

Promoting Effective Strategy Instruction

— Stages of Acquisition and Generalization —

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The Stages of Acquisition and Generalization (SAG) exemplify best practices in teaching; for example, they involve modeling, acknowledging the primary importance of generalization, recognizing the importance of the motivational domain through commitment and relevance, emphasizing “how and why” as strongly as “what,” and organizing a comprehensive process for the interactions between student and teacher working together in the complex world of strategies.

SAG is much more than a system for teaching learning strategies. Students, through SAG, are encouraged to explore the reasons for particular steps in a strategy procedure, evaluate their own awareness and application of strategies, and assess their learning beyond progress in acquiring strategy procedures. The same process is just as important for teachers critically examining their own practice. Less effective strategy teachers concentrate primarily on the procedural level, focusing on steps, and are often unaware of their own thinking processes regarding strategies and their work with students. More effective strategy teachers openly display their thinking processes in learning and using strategies. They proceed beyond procedure and emphasize rationale and when and where they are most applicable. SAG can be approached in the same manner. Exploring the reasons and fundamental principles undergirding SAG and its influence on our beliefs about teaching and learning can open our eyes to more meaningful use of SAG and its impact on other areas of our work. How can we use SAG to inform our

own practice? Refining our craft and professional development comes from more just special training institutes, staff workshops, and graduate courses. Directly examining how we change and learn through our involvement with students in SAG is a rich opportunity for growth.

Modeling as a Catalyst for Reflection

Modeling has been called the “heart of strategy instruction.” A teacher’s participation in modeling can also be a focal point for nurturing a deeper view of SAG and learning of student and teacher. For example, teachers often confuse the Describe and Model stages of SAG. Clarifying the distinguishing features of modeling and explaining helps teachers explore the differences between them. Explanations are conducted in the third person, modeling in the first. Explanations are primarily verbal and two-dimensional; models encompass the total process, including actions and thinking. Explanations remove a process from the realm of direct experience while models bring it alive. Explanations suggest listening, and models invite exchanges.

A focus on modeling opens all the other phases of SAG. Modeling is the strategy with all its complexities and implications. A person who can model the strategy, whether the teacher or student, really knows it. This became evident in my work in a university exceptionality course examining SAG. The format chosen was a participatory model of SAG, using *The Error Monitoring Strategy* as the procedural example. The students were

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strategy learners, and I was the instructor as we progressed through SAG. It was not a strategy training session; our attention was focused on SAG. It became clear that, from the teacher's perspective, offering a model requires: (a) thorough grounding in SAG, (b) the flexibility to handle unexpected questions and

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comments, and (c) a willingness to examine one's performance. A model is the big picture and allows us to proceed from whole to part learning. Reflecting on the quality of our modeling is a natural vehicle for examining our own teaching.

Things to Do and Questions to Ask

Scrutinizing our modeling is one way that SAG can inform our own practice and help us examine what we do and its influence on our teaching in a constructive and productive manner. There are other ways to use SAG to deepen our own awareness of our work with students.

1. Take advantage of available resources. The Strategies Intervention Model Configuration Checklist described in the December, 1991, and February, 1992 issues of Strategram, provides a comprehensive process for examining one's program. Before beginning, a teacher can ask "Why am I doing this self-assessment?" and "What do I

hope to get out of it?" Answering these questions can suggest how best to use the Checklist in one's individual situation. It puts the Checklist in a proper frame of reference, not as an end or project in and of itself, but as a vehicle for growth. Strategic teachers frequently ask their students to examine the purpose and relevance of their efforts. It is a good question for teachers as well.

2. SAG is often presented as an instructional process. Looking at SAG as a process for learning as well as teaching helps emphasize the student's perspective. In addition to thinking about SAG from the point of view of what the teacher does, a teacher can think about how the student is participating. For example, the orientation phase in modeling is generally described as the teacher reviewing previous learning, explaining the modeling process, and stating expectations. The focus is on what the teacher is doing. This description of orientation converted to the student's perspective may read "the student listens to the teacher explain a model, describe activities in the lesson, and state expectations for student

involvement in and awareness of SAG.

3. Discussing levels of understanding of SAG can provide a system for assessing the scope of one's current awareness. For example, simply recounting the activities in the stages, as in the *Error Monitoring Strategy* pretest, "I wrote a passage, edited it, and rewrote it", is a literal level. Explaining the importance of the stage might be another level which is evidence of understanding of the stage's relevance. For example, the student's statement, "A pretest helps me see how I do my editing right now," demonstrates understanding of the stage's relevance. Such a system provides a frame of reference for describing our understanding of SAG for ourselves and others.

Conclusion

The value of questions in exploring SAG is suggested throughout the manuscript. A person who is questioning is also looking for answers. In the participatory model described earlier, responses to questions such as "Why is the pretest important?"; "How is an understanding of SAG going to help me, or not help me?"; "How does examining setting demands from the beginning relate to other aspects of SAG such as generalization?"; and "What does this feel like as a student



involvement." The extensive teacher involvement at this point and the role of the student become very apparent. Looking at SAG as a student can provide a fresh perspective through which to guide the teacher's

and a teacher?" all began to emerge. Strategy learning and teaching are complex endeavors. It can be easy to lose sight of the forest for the trees in our day to day work. Addressing how we think about our own learning on an on-going basis as part of that work can

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ACTIVITIES, TIPS & TOOLS

#1 - Idea #1 comes from Sandy Hendrickson of Colorado Springs, Colorado. Sandy uses the cards on pages 5 and 6 to promote generalization of SIM into the regular classroom. Sandy gives these cards to regular education teachers to cue the students to use the specific strategies. The cards on pages 5 and 6 can be duplicated for classroom use.

#2 - Jane McCann, a Hamilton Middle School (Wichita, Kansas) LD teacher, feels that verbal rehearsal can be fun. To review strategy steps, Jane makes strips of the steps. Each student is given a strip with a step printed on it. Once the steps are passed out, the students must stand in order without talking. Students can only make gestures, or motion students to get in the right place. Jane has students repeat the activity once a week as a review. Their goal is to be able to get in order in thirty seconds.

#3 - Velma Wimes, BD teacher at North High in Wichita, Kansas makes her point to students about the importance of **Overall Appearance** by choosing 2 folders of students in her class. One has smudges, scribbles, drawings, and tears, and the other is neat and clean. Mrs. Wimes reminds students that their teachers often require them to turn in their folders as part of their grade. The question to the students is, "If you were the teacher, what would you think? What kind of grade do you suspect the messy student would get?"

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- ◇ Remember to use DISSECT!
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70 % recall of information for 24 hours.

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- ◇ You'll do great if you use PIRATES.
- ◇ Try PIRATES on this test.
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- ◇ Good luck on the test; make sure you use PIRATES.

*10 % - 15% increase in test scores
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all questions will be answered*

PENS (Sentence Writing)

- ◇ *All sentences begin with capital letters and end with punctuation.*
- ◇ *Do you have your PENS card? I expect you to use it.*
- ◇ *You'll do a great job if you use PENS.*
- ◇ *I expect you to use PENS.*

;

100% complete sentences

65% punctuation of complicated sentences

50% use of compound, complex, compound-complex sentences

ERROR MONITORING

- ◇ *Be sure and correct with COPS before your final copy.*
- ◇ *Follow the steps of WRITER.*
- ◇ *I expect you to use WRITER AND COPS on your paper.*
- ◇ *You can do a great job if you use your COPS card.*

!

*96% accuracy for COPS change in handwriting
(less than 1 error in 20 words)*



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This I PLAN Exercise



was developed by
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The exercise may be
copied for classroom
use!

EDUCATION PLANNING STRATEGY I PLAN Exercise

Directions

1. Review the steps of I PLAN. 2. List SHARE behaviors. 3. Break into groups of three. 4. Practice making eye contact. 5. Use script below for role play. Two people engage in a dialog while the third person counts the number of times they make eye contact. The observer notes the instances of eye contact. 6. Switch roles until each person has an opportunity to play each role. The object is to increase the student's eye contact.

Teacher: This conference is to help you plan what skills you'll work on next year.

Student: There are some things I need to learn.

Teacher: What do you see as your academic strengths?

Student: I can do math problems except for word problems. I need help in reading long words.

Teacher: What about writing skills?

Student: I can't write complex sentences.

Teacher: We'll work on word problems, dividing words into syllables, and writing complex sentences next year.

Student: That sounds good to me.

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be an impetus to refining our practice. SAG can help us as well as our students. The value of looking at SAG primarily as a learning process both for students and teachers is summarized by a preservice teacher participating as a student in a model using SAG to learn the *Error Monitoring Strategy*:

"The learning sequence (SAG) is a very comprehensive strategy which

encompasses many dimensions of how to learn. It not only shows a systematic way to learn and use a strategy; it also touches upon different ways to learn a particular process. Because the learning sequence has so many facets of how to approach learning, I believe that this is a very effective way for students to truly understand and process the information and then use it

in a variety of situations. Although this course has focused on strategies that apply to students who have learning difficulties, I have found these strategies extremely helpful in my own personal learning as a student and I am confident that these strategies will be useful for both regular and exceptional learners. These strategies can only enhance the learning process."

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