Self-instruction

Self-instruction is self-talk that guides thinking. It can support metacognitive control by reinforcing plans and strategies ('I will check my work') and motivational focus ('I'm staying focused on finishing my essay'). It is also very important for emotional control ('I'm not supposed to understand it straightaway', 'I will just take it one step at a time').

Teachers can explicitly teach self-instruction. Start by explaining the importance of positive self-talk: for example, 'I'm too stupid, I can't do it' is self-defeating talk, whereas 'I'm not stupid, I just didn't use the right strategies' is an example of self-instruction that helps students maintain positive attitudes towards continuing with learning. Teachers can also model self-instruction and give students self-instruction scripts (or task them to develop their own). Finally, teachers can have students practise self-instruction by assigning tasks accompanied by self-talk that will enable students to be successful. Model and prompt at first, perhaps using cue cards and posters, and gradually fade these supports until students are independent.

Some examples of opportunities for self-instruction include[1]:

Problem-definition statements: 'I got a D on my essay. What can I do? Was it the way I studied the text? How could I improve my writing technique?'

Focusing attention and planning: 'I have to figure out a better way to study this material. The text is very hard. I need to find a way to understand what I'm reading'.

Strategy statements: 'I will try making a word list of the words I don't understand. Then I will try to rewrite the tricky paragraphs in my own words.'

Self-evaluation and error correction statements: 'I tried to summarise the text in my own words and I still don't understand. I need to call a classmate to see how they are doing.'

Coping and self-control statements: 'Although I don't understand this text, I don't need to panic. I can ask the teacher.'

Self-reinforcement: 'My friend asked me questions about the text and I could answer them. I'm ready to revise my essay.'

Self-monitoring

Self-monitoring involves the observation and evaluation of one's own processes and outcomes. Having students self-record and self-evaluate is helpful, so ask students to selectively attend to specific actions, such as on-task behaviour or growth/fixed mindset thoughts, as they work. Self-monitoring might also focus on ways in which time and resources are managed to accomplish goals.

Support students with self-monitoring by scheduling regular reflection and check-in time. Structure this time with questions and prompts that encourage students to review their goals, progress and strategies

for meeting their goals. For example, encourage students to revisit their goals, measure their progress towards them, and reflect on whether their strategies are helping them make enough progress.

Students can use the following form[2] to self-monitor their homework strategies:

Did I write my assignment down?   Yes   No

What do I need to take home to complete this assignment?

1.

2.

3.

Time I plan to do my homework   _____

Did I complete it?   Yes   No

What did I not understand?

Endnotes

[1]Adapted from Alderman, M. K. (2008). Motivation for achievement: possibilities for teaching and learning. New York, NY & Abingdon, UK: Routledge.

[2] Taken from Alderman, M. K. (2008). Motivation for achievement: possibilities for teaching and learning. New York, NY & Abingdon, UK: Routledge.

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