Theoretical Background

The society in which we find ourselves offers large amounts of information. The messages which we receive come from a number of different and varying sources, that are at times complementary and at other times contradictory. For that reason, it is necessary to compare, contrast and integrate these sources in order to transform the information into knowledge (Pozo & Postigo, 2000). With this in mind, it is important to teach students how to create written syntheses of information from a number of different texts. However, there are very few studies that have proposed teaching the necessary strategies for creating these syntheses. Furthermore, the majority of the studies that have been conducted have been carried out in higher education settings (Boscolo, Arfé, & Quarisa, 2007; Segev-Miller, 2004).

Therefore, the Strategies for Writing Syntheses to Learn (SWSL) program presented in this chapter has been designed to teach students of 11–12 years old how to appropriately use reading and writing as tools in learning the content which the texts aim to convey. It deals with a program focused on the teaching strategies involved in the elaboration of a written synthesis of various texts. The advantages of this type of instruction, both with reading and writing (Graham & Harris, 1996; Mateos, 2001; Sánchez, García, & Rosales, 2010; Schunk & Zimmerman, 1997; Torrance, Fidalgo, & García, 2007; Zimmerman, 2000), as

---

well as the integrated use of both of them (Raphael & Englert, 1990; Wray & Lewis, 1997), have been widely studied.

In this way, the specific objective is that the students learn to read and write by selecting, elaborating, connecting and integrating the information coming from different texts with the goal of learning these contents in a profound and constructive way.

The SWSL program (that can be carried out by the student’s teachers themselves if they have received prior training) focuses on strengthening the development of the strategies involved in the process of a synthesis through diverse teaching methods. The strategies taught through this intervention are: (1) selecting important ideas from the source texts, (2) elaborating upon the information using prior knowledge, (3) organizing the content, and (4) integrating information from both source texts.

Through different teaching methods, based on the progressive transfer of control, autonomy and self-regulation of the learning process is encouraged amongst students. Based on previous studies (Wray & Lewis, 1997), all the strategies are taught using a variety of methods, such as (1) teacher modelling, (2) collaborative activity, (3) guided activity, (4) students’ individual activity and (5) the support of a written guide. Thanks to the implementation of this SWSL program, the students are able to achieve a number of important goals, which will be described throughout the chapter, that provide them with a quality learning experience.

**The Phases of the Program**

The SWSL program consists of 12 sessions that are divided into three phases. In each phase, a different synthesis task is carried out, thereby offering an increasing degree of control to the students as the program progresses. At the end of the program the students carry out the last task on their own and all prior offers of help or assistance are removed. Two expository texts—including complementary contents about the treated subject—of similar length (235–280 words) were selected for each synthesis task. All texts were provided from different textbooks directed towards 11–12 years old students and they belonged to the same teaching unit (contemporary history). In Table 8.1—and in the additional documents placed on the following link: —the stages of the SWSL program are described in detail as well as the objectives, contents, activities of both the students and the teacher, the teaching methods, materials, etc. used in each one. As can be seen, the intervention follows a progressive sequence of transfer of control of the learning process, from the instructor to the students, in the hopes of encouraging self-regulation amongst the students through their increased awareness of the processes that are activated during the learning