

13. Developing independent learning and group work skills

What will be covered

13.1 Learning to work independently

13.2 Developing group work skills

13.1 Learning to work independently

Key understandings

- It is important to:
 - keep the goal of developing independent learning skills in mind when working with students; and
 - encourage students to take responsibility for their own learning.
- For many refugee background students this may take time as students need to build up their foundation skills in order to learn independently.

Students need to be encouraged and supported to:

- take risks and view mistakes as an opportunity for learning;
- manage the physical environment (e.g. sit in an area where there are less distractions and manage equipment and resources);
- have a go at their work. It is important not to do the work for them (although modelling how to do the work may be the first step and you may gradually withdraw support);
- improve their work habits, study and organisational skills; and
- organise their work (e.g. by establishing a system such as setting up their folders in sections to file their handouts).

Activity 13.1

Think about and discuss ways in which you can support students to develop these skills.

13. Developing independent learning and group work skills

Some useful learning strategies are listed below.¹²²

➤ **Lower/middle primary**

- Learning how to look up information (e.g. in dictionaries, word lists or charts) and referring to these information sources
- Memorising or recording new words
- Asking for information or to clarify understanding (e.g. do you mean that ...?)
- Checking copied writing for accuracy, considering alternative words for effect
- Reading over their own writing to check meaning
- Listening for key words
- Finding the beginning and end of a book, holding it the right way up and tracking words from left to right
- Recognising the references in sentences created by common cohesive devices (e.g. yesterday, he)
- Interpreting basic punctuation when reading and using this in own writing (e.g. full stops, question marks)
- Using a personal journal to experiment with expressing ideas
- Practising writing letters, words, numbers, sentences, shapes
- Copying words, sentences, short paragraphs
- Drawing on experiences
- Trying to deduce the meaning of unknown words from context cues
- Planning before writing (e.g. writing notes in a framework)
- Using cues (e.g. to pay attention to diagrams during a presentation)
- Attempting self-correction to convey meaning more clearly (e.g. when perceiving misunderstanding, by the listener asking for the English word for something or how to write it in English)
- Reading on when encountering unfamiliar words
- Asking for repetition, questioning to check meaning
- Initiating interactions
- Imitating pronunciation
- Borrowing keywords and phrases used by others
- Rehearsing or role-playing short exchanges
- Re-reading familiar self-chosen texts
- Identifying base words (e.g. walk, walking, walked)
- Using simple repeated formulas to generate and structure writing (e.g. on the weekend ...)
- Providing additional information through diagrams
- Providing detail by listing items

¹²² These strategies have been taken from: Board of Studies (2000), *ESL Companion to the English CSF*, Board of Studies, Victoria.

13. Developing independent learning and group work skills

- Using a range of strategies to find out how to spell a new word (e.g. recording useful word in own dictionaries or checking labels, charts or books)
- Developing vocabulary and phrase lists
- Rewriting after correction or discussion (e.g. adding or deleting words to clarify)
- Using sound or visual features to have a go at spelling words
- Checking criteria and/or expectations before doing tasks
- Predicting what is coming next using semantic or syntactic cues
- After modelling, writing own text using the appropriate structure

➤ Upper primary

- Supporting students to gather and organise information by using frameworks (e.g. structured overviews, data charts, guiding questions or headings), to complete writing tasks and reflect on information
- Locating topic sentences to identify the main idea of a paragraph
- Using text organisational features to find information in texts (e.g. headings, labels, diagrams, contents page, index, glossary, main ideas and supporting detail)
- Using diagrams, pictures or graphs to help interpret meaning
- Identifying sounds that are hard to articulate and practising them (e.g. 'I can't say 'th' as in thank')
- Finding some basic information on a topic (e.g. through a guided search of the web)
- Using context cues to interpret difficult words

➤ Secondary

- Scanning a text for known words or particular information (e.g. whether the writer is concerned about global warming)
- Skimming to get the gist
- Organising ideas coherently (e.g. presenting main ideas followed by supporting detail)
- Using appropriate abbreviations, key words and paraphrasing when taking notes
- Getting the gist of articles by focusing on subheadings and the first line of each paragraph

Although these strategies have been grouped according to stages of schooling, the earlier suggestions may be useful with older students, particularly those with low literacy.

It is also important to have self-accessed learning activities for students who do not have homework or who finish their homework early. These are particularly useful for developing independence. The section on supporting self-accessed learning in *The New Zealand Refugee Handbook for Schools* is an excellent resource as it contains useful hints, skills and activities.¹²³

¹²³ New Zealand Ministry of Education, *The New Zealand Refugee Handbook for Schools*, Section 3: Planning and delivering a teaching program, pp. 13–22, available at: http://www.minedu.govt.nz/web/downloadable/dl8357_v1/refugee-part3-38262.pdf, accessed 8 May 2007.

13. Developing independent learning and group work skills

The following prompts have also been suggested for tutors to ask students:¹²⁴

- *Identifying the information they need*
What do you already know about this topic? What do you want to find out?
- *Deciding what information to use*
Where could you go to find some information? Can you think of another/better place?
- *Evaluating the reliability of a source*
Why is this information reliable? Where can you go to get up-to-date/reliable information?
- *Summarising and taking notes*
How can you organise your notes so that they are easy to use?
- *Acknowledging the information source they have used*
How can you reference your source?
- *Analysing and synthesising information gathered*
What questions do you have in your mind about this topic? What headings can you use?
- *Considering how to present their information*
What options do you have for presenting information? How will you organise your information so that it is clear to read?
- *Completing a general homework exercise*
Show me what you know. What do you think we need to do next? Where do you think I should help you? What do you notice about this? What if we try this another way: how could we do it? What do you think is the next step? What do you think you need? Are there other ways we could do this? How can we help you to learn better?

It may be helpful to put this information onto a bookmark or poster so that you have it as an easy reference.

Activity 13.2

Read through the section on supporting self-accessed learning in *The New Zealand Refugee Handbook* and consider the other strategies discussed above. Highlight the most appropriate strategies and activities for the students you are working with, given their age and language level.

Discuss any suggestions for implementing these or any questions you have with others in your group.

¹²⁴ State Library of Victoria (2005), *Middle Years Information Literacy Partnership Project*, VICNET.

13. Developing independent learning and group work skills

13.2 Developing group work skills

Key understanding

- It is important to develop students' understanding of how to work together.

Developing students' understanding of group work can be done by:

- encouraging peer support;
- making expectations explicit;
- modelling; and
- providing students with the opportunity to practise the language required.

This includes demonstrating how to:

- express agreement and disagreement;
- offer an opinion;
- build on a suggestion;
- request something politely;
- negotiate;
- join in an activity; and
- give and accept advice.¹²⁵

Activity 13.3

Look at the sample T-chart below on how to request something politely.

By	Not
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Using please• Using words like, 'Can I?'	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Stating that you want something and demanding it (e.g. 'Give me that')• Taking what you want from someone without asking• Waiting for someone else to notice your need

Make a similar chart for other group work skills your students need to develop.

¹²⁵ Adapted from: Gibbons P (2002), *Scaffolding Language, Scaffolding Learning*, Heinemann, USA, p. 26.

