

Self-Regulated Learning

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About Self-Regulated Learning

Self-regulated learning refers to one's ability to understand and control one's learning environment. Self-regulation abilities include goal setting, self-monitoring, self-instruction, and self-reinforcement (Harris & Graham, 1999; Schraw, Crippen, & Hartley, 2006; Shunk, 1996). Self-regulation should not be confused with a mental ability or an academic performance skill. Instead, self-regulation is a self-directive process and set of behaviors whereby learners transform their mental abilities into skills (Zimmerman, Bonnor, & Kovach, 2002) and habits through a developmental process (Butler, 1995, 1998, 2002) that emerges from guided practice and feedback (Paris & Paris, 2001).

Elements of Self-Regulated Learning

Effective learners are self-regulating, analyzing task requirements, setting productive goals, and selecting, adapting or inventing strategies to achieve their objectives. These learners also monitor progress as they work thorough the task, managing intrusive emotions and waning motivation as well as adjusting strategies processed to foster success. These are the students who ask questions, take notes, and allocate their time and their resources in ways that help them to be in charge of their own learning (Paris & Paris, 2001).

Why Teach Self-Regulated Learning to Adults?

Good self-regulators have developed the skills and habits to be effective learners, exhibiting effective learning strategies, effort, and persistence. The key for instructors is to understand how to foster and train these skills in *all* students. This fact sheet offers some instructional strategies for adult education settings.

Self-regulated learning strategies help to prepare learners for lifelong learning and the important capacity to transfer skills, knowledge, and abilities from one domain or setting to another.

What's the Research?

In the 1980's, the term self-regulated learning originated from the increased focus on self-regulation in academic settings (Dinsmore, Alexander, & Loughlin, 2008). A large base of literature has been established on self-regulated learning since the mid-1980's when researchers first began to look at how students become masters of their own learning processes (Zimmerman & Schunk, 2001). Today most models of self-regulated learning incorporate aspects of both metacognition and self-regulation focusing on self-monitoring (Dinsmore, Alexander, & Loughlin, 2008). Zimmerman and Schunk (2001; 2008) directly link motivation to self-regulation. According to these researchers, self-regulated students are those students who are metacognitively, motivationally, and behaviorally active in their own learning processes and in achieving their own goals.

Recommended Instructional Strategies

When strategy instruction for academic learning is paired with self-regulation, called SRSD or self-regulated strategy development, learners become more confident at adapting strategies reflectively and flexibly within recursive cycles of task analysis, strategy use, and monitoring.

Many of the self-regulated learning strategies are useful across various content domains. Specifically, self-regulated learning consists of three components: **cognition**, **metacognition**, and **motivation**. The cognition component includes the skills and habits that are necessary to encode, memorize, and recall information as well as think critically. Within the metacognition component are skills that enable learners to understand and monitor their cognitive processes. The motivation component surfaces the beliefs and attitudes that affect the use and development of both the cognitive and metacognitive skills. Below are suggestions for how to develop self-regulation in the adult education classroom.

- **Cognitive strategies**, include learning strategies that can be specific to a domain or content. Problem solving strategies and critical thinking skills are also important. Critical thinking involves a variety of skills such as identifying a particular source of information and reflecting on whether or not that information is consistent with one's prior knowledge. Activities to help adults articulate and practice critical thinking include comprehension activities such as student-generated questions before or during reading to focus the learner's attention, constructing graphs and tables of real-world issues, and engaging in classroom debate to articulate arguments for writing a persuasive essay.
- **The metacognitive** component is comprised of *declarative knowledge* (knowledge about oneself as a learner – the factors that influence performance), *procedural knowledge* (knowledge about strategies and other procedures), and *conditional knowledge* (knowledge of why and when to use a particular strategy). Adults often struggle to articulate their knowledge or to transfer domain-specific knowledge to a new setting. The goal of self-regulated learning is for these strategies to first become visible and eventually automated for the adult learner. One way to make the three types of knowledge visible in the classroom is to have learners do a demonstration. When demonstrating (such as cooking a particular dish), it is easier to find the specific words needed to articulate what one is doing and how one knows to do it. Questions will draw out more language. Debriefing after the demonstration can make visible the difference between declarative, procedural, and conditional knowledge so that one can make explicit points about how to transfer that knowledge to an academic task.
- The **motivation** component includes both self-efficacy (degree to which one is confident that one can perform a task or accomplish a goal) and epistemological beliefs (beliefs about the origin and nature of knowledge). Working with adults who have failed in school or with specific academic tasks necessitates deliberate discussion of their sense of self-efficacy. Many adult learners have shared with teachers and researchers how difficult

it can be to overcome ingrained, virulent, negative self-talk. Making self-regulated strategy development (SRSD), including goal setting, monitoring and displaying of progress, an everyday feature of instruction can assist these learners to replace negative self-talk with positive self-instruction and a sense of self as an effective learner. Building new habits reinforces adults' persistence and motivation.

Adult educators work diligently to help adults become successful, independent learners. Self-regulated learning strategies are research-based instructional techniques to help learners monitor and manage their own learning skills and habits. When paired with strategy instruction and metacognitive processes, instructors have a powerful learning toolkit to share with learners.

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About the TEAL Center: The Teaching Excellence in Adult Literacy (TEAL) Center is a project of the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Vocational and Adult Education (OVAE), designed to improve the quality of teaching in adult education in the content areas.