

# *L*earn to Learn *With Metacognitive* *Reflections*



**L**earning how to learn is just as important as what one is learning—going beyond the cognitive and into the realm of the metacognitive. Metacognition is about planning, monitoring, and evaluating one's own thinking and learning. To illustrate the concept of metacognition, think about a student working a typical mathematics problem. The cognitive part of the lesson is the answer to the problem. The metacognitive part (Flavell, 1979) is the student's awareness of the strategy he or she used to solve the problem and to arrive at the answer.



When the teacher focuses the lesson on the strategy as well as the answer, the student thinks about how he or she solves problems, and those strategies become part of the student's repertoire for future problems in mathematics as well as in other disciplines. By reflecting on the lesson, the student generalizes the learning and can apply it in diverse and novel situations.

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**Metacognition is about planning, monitoring, and evaluating.**

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Learning to learn, or metacognition, is about becoming aware of one's strengths and weaknesses as a learner. It is about acting on that awareness to change the way one does things. Once the learner is aware, that learner gains control over future learning situations. Teachers must explicitly weave metacognitive strategies into the fabric of the teaching-learning process. Metacognition is about planning, monitoring, and

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evaluating. It is easily integrated into the thinking processes before, during, and after the lesson.

### Best Practice

#### USE MEDIATED JOURNALS BEFORE THE LESSON

It is often appropriate to define terms prior to the lesson; therefore, an examination of the term literacy serves as a way to illustrate using metacognition before the lesson. Literacy is a robust concept that can be somewhat ambiguous. What is the definition of literacy as it applies to reading? To help develop a personal definition of literacy, try the following reflective strategy with students, a strategy using mediated journal writing.

A mediated journal entry is an entry with prompts by the teacher that cue the student to respond. The prompts get the student thinking by “priming the pump.” Using the concept of the mediated journal entry, have students respond to the following prompts to describe a literate person:

1. Name someone you believe is literate (personal acquaintance, celebrity, historical figure, or fictional character).
2. List two traits of the literate person you selected.
3. Describe someone who is not a literate person.
4. Tell how the two are different.
5. Write a summary sentence.
6. Title your piece: A Literate Person.

#### Illiterate (can't read) or Alliterate (does not read)

After completing the journal entry, think about the benefits of being a literate person and the repercussions of being illiterate (can't read) or alliterate (does not read). Some issues you might include are self-esteem, school and grades, open doors, or the gatekeeper concept of “closed gateways” to higher education and other opportunities.

### Best Practice

#### USE LITERACY RANKING DURING THE LESSON

During the lesson, teachers can further examine the elements of literacy by having students rank the four elements of literacy according to strengths: reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Students can then justify their rankings of literacy elements with further reflection (see Figure 1).

## Literacy Ranking

Rank the elements of literacy according to your strengths:

\_\_\_\_\_ Reading

\_\_\_\_\_ Writing

\_\_\_\_\_ Speaking

\_\_\_\_\_ Listening

Think about how you might pursue your weaker areas and why you might want to pursue them.

Figure 1

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Mr. Parnes's questions can spark thinking and metacognition during the act of reading. Ask students to use Mr. Parnes's questions as they read: "Pause at key points and ask yourself, 'How does this connect to something I already know? How might I use this in the future?'" As students learn to mentally gauge the possibilities of these two reflective questions, they begin to interact with the reading in the most meaningful ways.

### Best Practice

## RETURN TO MEDIATED JOURNALS AFTER THE LESSON

Again, a proven tool for explicit attention to reflective learning following the learning is the mediated journal, which guides the student entry with lead-ins (Fogarty, 1994). Lead-ins do just that. They lead the student to write a reflection. A lead-in leads students to think in critical and creative ways. Notice how the various lead-ins dictate a certain kind of thinking on the part of the student:

I wonder . . .

A conclusion I have drawn is . . .

Comparing the two . . .

What if . . . ?

A problem I'm having is . . .

The easiest part was . . .

My worry is . . .

How might I . . . ?

As students respond to the lead-ins, they begin to solidify their thinking about the learning, and they begin to develop a keen awareness about how they learn. This kind of self-feedback is critical to the concepts of lifelong literacy and learning.

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**Reading, writing, speaking, and listening are inextricably linked in the journey toward becoming a literate person.**

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Reading, writing, speaking, and listening are inextricably linked in the journey toward becoming a literate person. Use the mediated journal as a literacy tool to prompt thinking prior to the lesson and again following the lesson as a review tool to deepen comprehension. Have students label various sections of the journal. Use labels such as the following:

- Vocabulary
- Summaries

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- Characters to Remember
- Great Beginnings
- Literary Illuminations
- Write Your Own Endings
- Kinds of Stories I Like

Discuss with students how these labels are not only helpful signals about the important information to capture when reading but also helpful ways to categorize thoughts following the reading to capture the key points. Compare the mediated journal to typical text organizers such as headings, boldface type, and italics. Talk about how the text organizers and mediated entries act as signals to the reader or learner to pay closer attention.