strategies together in class	20%	55%	25%	
Using new strategies takes up too much of my time	5%	35%	45%	15%
I would have liked to use more new strategies but I had too much to do preparing my teaching	35%	60%	5%	

Comment: Grouping 'strongly agree' and 'agree' together, it seems that three quarters of the student teachers felt that strategy instruction had a positive effect on their language performance. However, a similar number also would have liked more time in classroom sessions to practise them. The limited time available meant that really only the awareness-raising step in the cycle was implemented and a few of the new strategies were modelled. There was no time for them to work in pairs using a new strategy to learn a list of Chinese words, for example. It is worth noting that in row 1, two out of the five students who felt that strategy instruction had not improved their performance, felt that it had *helped them to know how to teach strategies to their pupils. Adding up the 'disagree' + 'strongly disagree' figures, it seems that although 60% did not feel that using new strategies was too time consuming in principle, the pressures of classroom teaching meant that in reality it played a powerful role in limiting the amount of time they had to devote to using new strategies in their own language learning.*

Section 2. You as a teacher

> **1. Were you aware of strategies before you started the PGCE course? YES/NO Please circle and explain how you knew about them.**

YES: 80% *(yes but I wasn't aware of the terminology / yes but wasn't aware that pupils should be taught them)*

NO: 20%

Comment: it is hardly surprising that these successful language learners were already using strategies, even if they were not doing so consciously. It is interesting to note that all four students, who replied that they were not using them, had the weakest degree grades of the cohort. These were perhaps the less successful language learners, who typically use strategies less frequently and have a narrower range (see O'Malley and Chamot 1990).

> **2. Have you tried developing strategies with any groups of your learners? YES/NO**

YES as a Curriculum Development project (CDP): 35%

YES but not as Curriculum Development Project: 50%

NO: 15%

> **3. If NO, please go to section three. If YES, what have you tried out and with whom?**

Comment: it is heartening to see that so many of the student teachers took strategy instruction on board even if they were only able to implement it in small ways.
Of the seven students (35%) who chose to focus on Learning Strategies for their CDPs, three worked on 'fillers', two worked on reading strategies, and two on memorisation strategies. The remaining 50% spent either several lessons or parts of lessons on some form of strategy instruction.

> **4. Please summarise any benefits to the learners of developing strategies.**

The student teachers reported improvement in the following areas;

- pupils' results/progress;
- pupils' confidence;
- pupils' motivation;
- helped pupils to be more independent;
- helped pupils to understand more quickly and easily.

Other comments:

- *pupils enjoyed reflecting on their work and their learning;*

- *it helped them become aware of their own learning styles;*

- *it raised awareness, gave guidance and stopped them feeling discouraged;*

- *they benefit as they can transfer the strategies;*

- *pupils said that it helped them to have something specific to focus on when they read a text;*

- *pupils said that fillers gave them thinking time.*

Comments: the benefits in terms of confidence and motivation, reported in the case studies, have been summarised in chapter 8.

5.   Please describe any problems, if any, you or they have experienced.

- It takes time and pupils need reminders (this was mentioned five times); *'They need constant guidance and a lot of repetition. We assumed a couple of lessons would be enough but we should have followed it up'.*

Pupils *'tend to be puzzled at first at the new direction their lessons are taking'*, to rely too heavily on the teachers and to be reluctant to take responsibility for their own learning. *'They didn't realise that they needed to put in effort too. They felt like we were teaching them a new skill but didn't realise they needed to work for themselves at taking the new strategies on board. We should have done more pair work activities for communication strategies so they were training themselves and given them more opportunities to speak. Independence is hard to get!'*

- Some pupils found grammatical terminology confusing

Comment: The need for reminders and the rationale for providing plenty of pair work practice opportunities are discussed in chapter 8. The role of grammar in developing more sophisticated strategies is interesting, in the context of recent debates in Britain that modern language teaching has neglected grammar.

Section 3

1.   If you haven't been developing strategies with your learners, please prioritise the possible reasons given below: 1 = most important reason, 9 = least important.

Of the three students (15%) who did not try out any strategy instruction, the reasons in order of priority were:

1. taking time away from helping classes to do well in exams;

2. fitting strategy instruction into crowded scheme of work;

3. lack of support in school;

4. concern that the classes would not be interested;

5. lack of opportunities to share problems, successes, materials with colleagues;

6. thought understood it at the time but later felt uncertain about how to put the ideas discussed in the university into practice;

7. lack of practical examples given in university;

8. not the topic of CDP;

9. did not think it was relevant.

Comment: It is hardly surprising that in their vulnerable role as student teachers, they do not have the confidence to take time away from exam preparation and the departmental scheme of work to engage in strategy instruction. The concern that classes would not be interested is more worrying, especially as they themselves think that it is relevant.

Section 4

1. Do you intend to try developing strategies with your classes next year or even the year after when you are settled into your new school? YES/NO (please circle).

YES: 100%

2.   If YES, and you have done some kind of strategy instruction with your classes this year, please briefly explain what has convinced you it's worth continuing.

Apart from factors already mentioned, such as improvement in confidence, progress and motivation, comments included:

▪ *strategies are basic to all learning and should be taught from the outset. I will incorporate it for all four skills;*

▪ transferability: *Memorisation strategies can be used beyond the languages classroom and the school environment;*

▪ discovery that pupils not aware of strategies: *I realised how many pupils didn't even look at the pictures or for cognates. These are the easiest strategies and yet pupils are not aware of them;*

▪ the value in terms of differentiation;

▪ *finding out in preparing the CDP presentation that it had worked for others too.*

3. If YES, and you haven't done strategy instruction for your CDP, please briefly explain what has convinced you it's worth trying.

- listening to CDPs: *Presentation of the CDPs showed the pupils' results improved;*

- *memorisation strategies really important as from my experience pupils don't seem to be able to learn at home;*

- independence: *Important for pupils to develop independence and take on responsibility;*

- the value of teachers trying out something new: *new and interesting for teachers too.*

Comments: Again concrete results in terms of improving pupils' performance emerge as vitally important for these student teachers. It is heartening to see however that they also recognise the theoretical reasons for engaging in strategy instruction, its role in developing independence and establishing basic patterns of learning.

4. If NO, and you do not intend to try developing strategies with your learners, please briefly explain what it is that puts you off. You may want to use some of the reasons in Section three or add others.

All students responded that they would try strategy instruction.

5. Other comments, including how the sessions we have done on Strategy Instruction could have been improved. Please be honest!

Positive aspects:

- sessions very helpful: *Made me aware of the importance of teaching strategies to pupils. Before I assumed that all pupils have some ability to learn by themselves. Now I know that they don't unless they are taught how to;*

- *excellent in terms of teaching us to teach pupils how to learn better for themselves;*

- booklet very helpful as reference material;

- feedback from other's CDPs: *Useful to see how people have incorporated it into a sequence of lessons.*

Suggestions:

- would have liked more time to try out ideas in booklet in class: *Very good and interesting but more sessions like the Dutch poem, so we feel what it's like to be a pupil;*

- *more sessions directly related to learning our second language to convince me;*

- more input on communication strategies: *They are more difficult to teach in a whole class situation;*

- more input on making grammar strategies accessible;

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- more input on pair work;
- more input on listening;
- more in booklet on existing research findings;
- more time to hear in detail about others' CDPs.

Comment: the need for more time to be spent on strategy instruction during university sessions emerges, not only in terms of the students as language learners but in terms of providing more concrete, practical ideas for teaching pupils. It is noticeable that these were in areas such as listening, grammar and communication strategies that were not covered in detail in the booklet.

Some conclusions

Just like teachers, teacher trainers are often operating within severe time constraints where so much has to be covered in university sessions and in such a short time. We know from experience that the support student teachers receive in their school placements is crucial and yet often school mentors may lack the time or the expertise to offer it. At first sight, it may seem that if teachers are lacking in confidence about strategy instruction, it is impossible for them to encourage their student teachers to undertake it. An alternative way forward, however, is for mentors and student teachers to engage together in exploring how to make it possible in their particular school context. They could share the workload involved in preparing the materials, evaluate the lessons together and support each other through the disappointments as well as celebrating the successes.

Perhaps the Curriculum Development Projects also suggest a model for in-service training. Teachers could be introduced to strategy instruction and the ideas for evaluating them through undertaking the kind of action research projects outlined in this book. Rather than a 'one off' session, they could come together at regular intervals to plan their projects, share materials and report on the results. And then the cycle could start again!

For the road

The journey we embarked on at the start of our project has not been an easy one and there have been all sorts of obstacles that we could never have predicted. But what has made it worthwhile is to see time and time again the relief and even pleasure our learners have shown in discovering how to learn. As one of our secondary school pupils told us:

> It works. I finally understand what the work is about.

We will end the book with a comment from an Icelandic teacher who had recently participated in a short in-service course on strategy instruction:

> I haven't done much strategy instruction. Lack of time, you know, I have to cover the textbook. It would be a good idea though to work more with strategies. The kids might get ideas from each other. I mean 'he does it like that, good idea. I'd like to try that'. It might also give me a greater insight into how the pupils are working. You could help them individually. I guess I am now aware that this is something I really want to be doing more of.

We hope that this book has gone some way towards persuading you too!

Appendix:

What Now? Strategy Checklists

Many teachers have asked us for a simple list of strategies. This is not easy to provide as most of the leading researchers on Learning Strategies each have their own way of categorising and naming strategies. The Council of Europe Framework of Reference identifies four major overarching metacognitive principles and relates each specific strategy to one of them:

- planning;

- execution;

- evaluation;

- repair.

You could also refer to the lists in O'Malley and Chamot (1990) or Oxford (1990) or Chamot, Barnhardt, El-Dinary and Robbins (1999). In addition, those doing research into the specific strategies involved in a particular skill area provide greater detail than the authors above: Vandergrift (1997) on Listening strategies, for example. Finally, you may find it useful to refer to the different lists of strategies provided within the chapters of the book.

Here, we provide just a very basic starting point. To make them of immediate relevance to the classroom, we decided to try to word them in 'user friendly terms' and to present them as checklists that pupils themselves could use. You may want to add others that you use yourself. You could also use the checklists to:

- tick the strategies that you have seen your pupils using;

- cross the strategies that they are not using but you would like them to;

- indicate the year group most appropriate for teaching that particular strategy.

Cognitive strategies

Reading strategies

There is clearly considerable overlap between the strategies involved in the 'receptive' skills of reading and listening. For both skill areas, the order in which the strategies are listed indicates a broad continuum starting from those which might be associated with 'top-down' processing (global comprehension of the text as a whole) to those indicative of a 'bottom-up' approach (word-for-word translation).

Before reading;	
I have checked that I understood the task I have to do	
I have looked at the layout to see if I can guess what type of text it is; eg a poem, newspaper article, brochure	
I have looked carefully at the pictures and the title to see if I can guess what it will be about	
I have tried to remember as many words as I can to do with this topic	
While reading	
I read the whole text through, trying to get a rough idea of what it was about and not panicking when there were words that I did not understand	
I picked out cognates and other words that were familiar	
I picked out what seemed to be the key words	
I used my knowledge of the world to make sensible guesses	
I used the punctuation for clues eg question marks, capital letters etc	
I said unfamiliar words out loud, as a word may not look like a cognate but it may sound like it	
I read the text out loud and tried to identify how the sentence breaks down and which parts of it to work on at a time	
I substituted words in my mother tongue for those I did not know eg 'he somethinged his head on the table'	
I broke down unfamiliar words and tried to associate parts of them to familiar words	
I identified which new words were the most important and looked them up in a dictionary	
I didn't give up and just make wild guesses	
I looked carefully at the endings of verbs to check the tenses, who was doing what etc	
After reading	
I checked back to see if my first guesses were right and made sense or I needed to think again	

Date	In order to improve my performance, next time, I will ……..

Listening strategies

Before listening;	
I have checked that I understood the task I have to do	
I have looked carefully at the title and any pictures to see if I can guess what it will be about	
I have tried to remember as many words as I can to do with this topic	
I have thought about what is likely to be said in this situation	
While listening	
I identified if it was a conversation, an advert, a news bulletin etc	
I paid attention to the tone of voice and any background noises for clues	
I used other clues like key words to identify the rough gist	
I used my knowledge of the world to make sensible guesses	
I tried to see if any words were like words in my mother tongue	
I didn't panic when there was something I didn't understand but I carried on listening	
I listened out for the names of people or places	
I tried to hold the difficult sounds in my head and say them over	
I tried to break the stream of sounds down into individual words and write them down to see if they were like words I know	
I didn't give up and just make wild guesses	
I listened out for grammar clues like tenses, pronouns	
After listening	
I checked back to see if my first guesses were right and made sense or I needed to think again	

Date	In order to improve my performance, next time, I will ……..

Adapted from French as a Second Language; Formative Assessment Package. Canadian Association of Second Language Teachers, 176, Gloucester Street, Ottawa, Ontario.

Strategies for writing

Gathering information	
I have thought about what the task requires and brainstormed some ideas that I want to say	
I have gathered more information by reading, talking to others, remembering relevant words or phrases that I have previously learned	
Developing ideas	
I have listed some key ideas	
I have decided how to organise and communicate my ideas; if the task requires describing, sequencing, explaining or justifying	
I have written a rough plan to show the order in which I will put my ideas	
Writing	
I have added ideas as I was writing	
If I did not know a word or phrase that I need, I have looked it up or thought of an easier way of saying it	
I have tried to include as much detail as possible, for example using lots of adjectives when I am describing something or someone	
I have used clear 'markers' like 'first, then' or 'on the one hand, on the other hand'	
I have tried to 'make it fancy' by using relative clauses for example	
I have tried to 'make it fancy' by trying out grammatical rules that I have learned	
I have paid attention to accuracy	
Evaluating my work	
I have written a first draft, corrected it using strategies for 'checking my written work' and then written a second draft	
I have asked a friend/ the teacher to read it	
I have written a final draft	

Date	In order to improve my performance, next time, I will ……..

Strategies for checking written work

I have read the text all the way through to see if it makes sense	
I have read each word separately to see if it 'looks right'	
I have said the words to myself to see if they 'sound right'	
I have read it over again, paying attention to the grammatical mistakes I usually make eg; Adjectival agreement Verb endings Tenses	
I have made sure that the style was appropriate and I used good 'linking' words	
I have tried to spot what I am still not sure of	
I have looked it up	
I have left it for a day and then come back to read it 'with fresh eyes'	

Date	In order to improve my performance, next time, I will ……..

Strategies for speaking

Clearly more advanced learners should aim to apply many of the strategies indicated for writing; for example 'making it fancy' and paying attention to accuracy. We know from research however (Skehan and Foster 1997) that beginning learners may find it too difficult to make the 'mental space' needed to produce the language spontaneously and be both fluent AND accurate at the same time. The strategies in the list below are aimed at learners who are simply struggling to be able to say anything at all!

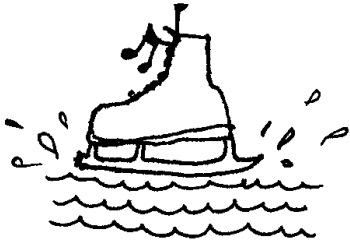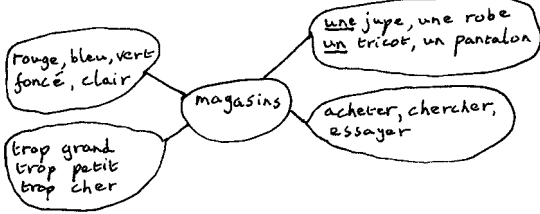|	
I try to keep it simple and avoid topics or ideas that may be particularly difficult	
If I find I do not know the words for what I want to say, I change the way I was going to say something so I can use an easier expression	
I use 'set phrases' that I am confident with to give myself time to think of how to say something I am less sure of	
I listen out for words and expressions that I have just heard the native speaker say and try to use them myself	
I try to encourage the native speaker to do the talking by asking questions like 'what do you think?'!	
I use communication strategies	

Communication strategies

When I am stuck, I ….

If I do not know the word for something……	
I describe it eg what it looks like, what you can use it for, whether you wear, eat or drink it!	
I use a word that has roughly the same meaning eg 'boat' instead of 'ship'	
I use mime or a gesture or a facial expression	
I make up a word by saying the mother tongue word but with the foreign accent	
I use an 'all purpose' word like 'thingumejig'	
I ask for help eg 'how do you say … / what do you call?'	
I show I need help eg by pausing, a puzzled expression etc	
To give myself time to think…	
I use 'stalling strategies' like 'Well, now let me see, as a matter of fact, not at all, absolutely' etc	

Strategies for memorising vocabulary

I think of a word in my mother tongue that is like the word I am trying to learn	
I draw a picture of it	
I write the words out over and over again	
I use look-cover-test-check	
I look at the word and then close my eyes and try to see it in my head (photographic memory)	
I break long words up into little parts	
I make the words into a poem or a shape poem	
I put 'post-its' with the words on them all round my room	
I make cards with the words in the foreign language on one set and in my mother tongue / or pictures on another. Then I play games with them	
I separate the gender of the articles from the words and then try to put them together again	
I say the first letter of the word, then my friend says the second then I say the third and so on	
I make up a word search or a cross word with the new words in it	
I make up a gap filling exercise with the new words in it	
I say the words out loud over and over again	
I make a tape of the new words and listen to it	
I put the words to a well-known tune	
I get my friend/my parents to test me	
I teach the new words to my parents/brother/sister	

Strategies for memorising grammar rules

	Example	
I put rules to music	Singing rules to a tune or a rap eg 'je suis, tu es' to the tune of 'Happy Birthday to you'	
I make games	Sorting words into piles eg verbs that go with être and those that go with avoir	
I make up a word using the initial letters (acronyms)	Eg DRAPERS VAN MMT for verbs with être in the past tense	
I think of a physical response	Thinking of cold/hot for masculine/feminine	
I use pictures	Drawing to remember *à la* disco, patinoire, piscine	
I make a linking map	Eg topic web for shopping	
I use similarities and differences in my mother tongue		

I am always on the look out	Underlining all the examples of a rule in a text	

Adapted from Oxford, R. (1990), Language Learning Strategies, Heinle and Heinle

Metacognitive strategies

The strategies here clearly link up to the Action Plans that have been discussed in part 1 and part 2 of the book. Since they are somewhat abstract, some examples have been provided.

Planning	*Example*	
I have looked at the task and identified what is required	*When I have read the text, I must pick out the key sentence for each paragraph.* *I need to think of questions the teacher might ask.*	
I have decided on how I am going to tackle it	*The first time I hear the tape, I will just try to get the gist. Then I will listen again for the details.*	
I have identified any problems and thought about ways to resolve them eg using a dictionary, asking a friend/the teacher	*I can't write this letter because I don't know how to say 'Yours sincerely'. I will look it up in the dictionary.*	
I have thought about the working conditions that suit me best in order to complete the task	*I need to do this homework in a quiet room/ after I have talked it through with my friend.*	
I have thought about what to concentrate on	*When I start writing, I am not going to worry about getting my tenses right; I'll just get my ideas down on paper. Then I'll come back and check what I have written.*	
I can keep myself going even when I encounter difficulties	*I cannot find the key sentence in this paragraph. That's alright. I'll read the next paragraph and see if that helps. Understanding one thing can lead to understanding another.*	

Monitoring/ evaluating		
I have double checked my original ideas	*I thought the text was about this but now it does not seem to make sense, so I need to think again.* *I thought that I could use this word in the role play but it does not seem to have been understood.*	
I have tracked how well my chosen strategies are working and revised them if necessary	*I thought I could do this task just by reading it through for gist but I think I need to go back and read each sentence more slowly and look up some key words.* *On my action plan, I wrote that I would use word association to help me remember words. This seems to be working well.*	
I know what I have successfully grasped and what I still need to work on	*I can manage to get the basic messages over in this role play but I am still quite hesitant and I need to practise certain key phrases some more.* *I have managed to write a simple letter but I need to look now at 'how to make it fancy'.*	

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