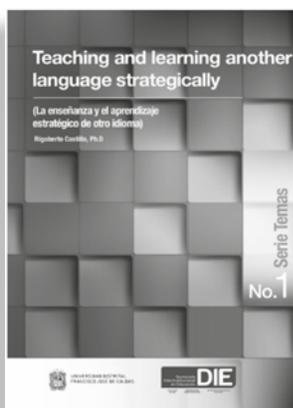


# Teaching and learning another language strategically

La enseñanza y el aprendizaje estratégico de otro idioma



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For many years, researchers and writers in the field of second language acquisition have attempted to provide insights on the strategies employed by learners when learning a language. Most learning strategies are framed within cognitive and metacognitive views. Although these efforts are significant in attempting to understand how languages are learned, many of them seem unclear. In spite of these circumstances, most theories conclude that language learning strategies are vital for L2 learning and teaching.

The uses learners make of language learning strategies mark the difference between the L2 and L1 acquisition processes. It has been assumed that language learning strategies help individuals evaluate their learning process when approaching an L2. In this manner, students reflect on their efforts to learn a second language. Consequently, the fact that language learning strategies can be taught makes them appealing for language learners and teachers (Pavičić Takač, 2008). It also provides

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for both the ground for exploring different alternatives, such as media and other materials available for optimizing learning (Castillo, 2014).

In different opportunities, and recently at the 2014 *Mitteldeutschen Sprachenkongress* in Germany, it has been discussed that the variety of languages spoken by immigrants in Europe may benefit European societies at several human, social, cultural and economical levels. Hence, researchers, teachers and academic institutions are interested in building interest in learning languages. They are also concerned with how teaching can provide better conditions for learners in order to become competent in a foreign language. The most interesting circumstance is, these views are not only present in Europe; they are present all around the world when we talk about language competency and communication.

Propitiously, the book *Teaching and Learning another Language Strategically* is a precious resource for language teachers, teachers of other subjects, pre-service teachers, teacher-educators, in-service teachers and researches. A wide range of readers may approach the book as it suggests several tasks for different learning contexts. The book provides a useful view of the most famous and up-to-date theories on the types of knowledge involved in listening, speaking, reading and writing (Castillo, 2014), by providing valuable examples and practice methods. The text also approaches the challenges teachers face today in a world rich in information technology, and attempts to encourage teachers to reflect on their processes as teachers and also as continuous learners, who are able to provide creative learning settings.

As the author states, this book was written as the result of the observation that educators should be informed about aspects such as the nature of language, the role of language in learning, and the types of knowledge involved in the different language skills. The text presents a new proposal for which it was nominated for “The Macmillan Education Award for Innovative Writing” of ELTons in the United Kingdom. The main thesis of this publication is that strategic learning should take place in school curricula since linguistic or topic syllabi presents serious limitations to helping students construct language or construct with language. It argues other difficulties as well, for example, the ability to learn about the functioning of language. The author indicates that strategic learning is linked with the movement of learning to learn (Castillo, 2014). It suggests that individuals can be active in their learning process by using strategic knowledge. It also provides recommendations for motivating teachers to make decisions about using language for learning and how a bridge between L1 and L2 can be constructed.

The text is divided into six chapters. Each chapter presents theory on the topic along with reflections by the author and methods teachers can implement in order to apply strategic teaching. The book is divided according to the four language skills: reading, listening, speaking and writing. This feature allows the reader to focus on theories about strategic learning for each language skill through clear, precise and substantial reviews. In addition, examples based on theory from different experts and methods are proposed. These examples are based on the author's studies and analysis of different approaches in classroom settings. For this reason, the information is reliable and effective.

*Chapter I: Theories that Illuminate Strategic Learning* presents a review of theories which draw on insights as to strategic behaviours in the four language skills. These theories will help teachers decide how to investigate language acquisition and understand what they can do to enrich their practices (Castillo, 2014). The author proposes that strategies may act and develop simultaneously and fluently. This view has a significant impact on instructional design since strategies are not isolated, but rather constitute a didactical choice. The author proposes that teachers should encourage learners to be “achievement oriented.” This situation allows students to think about their learning once teachers provide deep approaches in teaching and offer appropriate reward and assessment. Examples on how to apply these theories are provided. A key aspect is the use of visuals as a means to activate background information and the retention of concepts in long-term memory. Tables and illustrations are useful for readers to obtain a better view of literature in the field.

*Chapter II: Strategic Learning and Reading Competence* reviews literature pertinent to the connection between strategic learning and reading. It describes the role of motivational, cognitive and language processes. Finally, the author cites Bouvet's monitoring framework for advanced readers (Bouvet, 2000). The main feature in this chapter is the discussion of the types of knowledge reading calls for and their suitable strategies. This provides teachers and course designers with a valuable element when approaching reading, as well as real methodologies for teaching reading, along with didactic and procedural suggestions. These suggestions present a holistic, reliable and relevant methodology for teachers to structure reading lessons. Most books revised when writing this review provide theories about reading, but few proposals to be implemented. Therefore, the text has a great advantage in illustrating how reading takes place and provides feasible suggestions for teachers to approach in their lessons.

In *Chapter III: Strategic Learning and Listening Competence*, the author explains the significant relationship between reading and listening, and describes factors which define each. While other authors present the different types of listening as strategies to approach in lesson planning (Harmer, 2006), this text shows different competences in order to understand how listening takes place. It is crucial that strategic listening leads to effective communication. This part is useful for educators who wish to explore the obstacles learners need to overcome when conducting real life listening, also within classroom or testing situations. Important contributions on how to structure listening are of great value here. Examples such as studies made on TOEFL and other listening tests are also quite useful for course and material designers. These examples illustrate areas where test takers present difficulties. This aspect gives teachers the chance to approach listening material under a critical and analytical approach.

In *Chapter IV: Strategic Learning and Speaking Competence*, the author explains that in school settings, the topics, tasks, feedback and promotion of communication strategies account for the development of speaking. This chapter revises some theories as a means of proposing how to enhance learners' speaking skills. This part is useful for teachers who are interested in notions on working towards fluency.

*Chapter V: Strategic Learning and Writing Competence* presents an original and practical inventory of the types of knowledge called upon in writing and the strategies that go along with them. It gives a view on theory and practice. It also provides examples on how teachers can train learners on the use of graphics and visual representations to organize information and give structure to a text. Real examples presented here were tested by the author in his previous studies and compared with theory. This chapter is of great significance since it gives teachers tips on how to structure writing lessons and for learners how to approach texts. Graphics and descriptions are useful for busy teachers and for students to have a wider spectrum of strategies they might use.

In *Chapter VI: Implications of Strategic Learning for Language Education*, the key principle highlighted is how schools can integrate strategic knowledge into their syllabi. In this manner, teachers and learners can become active in examining, understanding and judging the world. The author provides useful methods for applying strategic knowledge in classroom settings. The author also encourages readers to start further research on testing the relationship between the types of knowledge included in his proposal and their relationship with age, as well as the impact of strategic knowledge in instruction (Castillo,

2014). Ideas on how to do this are given, but readers are free to use their creativity.

As a language teacher, since I started reading the text in the middle of September, I have been following Professor Castillo's proposals in my experience of teaching English and Spanish to German L1 speakers. For example, the use of Venn diagrams to explain the difference between present continuous and simple present has helped students to understand these concepts, which are difficult for many German speakers to cope with. The use of visuals to structure more effective learning and products has also helped quite a bit. More data needs to be gathered, but the first impression is that students are more motivated to learn and instruction is more structured in terms of competences and long-life learning. The great feature is that this book approaches international contexts; for this reason, it is possible to implement the material in any setting in any country.

A further reading section is presented along with Appendix and References. It provides the chance for readers to be creative, work on their own processes, and be critical thinkers.

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