A Guide for Smarter Learning

SMART LEARNING
BETTER TOOLS. BETTER LEARNING.

Planning with an End in Mind

Learning Skills

Activating what I know

Building connections

Generating questions

Forming images

Making inferences

Determining what's important

Summarizing and synthesizing big ideas

Checking and rechecking

Connecting…
Creating a Context for the Learning

Building community and purpose

Setting a *s-t-r-e-t-c-h* goal

Activating prior knowledge

Generating questions

Predicting Hypothesizing

Processing Information

Applying tools to *chunks* of text

Reflecting…

Transforming Learning

Setting a *s-t-r-e-t-c-h* goal

Setting the image…
Demonstrating understanding

Reflecting on Learning

Finding evidence

Noticing strengths

Goal for next time

Monitoring Learning

Noticing
guiding reflective thinking

Social Interaction
A/B Partner-talk
Collaborative-talk
Class-talk

Movement
Standing
Walk-to-talk
Manipulating objects
Signals

Balancing Brain Activity
Social thinking with individual thinking

Images and big ideas with language and details

SmartLearning… an approach with a powerful effect

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An overview: At the heart of the approach is the highly motivating *SmartLearning* process, and a kit of powerful learning strategies called *SmartLearning* tools. Teachers use the process and tools to design lessons, and sequences of lessons, structured to develop complex thinking and important 21st century skills. Learning along a continuum of skills is made visible, and achievement is used to plan next steps for learning. The high-challenge, low-risk experiences stimulate brainpower, and inspire expansive thinking, richer expression and deeper levels of understanding. Four principles of learning come to life in *SmartLearning* classrooms: active engagement, collaborative and collective learning, learning about the brain and learning, and taking responsibility for learning. The work equips all learners with a framework and tools for extraordinary learning. Over twenty years of documented action research studies have contributed to the set of practices. Visitors to the environments are struck by the rigorous engagement, the respectful interactions, the deep thinking, and the notable achievement demonstrated by all learners. *SmartLearning* has been designed with the gradual release of responsibility in mind. Following interactive whole-class work learners are guided to apply the *SmartLearning* process and tools in just-right texts, during independent reading. Over time they learn to apply the process and tools to personal inquiries — disciplined explorations into matters of importance. The thoughtful interactions develop communities of capable, confident, self-regulated thinkers and learners.

The *SmartLearning* Process

Before Learning: *connecting to text* (print, media, hands-on experiences…) *a number of ways*

☐ **Building community and purpose.** A purpose is set for the learning ahead — an authentic quest that piques interest, and offers choice and challenge to all learners. Structured-talk is used to facilitate the development of a learning community where everyone feels valued, included, respected, and responsible for learning. At different times during the *SmartLearning* process, talk structures are also used to distribute thinking, and to facilitate the social construction of understanding.

☐ **Setting a personal *s-t-r-e-t-c-h* goal.** Open-ended, high-inference tasks and authentic roles for the work ahead are established. A set of criteria for the immediate task at hand is developed, or reviewed. Learners use the criteria to set personal *s-t-r-e-t-c-h* goals – goals to grow their skills. They identify brain activity icons to focus work toward the goals. As the learning unfolds, individuals monitor and regulate their actions. Setting criteria and goal-setting may occur at different points in the *SmartLearning* process. With early learners, teachers often develop criteria and invite personal goal-setting just before reading… viewing or engaging in hands-on experiences.

☐ **Activating prior knowledge.** Tapping into what learners already know sets the stage for new learning. Tools applied at this stage in the process give learners a chance to examine, in an organized way, what they know and understand, and to build background knowledge. This critical pre- work enables learners to refine existing knowledge and absorb new, more correct or more sophisticated information.

☐ **Questioning or wondering.** Generating questions before, during, and after reading (viewing…) leads to deeper understanding. The work activates natural curiosity, leading to a sense of personal relevance, as well as to powerful insights into meanings in text. Generating questions learners seek to have answered in the text, sets personal purpose for reading or viewing.

☐ **Predicting or hypothesizing.** With a task and goals in mind, learners use clues to predict a best-guess response to the task. They use visual and verbal information to predict content, plot, or underlying themes and concepts in a text, before and during learning. Anticipation is critical for learner engagement and has a profound effect on thinking and memory. Partner generation of ideas, during the interactions, leads to more sophisticated thinking.

During Learning (reading, viewing or hands-on experiences): *processing information in "chunks"*

☐ **Reading and thinking with 'chunks' of text, applying skill-focused tools, monitoring learning, talking through ideas.** As learners work with sections of text (print, media, hands-on experiences), they apply skill-specific *SmartLearning* tools, engage in partner-talk to extend, clarify, question, and refine understandings. They revisit goals, and monitor and adjust learning as it unfolds.

☐ **Reflecting…** Learners find evidence of meeting personal goals, notice brain activity that works best to support goal achievement, notice strengths emerging in their work, set and justify next steps for learning.

After Learning: *transforming learning into understanding*

☐ **Setting a personal *s-t-r-e-t-c-h* goal for the response task.** A set of criteria is co- constructed or reviewed for the task. Samples generated in the context are often used to establish and refine criteria. Learners use the criteria to set personal *s-t-r-e-t-c-h* goals.

☐ **Setting the image and demonstrating understanding.** An image is set for the task, learners sketch and plan - to further develop their thinking, engage in A/B-talk to explain their emerging understandings, and refine their thinking. The task is set again, and learners reach to demonstrate their most developed thinking and understanding.

Reflecting on Learning: *finding evidence… noticing strengths… setting a goal for next time*

☐ **Finding evidence of meeting personal *s-t-r-e-t-c-h* goals for the response task.**

☐ **Noticing personal strengths…** new ideas, connections, and questions

☐ **Setting and justifying a goal for next time.** The learning ends with partners thanking each other for the work of the day.