Strategy Training for Language Learners: Six Situational Case Studies and a Training Model

Rebecca Oxford, University of Alabama
David Crookall, University of Alabama
Andrew Cohen, Hebrew University of Jerusalem
Roberta Lavine, University of Maryland
Martha Nyikos, Indiana University
Will Sutter, Danish Refugee Council

Abstract

As teachers, we all want to help learners discover how to learn languages more effectively and more easily. One way of doing this is strategy training, which has recently caught the imagination of researchers and teachers in many parts of the globe. The article’s four purposes are: a) to summarize existing research on use of learning strategies and on conducting strategy training; b) to present six situational case studies of strategy training, with affective aspects interwoven as part of the training; c) to offer a possible strategy training model based on research and personal experience; and d) to make other instructional suggestions for strategy training in the language classroom.

Introduction

Learning strategies are behaviors, techniques, or actions used by students, often consciously, to enhance their learning (Oxford, 76). Language-learning strategies are, of course, learning strategies applied to gaining skill in a second or foreign language. Strategies can often significantly help learners attain greater proficiency by making the learning process easier, more efficient, and more self-directed (Wenden and Rubin, 115; Oxford, 76; O’Malley and Chamot, 71). The four purposes of this article are:

1) to summarize very briefly the detailed research that has been done over the years on the use of learning strategies and on conducting strategy training;
2) to present six case studies of strategy training from around the world and to note the ways in which affective issues have been treated as part of strategy training in these instances;

3) to suggest a possible strategy training model based both on available research and on personal experience; and

4) to make additional, important classroom-oriented suggestions that can be implemented in the ordinary language classroom without any special resources.

Our underlying belief is that strategy training is not just an interesting research phenomenon beyond the reach of regular teachers; it is a set of concepts and procedures that any intelligent teacher can use to help students learn more effectively.

The following discussion represents a serious and sensible look at what we can learn from objective research and personal experience concerning the potential of strategy training. Although we do not yet know all the answers about the uses and limitations of such training, and although we are not yet totally sure of the best ways to conduct such training and adapt it to the vast range of possible language-learning environments, we have, nevertheless, some strong hunches to share based on available information.

**Research Background**

Learning strategy research has been conducted both outside and inside the foreign/second language field. In this section we summarize the status of such research. Given space restrictions, we cannot do more than highlight the main points, but we encourage readers to investigate the research in more detail by reading at least some of the many dozens of articles, books, and reports listed at the end of this article in the References and the Notes. For the best recent summary of learning strategy research outside of the language field, see Weinstein, Goetz, and Alexander (110). For the most comprehensive summaries of language-learning strategy research available at the time of this writing, see Oxford (77), Oxford and Crookall (81), Wenden and Rubin (115), and Skehan (103).

**Research Outside of the Language Field**

In a variety of fields outside of foreign and second languages — ranging from native language reading, through physics and electronics troubleshooting, to general problem-solving — the value of both strategy use and strategy training have been confirmed by well-known and respected researchers, such as Brown, Dansereau, Weinstein, and McCombs. Research has shown that learners actively associate new information with existing information in long-term memory, building ever more intricate and differentiated mental structures or schemata. Research also indicates that learners help those mental processes to occur through the use of learning strategies. The use of well chosen strategies typically distinguishes experts from novices; when compared with novices, experts use more strategies, and more effective ones, to improve comprehension, retention, and problem solving.

Many types of strategies are used by successful learners. One very important type is metacognitive strategies for organizing, focusing, and evaluating learning and for seeking the necessary practice opportunities. Use of these behaviors — along with cognitive techniques such as analyzing, reasoning, transferring information, taking notes, and summarizing — might be considered part of any operational definition of truly effective learning (Brown, Bransford, Ferrara, and Campione, 6; Brown, Campione, and Day, 7; Brown and Palinscar, 8). Successful learners often employ memory strategies (such as grouping and using imagery) and compensation behaviors (such as guessing or inferencing), both generally classed as subsets of cognitive strategies but, in fact, having very specialized functions: for the former, entering new information into memory and retrieving it rapidly when needed; and for the latter, compensating for the lack of not-yet-acquired subject knowledge. Competent learners frequently use social strategies, such as asking questions and cooperating with others in order to learn (Kagan, 55). Though often neglected in both strategy use and strategy training, affective strategies for managing emotions, attitudes, and motivation are important, and affective aspects are central to learning of all kinds (see McCombs, 58-61; Dansereau, 32, 33).
Several strategy training studies have produced some useful findings regarding ways to teach strategies to students (see, e.g., Brown et al., 6; Brown et al., 7; Brown and Palinscar, 8). **Blind training**, in which the tasks or materials cause the student to use particular learning techniques, does not provide explicit information to the student about the nature or importance of the techniques or how to transfer them to new situations. Not surprisingly, research shows that learners do not tend to transfer to other tasks the learning behaviors induced by blind training. **Informed training**, which tells the learner what a particular strategy does and why it is useful, results in improved performance on the task, maintenance of the strategy across time, and some degree of transfer of the strategy to other related tasks. However, the most effective mode of training identified in most empirical studies is known as **strategy-plus-control training** or **completely informed training**. In this mode, the learner is not only instructed in the nature and use of the technique, but is also explicitly instructed in how to transfer, monitor, and evaluate it. It is the most powerful of the three strategy training modes, probably because it empowers learners in a greater number of aspects of strategy implementation and evaluation. Strategy-plus-control training would likely be even more successful if it also dealt directly with beliefs, attitudes, motivations, and anxiety.

**Research Inside the Language Field**

The strategy research results mentioned so far have all come from outside of the field of foreign- and second-language learning. In the growing research on strategies in the area of language learning, some of the same patterns are emerging as have been seen elsewhere. However, as noted in reviews of research on language-learning strategies (Skehan, 103; Oxford, 77; Oxford and Crookall, 81), investigations have suffered from an overemphasis on cognitive and metacognitive strategies at the expense of other techniques, especially affective techniques, social strategies, and the so-called “communication strategies” that are often inseparable from learning strategies. 2

Despite the limited range of strategies taught in formal strategy training studies, along with other significant methodological problems mentioned in the next section, important effects of strategy training have been discovered by a number of researchers. 3 Effects of such training appear to be strengthened when the training activates already existing knowledge and/or techniques which were already being effectively used in the learner’s native language. However, the litmus test is not whether language learning strategies can be effectively taught, but whether language learners actually benefit from using them (either with or without special training).

Concerning possible benefits of strategy use, the research results have been generally positive. Though all language students use some kind of strategies, the more effective students use them more consciously, more purposefully, more appropriately, and more frequently than do less able students. 4 The most effective learners of a second or foreign language typically use a range of cognitive and metacognitive strategies. Social and affective behaviors are far less frequently found (probably because these behaviors are not as carefully studied), but when used they can nevertheless positively influence language learning. Some research suggests the existence of sex differences in strategy use (see review by Oxford, Nyikos, and Ehrman, 86); and certainly the choice of language-learning strategies relates strongly to ethnicity, language-learning purpose, the nature of the task, and other factors (Politzer, 88; Politzer and McGroarty, 89; Oxford, 76, 77; Oxford and Crookall, 81).

**Critique of Existing Research on Strategy Training and the Need for a Broad Concept of Strategy Training**

While there have been a number of successes in teaching language-learning strategies (see, e.g., Cohen, 20; Chamot and Kupper, 17; Chamot et al., 19; O’Malley et al., 72-74; Russo and Stewner-Manzanares, 102), not all such training has had a significant impact. Careful examination of the studies, or parts of studies, in which training seemed to have had little effect (in terms of either statistical significance or subjec-
tive judgment) reveals methodological problems that might have contributed to lack of training success: the short period of training; disproportionate ease or difficulty of the training task; lack of integration of the training into normal language classwork and the resulting perceived irrelevance of the training; and inadequate pre-training assessment of learners’ current strategy use and requirements.

Much research on language-learning strategy training has focused on the mechanics of using and transferring strategies, taken singly or in clusters of several strategies over a rather short time span. Little research or evaluation has been devoted to year-long or longer strategy training, in which many — say 20 or 30 — relevant strategies are explicitly taught as an integrated and prominent part of everyday classroom language learning activities. Furthermore, few if any researchers have gone back to study the permanence of strategy training effects a year or two years later.

Likewise, few investigators have systematically and empirically studied the affective (emotional, motivational, and attitudinal) elements that must be present if strategy training of any duration is to have a lasting effect, although a number of language-learning investigators (Ellis and Sinclair, 39; Oxford, 76; Wenden and Rubin, 115) have mentioned the importance of affective factors in successful strategy training. Training in language-learning strategies — beyond the teaching of just one or two strategies in an ad hoc fashion — is likely not to have many permanently positive effects if learners continue to hold dysfunctional attitudes and beliefs. Examples are the belief that language learning consists only of memorizing grammar rules and vocabulary, and the concept that the language teacher’s role is to decide what is to be learned and the student’s role is to obey passively or to wait for spoon-feeding to occur. Learning a language, perhaps more than learning any other subject, requires strong self-direction, high motivation, and positive attitudes on the part of learners (Crookall, 26-28; Crookall and Oxford, 29, 30; Gardner, 41; Gunderson and Johnson, 42; Holec, 46; Horwitz, 47; Horwitz and Young, 48; Prowse, 94). Moreover, language proficiency, once reached, can be sustained after the end of formal language education only if students possess the necessary strategies, attitudes, beliefs, and motivation to continue on their own (Oxford and Crookall, 80).

In the language area, as researchers continue investigating the use and the teaching of language-learning strategies, their vision of strategy training must be as broad as possible. This vision must include not only short-term strategy training interventions but also long-term strategy training woven into regular classroom work, even though integrated, long-term strategy training poses research-control problems (which might be resolvable only through the use of detailed, longitudinal case studies).

Strategy training thus does not have to be just the teaching of a few particular strategies; it can involve the teaching of many strategies over a long period of time and can include necessary development of positive attitudes, motivations, and beliefs. Some writers (see, e.g., Crookall, 27, 28; Ellis and Sinclair, 39; Fernandes, Ellis, and Sinclair, 40; Wenden, 113) have used the term “learner training” to encompass all the elements already mentioned and sometimes others as well, including knowledge of simplified concepts in applied linguistics and understanding of the learning/teaching process as a whole. No matter which term is used, strategy training or learner training, affective aspects are important in the training process.

Six Situational Case Studies

We present here six situational case studies of strategy training for language learners. Many of these efforts have never before been described in print, and none of the six has previously been analyzed in the way shown below. The four countries represented are Israel, Denmark, the U.S. (three sites), and France. All six case studies involve a comprehensive view of strategy training, in which the teaching of specific strategies is linked with a clear effort to deal with students’ attitudes, beliefs, and motivation — the affective aspect of language learning.

The training described below was designed primarily to provide students with concrete assistance for the improvement of their own learning rather than to generate research results, although, in most instances, research has
emerged as a by-product. These examples show how individual teachers can experiment with innovative approaches for helping their students become more effective learners.

Cases A and B, involving Andrew Cohen in Israel and Will Sutter in Denmark, occur in second-language environments, i.e., settings where the target language is the main medium of communication. In contrast, the training described by Roberta Lavine, Rebecca Oxford, Martha Nyikos, and David Crookall (Cases C, D, and E in the U.S. and Case F in France) is in foreign-language settings, i.e., locations where the target language is not the principal means of communication. Each case is analyzed as follows: a) description of the instructional situation, b) description of the strategy training, and c) responses to the strategy training.

Each case study is short, providing only a few main aspects of the strategy training. Readers wishing to implement similar strategy training projects, and thus requiring more details, are strongly urged to contact any of the strategy trainers whose work is described here. 

Case A: Strategy Training for Learning Hebrew in Israel

This is a case study of monthly strategy training conducted by Andrew Cohen for learners of Hebrew in Israel.

Description of the Instructional Situation

Hebrew as a second language is taught at Ulpan Akiva in Natanya, Israel. At any one time, the group at this center numbers 100 to 150 and includes learners of many ages and backgrounds: Jewish immigrants trying to improve their Hebrew, West Bank and Gaza Arabs sent by their employers to study Hebrew, other resident non-Jews such as diplomats, and tourists wanting to learn Hebrew. The length of their residency at the Ulpan varies. Language instruction is intensive, with six hours per day in class, plus informal language use in the dining hall and residences. One of the Ulpan's basic goals in language learning is to aid in peace-building among peoples of different cultures.

Description of the Strategy Training

For the last eight years, ever since Cohen first went to the Ulpan to learn Arabic, he has served as a strategy trainer for learners of Hebrew. He now typically goes to the Ulpan once a month for three days. The purpose of Cohen's strategy training is to help language learners of all ages take greater responsibility for their own progress. This training can be characterized as a "wake-up call" to learners, involving a series of talks which instruct learners in how they can and should become more responsible for their own language learning. Cohen tries to shake learners out of passivity and apathy and immerse them in the creative process of language learning. His greatest challenge is coaching senior citizens learning Hebrew. He calls it "the old dog/new tricks" syndrome.

During each monthly visit, he gives two formal, hour-long talks, one in English and the other in Hebrew (for more advanced students). The presentations concern various aspects of strategy use and self-directed learning. Students who remain at the Ulpan for up to five months hear a number of talks. For this reason, the topics are varied (e.g., paying attention, vocabulary learning, speaking, writing, reading). All topics are treated in a highly practical manner. For instance, in a discussion of vocabulary learning, tips are included about using specific mnemonic devices. Concrete examples of useful and dysfunctional error correction are part of the talk on speaking and writing.

During each visit he also leads two informal, one-hour rap sessions, one in Hebrew and the other in English. The theme of these sessions is "Everything you ever wanted to know about language learning but were afraid to ask." Additionally, students use coffee breaks and meals to ask about strategies. Says Cohen, "The students really do ask! In many ways I have become a language therapist at Ulpan Akiva."

Because the visits occur only once a month, Cohen cannot conduct integrated strategy training, i.e., training that is integrated with daily language-learning activities. Instead, he specifically instructs Ulpan students about how they themselves can integrate the practical tips and the general attitudes he presents into their own day-to-day learning. Through his mixture of new information, humor, and friendly cajoling, he inspires learners to incorporate and use better techniques.
Responses to the Strategy Training

Cohen receives many positive and often ebullient comments from students. Many learners report that they have begun to learn more systematically by using the strategies introduced in the talks and rap sessions. Learners say that writing dialogue journals has helped promote new self-understanding. Various students are seen carrying portable tape recorders to tape and review lessons as a result of a talk on listening comprehension techniques. Students have also discovered the utility and the limitations of oral readings of texts. Many other specific techniques have been discussed and implemented by Ulpan students after strategy training. Equally important, learners have shown a strongly positive response to the concept of altering traditional roles of students and teachers.

Teachers frequently eavesdrop on the student-oriented sessions to clarify (and in some instances change) their perspective on the role of the learner in the language-learning process and to gather information on specific learning strategies. As a result of the training, both learners and teachers increasingly see the value of learner self-direction. Recognizing this value helps them become part of a more purposeful and more unified educational team.

Case B: Strategy Training for Learning Danish in Denmark

In this example, Will Sutter encourages three types of strategy training by teachers of Danish as a second language.

Description of the Instructional Situation

Adult refugees in Denmark receive Danish second-language instruction through the Language Schools of the Danish Refugee Council, which also provides preparatory courses aimed towards mainstream (tertiary) education and the labor market. Most students attend 15 to 20 lessons per week in classes of 8 to 12 individuals. There is no limit on how long a student may attend language classes free of charge, as long as the student's communicative ability is below that of an average Danish ninth-grade graduate. Almost all language programs run for two months, after which students' progress is evaluated. Denmark does not establish scholastic prerequisites for persons who seek Danish immigration visas or asylum, so twenty percent of the Refugee Council's student body have little or no formal education prior to arrival and may be illiterate. Many students come from Arabic-speaking countries, but Southeast Asians are also frequent. Students of many ages are included, and the average age is 27. Most students are male. Some current language-program goals are to focus on the learner, to have one-third of the classes outside of the traditional classroom, and to promote assimilation of refugees into Danish life.

Description of the Strategy Training

Language program supervisor Will Sutter encourages the teachers to conduct strategy training with no restrictions imposed by the school administration. Three modes of strategy training are used: integrated and overt training; non-integrated courses that teach specific strategies while preparing advanced students for tertiary education; and integrated and covert ('"camouflaged"') training.

Integrated and overt training, the most frequent mode, is conducted as part of the language instruction curriculum and is woven into ordinary classwork, but with explicit discussion of the strategies involved and the need for changing attitudes about classroom roles and responsibilities. The time allotted to this type of training is 15-20 percent of the language course. Methods vary, but usually include making students conscious of their existing strategies, highlighting the advantage of those techniques, and praising students for using them; presenting and practicing new techniques, mostly cognitive and metacognitive; and evaluating the success of strategy use.

The second training mode is separate training courses designed mainly to prepare learners for college, but with strategy training included. These courses of 20-30 hours each are provided outside the mainstream of the Refugee Council's language training programs. They consist of academically-focused lectures followed by group work.

The third training mode, integrated and covert (camouflaged) strategy training, is offered as the
lasting basis of a language-learning course or project lasting as long as six months. Camouflaged training is used with students who feel they should spend time only on learning Danish, or who are threatened by new concepts such as learner responsibility. Many students — particularly some Asians and East Europeans — continue to adhere rigidly to the old learning techniques they acquired in their homeland. Such students are invited to undertake social and academic activities outside of school that implicitly guide them to use new strategies, especially cooperating with peers. For instance, devout and solitary word-list makers are encouraged to form groups whose job is to make and publish a glossary, dictionary, or cookbook; and analytic grammar enthusiasts are invited to work together to make a video. The aim of this training mode is to help these students enlarge their strategy repertoire without actually knowing it or feeling threatened.

Responses to the Strategy Training

Many students are very receptive to overt strategy training, whether integrated with regular language learning activities (the first mode described above) or presented as part of separate college-preparatory courses (the second mode). Perhaps one of the reasons that the separate training courses are popular in the Danish situation is that they are seen as providing highly relevant skills necessary for a very important future goal, “making it” at the tertiary educational level in Denmark. They also provide students with relevant techniques for improving language proficiency even before they move on to tertiary education. Another reason for the effectiveness of both types of overt strategy training in the Danish situation is that the students who succeed in these training modes have certain common characteristics: they are usually more highly educated and younger than less successful students. Camouflaged training (the third mode) is successful with students whose cultural backgrounds do not allow them to deal with overt strategy training and who are often less well educated and older than other learners.

Case C: Strategy Training for Learning Spanish in the U.S.

Roberta Lavine started to conduct strategy training in her university Spanish classes as part of a field test, and has continued with the training since then.

Description of the Instructional Situation

Undergraduate Spanish classes at the University of Maryland are composed almost totally of American students. The vast majority of the students in lower-level courses study Spanish four class hours a week to fulfill part of their mandatory language requirement. Initially, many of them have little interest in the language and see no need for learning it. These students are average, certainly not exceptional, language learners who have never heard of strategy training previously.

Description of the Strategy Training

For two years Roberta Lavine has conducted strategy training in her Spanish classes. She is both the teacher and the strategy trainer. In the beginning, she led strategy training as part of a prepublication field test of a book for teachers on language-learning strategies (Oxford, 76), but the training was so successful that she kept doing it after the field test was over and has made it a standard feature in all of her classes. This discussion concerns the training that was part of the field test.

The training focused on vocabulary acquisition and listening comprehension. It covered the six general categories of strategies mentioned earlier in this article: memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective, and social techniques. While Lavine initially felt most comfortable with a formal approach, she soon found that students preferred informal strategy training integrated into regular classroom activities. She rapidly shifted gears, began to offer more integrated training, and had much greater success than with lectures.

Strategy training took place almost daily during one 15-week semester. Students were introduced to all six strategy groups in a very practical and nonthreatening way. They were regularly faced with specific language tasks that could be facilitated by the use of learning strategies, which the teacher illustrated and the students practiced. Particular emphasis was placed on
strategies for accomplishing tasks related to vocabulary learning, listening comprehension, grammar learning, and test taking.

Students often shared their own techniques with other students. Awareness of strategy use was enhanced by the requirement that students should regularly keep language-learning diaries — a strategy in its own right.

Strategy training was completely integrated into a wide range of communicative language activities. For many of these activities, Lavine made specific suggestions about the kinds of techniques the students might employ. The classroom climate was intentionally changed by introducing affective strategies to reduce anxiety and social strategies like cooperation with peers. Students were made aware of the techniques they were using and were praised for using creative and positive ones. They were taught to notice the effectiveness of their strategies and to transfer the most successful of these to new language tasks when needed. Integrating strategy training with regular language activities and explicitly demonstrating the concrete benefits (e.g., higher grades and greater proficiency) of appropriate strategies motivated the students to improve their conscious behaviors.

Responses to the Strategy Training
Students liked sharing their strategies and coaching each other on how to learn more effectively. Some of the most useful techniques were metacognitive techniques, especially deciding the purpose for listening; social strategies, such as cooperating with peers (students were shocked to learn that they could trust each other and work together); compensation behaviors, like guessing meanings and “talking around” an unknown word (learners were surprised that they did not have to know every word in order to communicate); affective actions, such as laughter, group encouragement, and positive-self talk (e.g., “El español es facil,” “Spanish is easy”); and memory techniques, including associating/elaborating and using imagery, with which they were already familiar. Giving labels to these and other strategies helped students remember and apply the techniques.

As a result of strategy training, students developed an awareness of their own personal responsibilities and choices in language learning. They became more aware that they were already using a variety of home-made memory techniques for vocabulary acquisition, but that they had not yet considered a number of other useful strategies. On their own, students sought out other students who used the same types of techniques they did. Attitudes toward language learning improved dramatically (e.g., “I never knew before that I could use this language!”). Students also developed a greater sense of responsibility for learning in general. Thinking changed from “How can I get a good grade?” to “How can I approach learning?”

Strategy training also helped Lavine in her own teaching. She discovered that her general teaching style and instructional strategies did not always work well with the styles and strategies of her students. After this discovery, she consciously altered her instructional behavior: for example, she began providing more visual clues. Lavine’s first tentative steps in strategy training were so useful for students and teacher alike that she has expanded the training to all language skills and to every language class she teaches.

Case D: Strategy Training for Learning Russian in the U.S.
Rebecca Oxford recently conducted a program of integrated strategy training in two university Russian classes.

Description of the Instructional Situation
This illustration concerns two recent classes of students learning elementary Russian (levels 101 and 102) for approximately five hours a week at the University of Alabama as part of their language requirement. Students in these classes chose Russian for a diversity of reasons: relatively small groups (11 in one class, 15 in the other), career requirements, personal interest in Russian language and culture, and closed sections in easier language courses. Six or seven of these students were highly gifted in language-learning ability, most were ordinary language learners, and one had perceptual deficits even in English that made learning any foreign language difficult.

Although the departmental curriculum called for the use of a grammar-translation textbook
with a schedule of discrete-point tests for all units covered, Oxford found it possible to inject communicative activities, such as games, mini-role-plays based on humorous BBC language tapes, and learner-generated conversations and travelogues. The students also did an extracurricular Heritage Project, in which they worked in small groups to bring to life aspects of Russian culture (e.g., literature, dance, classical and rock music, food, families, politics) which they chose for themselves. The project finale was the Heritage Evening, where students shared their projects in an informal setting and enjoyed a Russian banquet that they prepared.

Description of the Strategy Training

Ongoing strategy training was explicitly built into Oxford’s course syllabus. Strategy training occurred as an identifiable but thoroughly integrated part of each student’s work. Students were often asked questions like these: “What techniques can you share with other students concerning how to deal with the new alphabet?,” “How do you remember this phrase?,” “What does this word sound like to you?,” and “How would you picture this word in your mind?”

Many kinds of strategies were demonstrated and practiced regularly, including memory strategies such as rhyming, grouping, using imagery, and putting new words into context; social strategies, most notably collaborating with others, seeking help, developing empathy, and developing cultural understanding (especially through the Heritage Project); compensation strategies, such as guessing; and affective behaviors, including positive self-talk for students who lacked language-learning confidence. Students were encouraged to share their successful techniques with each other both in class and out. Significant, self-generated, friendly, peer-teaching relationships sprang up throughout the semester.

Every two or three weeks, students brought to class their learning journals, in which they described the strategies they had been using recently for specific language activities, the problems they had experienced, what they liked the best, and what they needed from the class. They shared the journals with the teacher, who used the information to work with individual students and to design future activities.

Responses to the Strategy Training

Though strategy training was new to most of the students, they immediately accepted its value in the learning of Russian. Learners were particularly interested in memory strategies, which helped in mastering the radically new and sometimes daunting Russian alphabet, vocabulary, and grammar. Students started quietly rehearsing their own private memory associations for a given word or phrase, and they felt unembarrassed and even pleased to share their memory devices with their classmates and teacher. Very positive guessing behaviors grew in frequency, especially as applied to new words on the BBC tapes and in textbook reading passages. Social strategies appeared to be popular with students; their learning journals included statements about valuable sessions spent working with peers on the Russian language and on the Heritage Project. Students also commented on the relaxed, sociable atmosphere of the classes and their sense that others really cared about their progress.

Strategy discussions and training had another positive effect: many students started analyzing their individual learning needs (a metacognitive strategy) in a surprisingly perceptive and sophisticated manner and communicated these to the professor, who acted upon their suggestions. For instance, several students specifically asked for additional, independent homework in contextualized translation. Some high-aptitude learners requested more advanced activities and extra out-of-class practice with other students like themselves. One intelligent but underachieving student expressed her serious difficulties with Russian spelling and in the process revealed a previously undiagnosed reading disability in English that was reflected in her Russian language learning. Greater individualization and more effective grouping were possible as students identified and freely communicated their needs to the teacher.

Case E: Strategy Training for Learning German in the U.S.

The strategies taught and exchanged in Martha Nyikos’ German classes were part of
ongoing instruction and represent what came to be known as the "motivational" part of class.

Description of the Instructional Situation

Primarily freshmen and sophomores enroll in the beginning and intermediate levels of German at Purdue University, where the foreign-language requirement is two to three semesters. Students attend four 50-minute classes per week. Class size is fairly constant, approximately 25-30 students. Most students are adamant that their sole reason for taking a foreign language course is the requirement, though some study languages for career purposes.

As in most university programs, instruction is textbook-driven and in the hands of teaching assistants. The overriding goal of instruction rapidly becomes covering the designated half of the chosen textbook within a semester in order to prepare students for objective, departmental tests (a situation similar to that described in Case D). This goal is often recognized by students and finds its logical extension when students assume strategies which are aimed directly at achieving a specific letter grade.

Fortunately, the textbook used in the German program at Purdue moves the students from mechanical, controlled sentences to more communicative, open-ended conversations. Nevertheless, students revert to paying most attention to grammar points, with the attitude that real learning takes place only when rigorous academic, no-nonsense (grammatical analysis) techniques are used.

Description of the Strategy Training

Working within the boundaries of the classroom realities just mentioned is a challenge to any teacher who believes in communicative and affectively-oriented instruction. Given this situation, all materials in Nyikos' German classes were introduced through learning strategies. Students learned "how to learn" by visualizing, performing social tasks, and emulating native speakers in specific ways.

The overarching principle for many cognitive strategies was expressed as: "The more connectives or pathways you have to a piece of information, the more likely it is that you will be able to retrieve it." Strategies were modeled by setting up dichotomies and juxtapositions for visualization. For example, the teacher would stand at one side of the room to model the polite form of address and move emphatically to the other side to express the informal version, each time with a student acting out the interlocutor role. Thereafter, students on one side of the class paired up with an opposite person to practice social strategies, as if speaking to someone of a clearly different social status. Role-play involving physical movement and visualization became interwoven with choice of verbal expression.

Five minutes of class time were devoted to generating other, personally meaningful, multisensory learning strategies. In strategy generation, the creative challenge was for students to draw their best picture, using colors and shapes to represent not only vocabulary, but also difficult sounds and abstract grammatical concepts. Students met this challenge with a rich variety of creative and amusing representations.

Tunes accompanied various types of information. Intonation, speed of delivery, or voice height were occasionally exaggerated to distinguish between questions and statements, or between adjectives representing on the one hand big, tall, or heavy objects and on the other hand little, short, or light ones. These acoustic mediators were coupled with social interaction strategies when students requested objects of a given weight or texture. Such combinations of strategies involving as many modalities and senses as possible were useful to reinforce and provide multiple pathways to information intake and retrieval.

Responses to the Strategy Training

The high level of student involvement and intensity of preparation represented by these student-generated learning strategies promoted several helpful phenomena: class comradery, friendly competition, and understanding of one another's thought patterns and learning styles. Students either shared their ideas in small groups or volunteered to draw or graph their strategies on overhead transparencies. Some initially reluctant (either shy or indifferent) students soon became regular contributors. As the semester went on, one class decided to compile its strategies into a booklet, which a computer buff
then generated with full computer graphics for the benefit of the class. Many of the strategies were admittedly idiosyncratic and thus difficult to understand for anyone who had not heard the individual's explanation: "you had to be there." The main idea in allowing students to generate their own strategies is that personally meaningful information is far easier to remember, even if it is not fully comprehensible to others.

Learning strategy generation quickly made the German class a unique, enjoyable, and therefore truly motivating experience. The initial stages of "goofy" ideas soon gave way to fascination with fellow students' patterns and genuine desire to share helpful hints. Students felt deprived of the information and the entertainment if they did not have time to exchange new learning ideas.

**Case F: Strategy Training for Learning English in France**

Conducted in France, David Crookall's very broad strategy training for students of English was linked with his overall program of active learning through simulation/gaming.

**Description of the Instructional Situation**

The language program consists of a mandatory course in a foreign language for all second-year students at the Université de Toulon et du Var, located on the Côte d'Azur in southern France. The students are often poorly motivated to learn any foreign language, which is not viewed as useful to their present university studies or their future careers. Students receive only about 35 hours of foreign language instruction per year, so contact with the language is exceedingly limited. Low motivation and restricted language contact are barriers facing foreign language teachers in this environment.

**Description of the Strategy Training**

David Crookall, a teacher of English as a foreign language at the Université de Toulon et du Var, conducted training in France with the following goals: to encourage unmotivated students to take responsibility for their own learning and optimize their limited English language contact; to give them learning-to-learn tools or strategies; to bring the language alive, i.e., to activate students' previous knowledge, generally acquired in the lycée; and thus to help learners discover that language learning can be fun instead of drudgery. He offered what he called "learner training," in which he emphasized a broader-than-usual range of training topics, somewhat more than specific language-learning strategies.

For Crookall, the training was intimately linked to active language learning through simulations, games, and group discussions. Half of the first lesson of the term consisted of a language activity, and the rest of the lesson involved talking about language learning issues that arose from the completed activity. The informal discussion covered these topics:

a) Differences between active language learning through simulations and games and the much more formal, grammar-based language program students had experienced in earlier schooling;

b) the special, more demanding, more communicative nature of language learning as compared to other school subjects;

c) problems of low motivation and restricted language contact at the university;

d) classroom management and structure issues, e.g., group work vs. individual work, learner and teacher roles, the need for greater self-direction by learners;

e) the differences in the four skills of reading, writing, speaking, and listening;

f) trade-offs between accuracy and fluency;

g) sociocultural aspects of language use, including appropriacy; and

h) the many functions of language.

In addition, the initial session typically involved explicit discussion of useful learning strategies, such as guessing, not being frozen by a perceived need for perfect grammar, avoiding verbatim translation, arranging the environment to make it conducive to communication, self-monitoring of errors, self-evaluation of progress, cooperating closely with peers, finding and creating language practice opportunities, asking questions, and developing empathy and cross-
cultural understanding. In subsequent lessons throughout the term, these points continued to be addressed. All training was integrated with concrete language-learning activities.

Responses to the Strategy Training

Though research was a by-product and clearly not the main focus, for two years Crookall collected quantitative and qualitative data on 198 students’ reactions to simulation/gaming and strategy training. (See Crookall and Oxford, 31.) To summarize, learners showed a significantly more positive attitude toward active language instruction techniques such as simulation, games, and discussions—encouraged and facilitated by explicit strategy training—than toward more formal, more passive, and less communicative language learning. They also reported significantly more student talk and significantly less teacher talk as a result of the instruction.

At first students were surprised, some negatively and others positively, at the participatory focus of the English class and their need to become self-directed. Throughout the course, students became increasingly favorable toward the nontraditional orientation and the requirement for greater student responsibility. Most became more motivated, involved, and self-assured, even to the point of being able to organize their own class.

In one memorable instance, Crookall invited students to conduct the class in his absence, a not altogether common event, given the institutional context. After some initial surprise on the part of the students that such a thing could ever be conceived, let alone done, the students decided to go ahead with the idea. Taking their responsibilities into their own hands, they duly gathered at their appointed class time, but with no teacher.

Later, when asked how the class had gone, the students reported with evident pride that they “had never worked so hard in a class before” and that they “had never spoken so much English in a classroom.” With hindsight, Crookall reckons that this was probably the best language class he has ever taught.

Summary of Case Studies

Despite varied settings and different styles of strategy presentation, the situational case studies just described have a number of elements in common: a communicative approach to language instruction; enthusiastic strategy trainers; a relaxed and warm atmosphere for learning; explicit strategy training, except for the camouflaged training used with a small minority of students; long-term commitment to strategy training; and positive reactions from learners. These six examples, in their diversity, suggest that the case study methodology may be quite valuable for providing information about strategy training and its results. These illustrations also suggest that even in ordinary language classrooms, it is possible for teachers to help their students learn strategies that will make learning more effective and often more fun.

A Model for Strategy Training

The strategy training model presented here is a comprehensive one, focusing on language-learning beliefs, attitudes, and motivations as well as on teaching specific strategies. Readers for whom some of the concepts or procedures below seem unfamiliar are encouraged to read more about the model in Oxford (76).

1) Setting the scene and exploring attitudes, expectations, and current strategies. This stage involves taking stock of learners’ beliefs about their role, their purpose for language learning (to pass a language exam, to meet a graduation requirement, to read scientific articles, to communicate with native speakers of the language, and so on), and their degree of willingness to accept additional responsibility for language learning. Learners are encouraged to discuss cultural expectations about language learning and about learning in general. They are permitted to explore their anxieties, fears, and even anger toward language learning — feelings which are sometimes strong, especially if students have had negative language experiences in the past. This stage also involves assessing the students’ current strategies using one or more of the following techniques: observations, interviews, student notes or diaries, think-aloud procedures used during a language task, or structured surveys. (For strategy assessment techniques, see Oxford, 76; Cohen, 21; Chamot and Kupper, 17; Politzer, 88; Politzer and McGroarty, 89). At this stage, the trainer considers the amount of time
available for strategy training, the range of relevant strategies, and ways to help learners alter negative feelings and attitudes.

2) Choosing strategies. This stage involves identifying pairs or clusters of relevant techniques that seem to fit together naturally (e.g., the social strategy of cooperating with peers and the memory strategy of structured reviewing). The next part of this stage is choosing strategies based on the following criteria: relevance of strategies; the needs and cultural/personal characteristics of the learners; number and type of strategies to be taught; transferability of strategies to different kinds of learning tasks; usefulness of strategies across different cultural backgrounds.

3) Considering strategy training integration. In this step, trainers consider ways to integrate strategy training into regular language-learning activities. In most cases, as discussed earlier, such integration is very valuable. Only in certain rare instances is it useful to present non-integrated, separate courses or sessions, divorced from day-to-day language instruction.

4) Focusing directly on affective issues. At this point, it is necessary to focus again, and more intently, on the affective issues that surfaced in Stage 1. These might include the amount of motivation learners have toward language learning, their reasons for language learning, and their attitudes toward taking greater language-learning responsibility through strategy training; self-esteem, both general and related to language learning; and attitudes toward the teacher’s role and toward the target language and culture. It is important to consider the ways in which cultural and ethnic identity affect motivation and attitudes. If learners have negative attitudes or unhelpful beliefs about language learning, strategy training must be structured so that these difficulties can be diminished. At this stage, the trainer lists various ways to pinpoint and reduce such problems: for instance, relaxation exercises; emotional checklists; extensive use of laughter in the classroom; regular writing of language-learning diaries; diary-sharing, in which students read each others’ diaries and give suggestions about how they can lessen their fears and increase their confidence; and games and simulations that are specifically designed to identify and reduce anxiety. The trainer also considers ways to improve the classroom climate in general by eliminating punitive types of error correction and by changing communication patterns through group work, so that students do not have to do repeated, fear-producing solo performances in front of a class of onlookers. (For suggested activities to deal with affective issues, see Crookall, 26; Crookall and Oxford, 29; Oxford, 76.)

5) Preparing materials and activities. The trainer now prepares the materials and activities that will be used in strategy training. Learners can contribute to the development and collection of materials; for instance, they can bring in pictures or objects that might be useful as memory aids for vocabulary learning. Activities must be interesting, varied, and meaningful, and they should deal not just with intellectual aspects of language learning, but with the affective side as well.

6) Conducting completely informed strategy training, if possible. This means that the trainer explicitly talks with the learners about the need for greater self-direction and teaches strategies explicitly. Completely informed strategy training is generally preferred to covert or camouflaged training. The latter should be used only when the former would be threatening to learners because of their cultural or individual expectations about learning, and when those expectations are too rigid to change; in this case, it might be necessary to camouflage new strategies without forcing learners to abandon their “security blanket” of old strategies and without explicitly discussing the need for greater self-direction. Regardless of whether overt or covert strategy training is used, it is helpful to provide plenty of practice involving meaningful language-learning tasks. One useful sequence is:

a) To ask learners to do a language activity without any strategy training;
b) to have them discuss how they did it, and to praise any useful strategies and self-directed attitudes that they mention;
c) to suggest and demonstrate other helpful strategies, mentioning the need for greater self-direction and expected benefits, such as higher grades, faster progress, and greater self-confidence;
d) to allow learners plenty of time to practice the new strategies with language tasks;
e) to show how the strategies can be transferred to other tasks;
f) to provide practice using the techniques with new tasks; and
g) to help students understand how to evaluate the success of their strategy use and to gauge their progress as more responsible and self-directed learners.

7) Evaluating strategy training. This step involves evaluating the success of strategy training using varied procedures. Criteria might include:
a) Improvement on a given language task (measuring student performance on the same task or similar tasks before and after strategy training);
b) general skill improvement;
c) transfer of strategies to new tasks;
d) better attitudes among students toward language learning, toward the target language and culture, and toward themselves as language learners;
e) greater learner self-direction and responsibility; changes in the anxiety level; and
f) evidence of more positive emotions.

8) Revising. At this stage, the trainer revises the strategy training procedure based on the evaluation in Step 7, and the cycle begins again.

Additional Instructional Implications
We would like to add several instructional implications drawn from the six case studies and from the strategy training model just presented.

1) Impact of strategy training on the learner: All types of strategy training involve an expansion or enhancement of the learner's repertoire of strategies. The best and most effective strategy training is designed to result in the development of a greater sense of competence and self-direction. The use of appropriate strategies often produces stronger and less inhibited performance by language learners, at least in particular skills. Strategy training can enhance both the process of language learning (the strategies or behaviors learners use and the affective elements involved) and the product of language learning (changes in students' language performance).

2) Impact of strategy training on the trainer/teacher: Teachers who use strategy training often become enthusiastic about their roles as facilitators of classroom learning. Strategy training makes teachers more "learner oriented" and more aware of their students' needs. Teachers also begin to scrutinize how their teaching techniques relate (or fail to relate) to their students' learning strategies, and sometimes teachers choose to alter their instructional patterns as a result of such scrutiny.

3) Possible influence of cultural factors on strategy training: Cultural background is one of several factors which have a strong influence on the type of learner training that is likely to be successful. For instance, though it is usually wise to conduct strategy training overtly and explicitly, in some instances learners' preferences and predispositions — based largely on cultural factors — make it impossible to do so. In such cases, camouflaged training (described in Case B) might be necessary. Another cultural issue that might come up is students' level of comfort with cooperative learning (pair work or small group work) in strategy training; learners from certain cultures feel discomfort when asked to work with others in a classroom and consider it "enforced socializing." Further investigation is needed to explore the impact of cultural factors on strategy training.

4) Design and implementation of strategy training: Strategy training comes in many different shapes and varieties to accommodate diverse sets of learners. Such training is typically most effective when integrated into regular classroom tasks, according to research and subjective experience. Practical use of learning strategies in concrete activities, not a theoretical understanding of strategy principles, should be the goal. In addition, in real life, strategy training is not usually a one-time occurrence; it is iterative or continuous. The final step of the training model shown above leads back to the first step, which allows for continued strategy training and for refinements in that training as needed. As strategy training progresses concurrently with regular language activities, the teacher and the students work together to expand the students' ability to use new techniques and to strengthen existing ones.

5) The need for a comprehensive concept of strategy training: A broad vision of strategy
training is truly necessary. Strategy training seeks to encourage greater responsibility and self-direction in learners, stimulate a collaborative spirit between learner and teacher and also among learners themselves, and help learners master specific strategies that facilitate self-reliance. Strategy training not only focuses on specific techniques, but also addresses the reorientation of learner beliefs and attitudes about the role of students and teachers. This instructional shift moves the teacher from the role of controller to that of enabler. Students consequently feel they have greater latitude in deciding how they will learn. When this more autonomous role is assumed, even initially skeptical students soon report improved attitudes toward learning and show greater progress.

In conclusion, strategy training — if designed carefully and sensitively with the learners’ needs in mind — can become a key element in creative, self-directed language learning. In this article, the research background, the six case studies of strategy training, the training model, and the classroom implications all point in the same general direction: toward the possibility of more effective learning for language students. Admittedly, we have a long way to go in obtaining all the desired answers about the best way to help students become optimally effective language learners. Yet even now we can surmise, based on the objective research and the case studies offered here, that strategy training may be an important part of the solution.

NOTES
1 For research on strategy use and strategy training outside of the language learning area, see, e.g., Brown, Tronsford, Ferrara, and Campione, 6; Brown, Campione, and Day, 7; Brown and Palinscar, 8; Dansereau, 32, 33; Derry and Murphy, 34; McCombs, 58-61; Rigney, 98; Weinstein and Underwood, 109; Weinstein, Goetz, and Alexander, 110.
2 Exceptions to this are Wong-Fillmore, 116, and Ehman and Oxford, 36-38, who have dealt with affective and social language-learning strategies in depth; and Tarone, 106, 107, who has shown how communication strategies and learning strategies can be one and the same.
3 For studies on language-learning strategy use and/or training, see, e.g., Atkinson, 1; Barnett, 2; Bejarano, 3; Bialystok, 4, 5; Carrell, 10-13; Carrell, Pharis, and Liberto, 14; Chamot, 15, 16; Chamot and Kupper, 17; Chamot and O’Malley, 18; Chamot et al., 19; Cohen, 20, 21; Cohen and Aphek, 22, 23; Cohen and Hosenfeld, 24; Cohen et al., 25; Crookall and Oxford, 30, 31; Dickinson, 35; Ehman and Oxford, 36-38; Gunderson and Johnson, 42; Hague, 43; Hamp-lyons 44; Henner-Stanchina, 45; Holec, 46; Hosenfeld, 49-52; Hosenfeld et al., 53; Jacob and Matteo, 54; Kern, 56; Levin, 57; McGroarty, 62-64; McGroarty and Oxford, 65; Naiman et al., 66, 67; Nyikos, 68; Nyikos and Oxford, 69, 70; O’Malley and Chamot, 71; O’Malley et al., 72-74; Oxford, 75-79; Oxford and Crookall, 79-82; Oxford and Ehman, 83; Oxford and Nyikos, 85; Oxford et al., 84, 86; Papalia and Zampogna, 87; Politzer, 88; Politzer and McGroarty, 89; Pressley and Levin, 90; Pressley et al., 91-93; Ramirez, 95; Reiss, 96, 97; Rubin, 99-101; Russo and Stewner-Manzenares, 102; Stern, 104; Tyacke and Mendelsohn, 108; Wenden, 111-114; Wenden and Rubin, 115; Wong-Fillmore, 116. Information on communication strategies, which Tarone argues are often indistinguishable from language-learning strategies in practice, is found in Tarone (106, 107) and Oxford (76).
4 See Note 3 above for a number of strategy training studies.
5 Current addresses of individuals named in the situational case studies are as follows: Case A — Andrew D. Cohen, School of Education, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 91950 Jerusalem, Israel. Case B — Will Sutter, Terpretvej 160, 9830 Thars, Denmark. Case C — Roberto Lavine, Department of Spanish and Portuguese, University of Maryland, College Park, MD 20742, USA. Case D — Rebecca Oxford, Graves Hall, College of Education, University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa, AL 35487, USA. Case E — Martha Nyikos, School of Education, Wright Building, University of Indiana, Bloomington, IN 47405, USA. Case F — David Crookall, Department of English, Morgan Hall, University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa, AL 35487, USA. These individuals welcome comments, inquiries, or suggestions about strategy training.

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Student and Teacher Talk as a Function of Learning Situation.” Forthcoming.


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108. Tyack, Marian and David Mendelsohn. “Student
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