

Introduction

Welcome to Module 9 of Working with English Language Learners: A handbook for learning assistants (WELLS).

In this module, we will explore strategies that empower learners to recognise and appreciate their own ability to learn. Having an awareness of how we learn, means we can make decisions for ourselves that can help us to overcome learning challenges. Terms used in this module include: 'Learning to Learn,' 'Metacognition,' and 'Metacognitive Awareness and Agency.'

Learning to Learn

'Learning to learn' is related to developing an awareness of ourselves as learners. This involves reflecting on strategies that support our learning process and selecting the right strategies when problem solving in new areas of learning. We also need to self-monitor to ensure that the strategies we choose are effective.

Metacognition

Metacognition means 'learning to learn'. It is thinking about thinking. It involves asking questions and using strategies that will help you to learn more effectively. It involves checking on and 'monitoring' your own learning.

Metacognitive Awareness

Having an awareness of how we think and learn is called 'metacognitive awareness'. This is important as learners are expected to become more independent over time. If learners develop an awareness of the strategies and questions that support their independence, they will experience ownership over their own learning. Learners can use metacognitive strategies throughout their lifetime to pursue new learning.

Agency

Ownership over learning is sometimes referred to as 'student agency.' Learners who have agency in the learning process know their strengths and goals, explore their interests, and know how to problem solve when learning is challenging, for example, using strategies and resources, or asking for support from a teacher or peer. Learners who have developed a sense of agency are aware of their ownership of their learning process. They also can contribute to the agency of others by sharing their metacognitive strategies and resources for learning.

Learner Experiences with Agency

It is important to keep in mind that some learners have educational histories in other countries that are culturally different to dominant teaching practices in Aotearoa New Zealand. Educational experiences and histories shape learners' agency in different ways. What is considered 'agentic' to the teacher may cause tension for the learner. For example, some learners may choose 'silence' as an agentic and respectful action, whereas the teacher may be expecting the learner to question and challenge ideas. Within a strengths-based approach, it is important to recognise that all learners experience agency in their lives outside of school, and this agency can be built upon as they engage in school learning. Belief in oneself is tied to the learner's persistence to overcome challenges. Therefore, learners need both metacognitive strategies, as well as teachers who believe in them and know their strengths.

Emergent Bilinguals use their stronger language as a metacognitive tool to support the learning of another language. For example, learners may think and make meaning in their stronger language and transfer that conceptual knowledge into the target language. In this sense, Emergent Bilingual learners are already thinking metacognitively. Teachers and learning assistants actively need to create space for

learners to do this in order for learners to recognise and tap into their metacognitive strengths.

The following task is a mind map on 'learning to learn' and 'agency'. The purpose of this task is to explore personal experiences that learning assistants have with agency in their everyday lives and how this can be used as a springboard to understand metacognition.

Task Instructions:

In small groups, respond to and discuss the key questions in the following mind map.

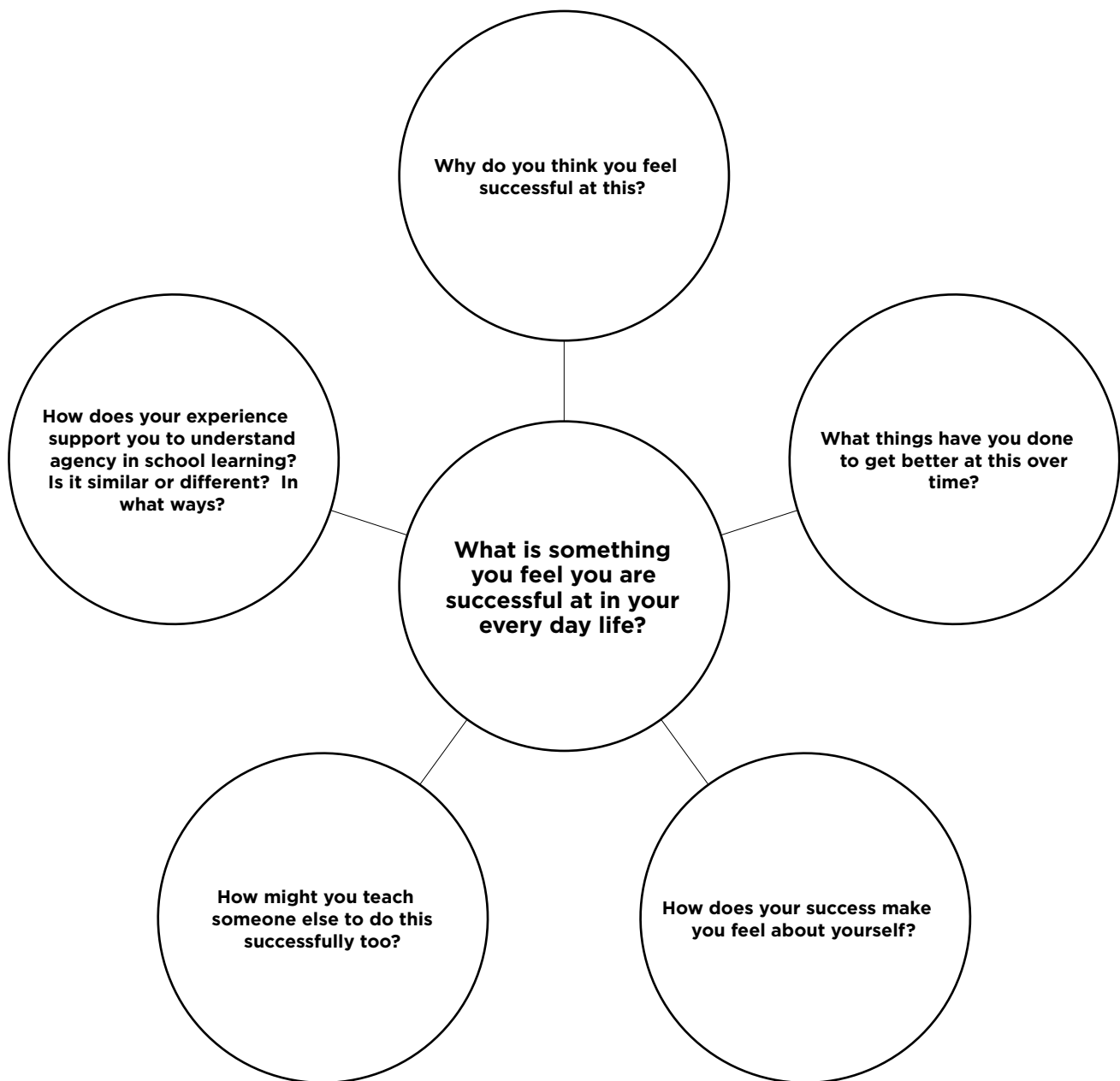
As you discuss, consider:

- What strategies did people share that led to their success?
- Where might these strategies be useful for learning in school?

You can use the example below to support your thinking:



Module 9: Task 1: Mind Mapping on Learning to Learn and Agency



Supporting Metacognition

These are strategies that support learners in developing metacognition and metacognitive awareness before, during, and after a lesson.

Before the lesson, learning assistants can promote metacognitive awareness by:

- inviting learners to explore key vocabulary in their heritage language/s
- finding out what links can be made between learners' prior knowledge and experiences and the new learning

- introducing the learning intentions (learners know what they are learning about or doing)
- explaining the purpose for learning (the why)
- explaining how learners will know they have been successful, including checking in with learning goals or the success criteria.

During the lesson, learning assistants can promote metacognitive awareness by:

- inviting learners to access resources that promote agency and increasing independence, for example, experiences to express meaning in multiple ways such as role play, drawing, movement or games, bilingual dictionary, visuals, online videos or websites*, previous graphic organisers or plans, and talking with a teacher, learning assistant, or peer
- giving opportunities for learners to make meaning, discuss ideas, or problem solve in their heritage language/s
- supporting learners to see themselves as independent and successful by taking healthy risks within a supported lesson
- checking in with learners to revisit aspects about the lesson (see below).

*It is important to check all online content before sharing with learners. You may want to have conversations about online content and school protocol with the classroom teacher.

After the lesson, learning assistants can promote metacognitive awareness by:

- giving learners an opportunity to reflect (individually and as a group) on what went well for them and what was difficult
- identifying and sharing strategies that were helpful for problem solving
- setting goals for the next lesson
- communicating feedback from the learner/s with the classroom teacher to inform future lesson planning.

Supporting Independent Learning:

It is important to support learners to become independent in their learning as they progress through the schooling system, enabling them to

respond positively to learning challenges. This idea of independent learning connects with the New Zealand Curriculum's Key Competency of 'Managing Self'.

This competency is associated with self-motivation, a "can-do" attitude, and with students seeing themselves as capable learners. It is integral to self-assessment. Students who manage themselves are enterprising, resourceful, reliable, and resilient. They establish personal goals, make plans, manage projects, and set high standards. They have strategies for meeting challenges. They know when to lead, when to follow, and when and how to act independently. (New Zealand Curriculum, 2007, p. 12)

As learners become familiar with a range of 'learning to learn' strategies, they can be reminded of strategies they have learnt, for example, graphic organisers, note taking, memorisation, etc. Learners can be encouraged to become more independent in using these strategies by asking questions of themselves, such as:

- What am I trying to do?
- Do I understand what is expected of me?
- If I don't understand, what can I do about it?
- What strategy could I use to help me complete this task?
- What strategy would be most useful in this context?

"Checking in":

- Checking in can occur before, during, or after the lesson.
- Learning assistants can check in to see what questions and interests have come up for learners before, during, or after the lesson.
- Learning assistants can prompt learners to look for connections between what they know or have learned in another subject area in relation to the current lesson.
- Learners can be encouraged to express their thinking in their heritage language/s, or English, or a combination during check in times.

Module 9: Task 2: Using a KWHL Graphic Organiser

Purpose: KWHL is a graphic organiser that can be used at different points in a lesson to help learners think through and record what they Know (K), what they Want or need to know (W), How they will learn it (H), and what they have Learnt (L).

The ‘How’ (H) aspect of this graphic organiser is important because it contributes to a learners’ sense of agency. The ‘H’ highlights actions the learner can take to actively engage in the lesson by connecting to their own knowledges, interests and questions (from the ‘K’ and the ‘W’).

It is important that learners have opportunities to see their growth over time (i.e. what they

know at the beginning of a topic and what they know at the end). Making time to celebrate new learning is very important to developing learner agency.

It is important learners are able to express and record their ideas in heritage language/s as well as in English.

Task Instructions: Complete the KWHL graphic organiser below in relation to one of the success stories from Task 1, for example, singing, weaving, pruning, etc.

| K What I already Know | W What I Want to know next | H How I will find out | L What I have Learnt |
|--|---|--|---------------------------------------|
| | | | |

Module 9: Task 3: Disappearing Text

The Disappearing Text or 'Rub Out' task provides an opportunity for learners to demonstrate their ability with text memorisation and recitation focused on meaningful text.

This task uses the learning to learn strategies of memorisation and recitation, which may be familiar to learners in their family cultural practices. The Disappearing Text should always be used with content that learners understand and care about, rather than being used for meaningless rote learning. It also presents an enjoyable way for students to learn and retain important information.

Because learners work together to read the text aloud, they get practice in speaking, listening, and reading in a safe way.

Task Instructions:

1. Write the definition/text on the whiteboard.
2. The learning assistant reads the definition/text to the learners.
3. The learners read the definition/text aloud together.
4. The learning assistant rubs out every seventh word replacing it with a line to show that there is a missing word.
5. Learners read out the text including the missing word/s that they retrieve from memory.
6. The learning assistant continues rubbing out, with learners reading the definition/text, until there is no text on the board.
7. Learning assistants might create a fun challenge by asking individual learners to try recalling the entire definition/text from memory.
8. Learners then write the definition/text into their books from memory.

Try this task with your colleagues or coordinating teacher using the definition/text below:

Metacognition means 'learning to learn'. It is thinking about thinking. It involves asking questions and using strategies that will help you to learn more effectively. It involves checking on and 'monitoring' your own learning.

Reminder:

- Always use an important piece of text or definition for this activity that learners need to remember.
- A text should not be too long so learners can be successful. It can be two or three sentences for older learners and can be adapted for younger learners, or those beginning to acquire English as an additional language.
- Disappearing Texts can be in languages other than English.

Recapping Key Vocabulary: Module 9

| Term | Definition |
|---------------------------------|--|
| Metacognition | Awareness and understanding of one's own thought processes |
| Agency | To have ownership over learning |
| Metacognitive awareness | To have an awareness of how we think and learn |
| Metacognitive strategies | Tools we know and use that help us to learn more effectively |

Coming up: Module 10

Module 10 is about using your learning from this handbook to create an action plan to support learners.

Preparation: Take some time to reflect on the modules of this handbook and what you have found most useful. Reflect on what you would like to put into practice or improve on. Think about where you might find opportunities to practise your new strategies in the classroom.