

Metacognitive Awareness

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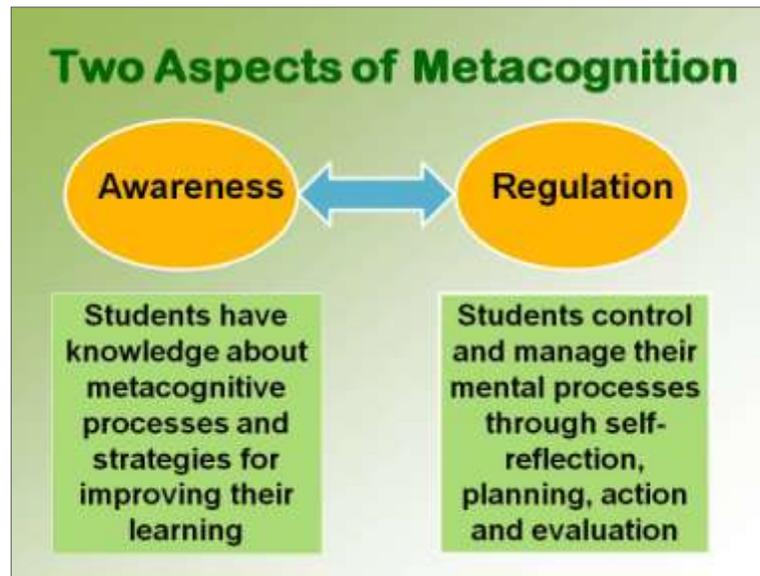
Definition of Metacognitive Awareness

Dr. David Conley, in a 2014 Education Week article, argued for the use of the term “metacognitive” rather than “non-cognitive.” His definition of metacognition is provided below.



Metacognitive awareness involves self-reflecting on these learning processes in order to understand and improve them. This focus on metacognition is in contrast to an emphasis on cognitive content knowledge which until recently has dominated educational theory, policies and practice. Recent research demonstrates that both cognitive and metacognitive abilities are critical to student learning and achievement.

Hacker, et al (2009) defines metacognition as consisting of “two complementary processes: 1) the knowledge of cognition and 2) the regulation of cognition.” The graphic below summarizes these two key components of metacognition as they relate to student learning.



Awareness (knowledge of cognition) focuses on our knowing the metacognitive factors that influence our learning and performance, knowing various appropriate strategies to improve our learning processes, and knowing which strategies to select to increase our ability to control and manage our mental processes. Regulation focuses on applying what we know and taking action to improve our learning processes and hence improve our learning outcomes. This involves goal-setting, planning, implementing the plan and monitoring progress, and evaluating the results of our efforts to improve our learning.

Our metacognitive abilities enable us to reflect on what controls our learning processes and take action to improve them. Development of our metacognition is a pathway to improved learner outcomes and as such needs to be a strong focus in the work of school counselors. Even a cursory look at the CBA's four constructs and associated sub-constructs shows that metacognition is inextricably related to a CBA's foundational components.

There is also a strong relationship between CBA constructs and sub-constructs, metacognitive abilities and social-emotional learning. The CASEL (Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning) website (www.casel.org/social-and-emotional-learning) states: “The short-term goals of SEL programs are to (1) promote students' self-awareness, social awareness, relationship, and responsible-decision-making skills and (2) improve student attitudes and beliefs about self, others, and school.”

The CBA program focuses on students acquiring relevant knowledge, developing appropriate skills, and embracing the attitudes, behaviors and habits of mind that lead to personal fulfillment and success in life. Expected student results from implementing a CBA are that students will be highly motivated, self-directed learners who are knowledgeable about themselves, engaged in meaningful relationships and developing as contributing members to society and the well-being

of our world. The CBA program, like “school-based SEL programs can promote and enhance students' connection to school, positive behavior, and academic achievement.”

The website identifies five social and emotional learning core competencies. The table below shows the alignment of these competencies with CBA constructs and sub-constructs. Metacognitive awareness is critical to both.

CASEL Core Competencies	CBA Constructs and Sub-Constructs
Self-Awareness: “The ability to accurately recognize one’s emotions and thoughts and their influence on behavior.”	Self-Knowledge Construct: metacognitive awareness and skills, attribution styles, learned optimism. Motivation Construct: intrinsic motivation, self-determination, possible selves, self-efficacy.
Self-Management: “The ability to regulate one’s emotions, thoughts, and behaviors effectively in different situations.”	Self-Direction Construct: self-directed learning, self-regulated learning, self-regulation, of emotions, executive functions, goal setting/planning.
Social Awareness: “The ability to take the perspective of and empathize with others from diverse backgrounds and cultures.”	Relationships Construct: social skills, critical consciousness, social justice.
Relationship Skills: “The ability to establish and maintain healthy and rewarding relationships with diverse individuals and groups.”	Relationships Construct: social skills, help seeking, critical consciousness, social justice. Self-Direction Construct: self-regulation of emotions.
Responsible Decision Making: “The ability to make constructive and respectful choices about personal behavior and social interactions.”	Self-Knowledge Construct: metacognitive awareness and skills, attribution styles, learned optimism. Self-Direction Construct: executive functions, learned optimism, goal setting/planning.

Metacognitive Awareness is Fundamental to a CBA

Metacognition is a fundamental part of human experience as it deals with our ability to be aware of how we function and what we can do to more effectively control and manage our mental processes. Traditionally, counselors have helped students develop metacognitive awareness of their interests, values, abilities, learning styles, temperament and personality, all of which promote effective learning, self-direction and decision-making.

Understanding metacognition and how to teach students to improve their metacognitive abilities are a core responsibility of school counselors and an essential component of comprehensive school counseling programs. Helping students become aware of their own selves and ability to regulate their own metacognitive and social-emotional processes are central to the design of a CBA and the core mission of school counseling programs. By focusing on metacognition as a central component of what we teach students, we are helping them to become more proficient learners and progress toward achieving at their highest potential.

For a CBA school counseling program to be successful, metacognition and social-emotional learning must be addressed. School counselors make their greatest contribution to cognitive development through a focus on metacognitive and social-emotional processes that support academic (cognitive) achievement.

School counselors can provide a necessary complement to the work of teachers because students need to learn to develop their metacognitive skills in order to profit maximally from a rigorous curriculum and effective instruction. If school counseling programs and counselor practice are to

be “research-based,” it is the responsibility of school counselors to comprehend the metacognitive domain and how it impacts both student learning and social-emotional development. An understanding of metacognition should be evident in the thinking and behavior of school counselors, teachers and students.

The effective use of CBA school counseling standards and competencies, which serve as primary learning targets in the CBA counseling curriculum, all depend on helping students develop their metacognitive abilities. This includes helping students reflect on their own thinking processes and behavior patterns, assessing how these processes and patterns influence their learning, plan to improve their processes and patterns, implement their plan and monitor progress and evaluate the results. We want to help students be aware of their own mental processes and take charge of regulating these processes in ways that improve their learning outcomes. By doing so we are making a significant contribution to students’ ability to achieve in school and succeed in life.

Additional Resources Related to Metacognitive Awareness

The Internet is a wonderful tool for accessing information on just about any topic. It has been invaluable in helping us to identify what research has demonstrated to be strongly related to students’ academic achievement and well-being, and evidence-based practices that provide concrete examples of how to translate the research findings into meaningful learning opportunities that support student development.



Staying informed about what works and does not work to help students achieve and succeed is one of the defining characteristics of a professional school counselor. Internet search engines can be used to develop a deeper understanding of the topics discussed on the CBA Website. To get you started, here are some additional resources you may find helpful. These resources, however, only scratch the surface of what is available on the Internet or in published books and articles. We encourage you to use search engines to find more resources that will increase your understanding and build your capacity to apply these ideas in your work as school counselors.

Videos

A video by Dr. Saundra McGuire on incorporating metacognitive strategies into the classroom.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FocR5SloWfM>

A video by Dr. Josh Walker that provides a brief introduction to metacognition and discusses the difference between cognitive and metacognitive processes.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mVE21QhY-II>

An animated lesson from the Smithsonian Science Education Center on metacognition. It investigates how explicitly teaching students metacognitive strategies helps them become more effective learners.

<https://youtu.be/f-4N7OxSMok>

On the lighter side, here are a couple of videos of elementary students singing their metacognition songs.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FvyZsSQ3ul4>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KkdBwn0AT0s>

Websites

This Learning Coach website contains an article on “Metacognition And Learning: Strategies For Instructional Design” by Connie Malamed.

<http://thelearningcoach.com/learning/metacognition-and-learning/>

Knowledge of self requires being aware of one’s emotions and social interactions. This website by the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) is an excellent resource on critical aspects of social-emotional learning. Among the many topics discussed are five interrelated sets of cognitive, affective, and behavioral competencies that are key to learning and behavior.

<http://www.casel.org/social-and-emotional-learning>

Books

For a detailed description of metacognition as it relates to student learning, see *A Handbook of Metacognition in Education* (Hacker, et al, 2009)