Workshop on Enhancing Students' Writing Skills through Promoting Self-directed Learning (SDL) Strategies

Self-directed Learning

English Language

Writing

Strategy Training

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Outline of the Workshop

- Brief reflections on current approach(es) to teaching writing, the merits and problems encountered
- Discussion on some principles for promoting SDL in writing lessons
- Brief introduction to the rationale behind the setup of an SDL writing unit
- Examination of the SDL teaching unit:
  - SDL in pre-writing
  - SDL in while-writing
  - SDL in post-writing
Brief Reflection

- How do you prepare your students for writing tasks?
- What are the major challenges?
- What does SDL mean to you?
- How is it relevant to teaching writing?
Some Principles for Promoting SDL in Writing Lessons
1. Goal Setting and Goal Attainment

**Goal setting**: the process of establishing clear and usable targets, or objectives, for learning (Moeller et al., 2012)

Studies have shown that appropriate goal setting, along with timely and specific feedback, can lead to higher achievement, better performance, a high level of self-efficacy, and self-regulation (Moeller et al., 2012)

“Goal setting can have exceptional importance in stimulating L2 learning motivation, and it is therefore shocking that so little time and energy are spent in the L2 classroom on goal setting” (Oxford and Shearin, 1994, p. 129).
Goal Setting and Goal Attainment (Cont’d)

- **SMART** formula for desirable learning goals: Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Time bound (Doran, 1981; Miller & Cunningham, 1981)

- A classroom goal-setting intervention should consist of explicitly teaching and illustrating the connection between effort and achievement (Moeller et al., 2012)

- Students should be allowed to participate in setting their own goals (Azevedo, Ragan, Cromley, & Pritchett, 2002; Tubbs, 1986, as cited in Griffiee & Templi, 1997)

→ Students to be guided through interacting with the target language at different levels
3. Student-centered, but teacher-guided and monitored
4. Reflective in addition to generative on the part of the learners
5. Assessment for learning (feedback) + Assessment as learning (self- and peer assessment, monitoring of learning progress)
6. Flexible Grouping
A Writing Unit Reflecting the SDL Principles

- A glimpse of some SDL strategies at pre-, while- and post-writing stages
A recent article in the *Young Post* suggested that an 8:00 am start to the school day makes students feel tired and sleepy. Write to the editor of the *Young Post* expressing your views on the following:

- Why students feel tired;
- Whether or not a 9:00 am start will solve the problem; and
- What else/instead can be done to prevent students falling asleep during lessons
SDL in Pre-writing

- Involving students in the goal-setting process
- Brainstorming/researching for content (through the EAS approach)
- Aims: To develop the students’ metacognitive strategies (e.g. thinking and referencing skills) to promote learner autonomy and independence
Goal Setting and Goal Attainment

Task 1: Imagine you’re the English teacher of an S5 class and you’ve asked the class to set some goals before they attempt the above writing task. How would you respond to the following goals as set by your students?

1. “I aim at getting 70 marks in this composition.”
2. “I’ll try to write with good grammar.”
3. “I’ll write more than 200 words.”
4. “I’ll link my sentences up this time.”
5. “I’ll tidy up my composition before I submit it.”

SMART Learning goals:
S Specific, M Measurable, A Attainable, R Relevant, T Time bound
Let’s begin by reading the question carefully and underline the important phrases:

- A recent article in the *Young Post* suggested that an 8:00 am start to the school day makes students feel tired and sleepy. Write to the editor of the *Young Post* expressing your views on the following:
  - Why students feel tired;
  - Whether or not a 9:00am start will solve the problem; and
  - What else/instead can be done to prevent students falling asleep during lessons.
Goal Setting and Goal Attainment

A possible approach to providing step-by-step training in goal setting (from general to specific)

Task 2: Let’s help our students set better goals with reference to the HKDSE writing marking scheme!

Step 1:

Identify the focuses of each of the three criteria of Content (C), Language (L), and Organisation (O), which can form the basis for guiding the students to set their own goals for the particular task. (Two for each criterion are provided as examples.)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content</th>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Organisation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fulfilling question requirements</td>
<td>Grasp of complex sentence patterns</td>
<td>Effective organisation of text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relevant ideas</td>
<td>Accurate grammar</td>
<td>Logical development of ideas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Well developed ideas with supporting details</td>
<td>Wide variety of simple and sophisticated vocabulary</td>
<td>Clear cohesion and cohesive ties throughout the text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creativity and imagination</td>
<td>Correct spelling and punctuation</td>
<td>Coherence in overall structure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Appropriate register, tone, style</td>
<td>Clearly defined topics</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
SDL in Pre-writing

Goal Setting and Goal Attainment

Step 2: Guide the students to:

- pick the most relevant focus(es) of the three criteria according to their own strengths and weaknesses and develop specific pointers for the particular writing task

- limit the number of areas chosen to make their goals attainable
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus of the HKDSE Writing Criteria</th>
<th>Specific Pointers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Fulfilling question requirements (C)</td>
<td>- Genre/Text type: Letter to the Editor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Target reader(s): Editor and newspaper readers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Wide variety of simple and sophisticated vocabulary (L)</td>
<td>- Main points to cover:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Why students are tired at school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Whether it’s a good idea to start school at 9am</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Other measures to prevent students from falling asleep</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **Nouns:** e.g. Causes of tiredness: tons of homework, extra-curricular activities
- **Verbs:** e.g. Lexical verbs denoting how students spend time after school; modal verbs stating strong/weak obligations
- **Adjectives:** e.g. Describing physical and mental states: energetic, exhausted, tired
- **Avoiding** repetitions, e.g. using synonyms and superordinate terms
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus of the HKDSE Writing Criteria</th>
<th>Specific Pointers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Effective organisation of text (O)</td>
<td>Identifying the typical rhetorical structure of the target genre:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Introducing the topic/the article that the writer responds to and the stance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Body: Main arguments and supporting details</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conclusion: Summing up and reiterating stance</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Your turn NOW! Pick a focus under C, L, or O and come up with some specific pointers.
Goal Setting and Goal Attainment

Step 3: Guide the students to identify what information is needed to address the specific pointers and what can be possible sources of such information. Read and complete the following table.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus of the HKDSE Writing Criteria</th>
<th>Specific Pointers</th>
<th>Required Information and Possible Sources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fulfilling question requirements (C)</td>
<td>Understanding the target genre</td>
<td>The typical features of the target genre, e.g. to whom the letter is addressed, tense(s) to use, the use of the first person perspective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Addressing Point 1: ‘why students are tired at school’</td>
<td>Possible Source: Letters to the editor in SCMP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Addressing Point 2: ‘starting school at 9am’</td>
<td>Reflecting on their own personal experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Addressing Point 3: ‘alternative measures’</td>
<td>Interviewing their classmates, brainstorming the pros and cons of starting school one hour later</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Comparing and contrast ing the relative benefits of starting at 8 and at 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Browsing the Internet for tips to stay focused and awake</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus of the HKDSE Writing Criteria</td>
<td>Specific Pointers</td>
<td>Required Information and Possible Sources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wide variety of simple and sophisticated vocabulary (L)</td>
<td>- Including appropriate nouns, verbs, adjectives etc in the composition</td>
<td>- Referring to the vocabulary log book</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Jotting down useful words/phrases while reading texts on the topic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Seeking help from the teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effective organisation of text (O)</td>
<td>- Identifying the typical rhetorical structure of the target genre</td>
<td>- Introduction:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Referring to authentic letters to the editor for the language/sequence for orienting the readers, stating the topic and stance etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Middle paragraphs:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Deciding on the number of paragraphs, focusing on one main point in each paragraph, writing topic sentences etc., drawing on experience in writing other compositions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Concluding paragraph:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Using signposting phrases like ‘to sum up/conclude’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Reading others’ concluding paragraphs which present just the required information in the briefest way possible</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
SDL in Pre-writing

Goal Setting and Goal Attainment

Step 4: Guide the students to set a time frame for attaining the goal(s) before the actual writing process, i.e. time-bound

Step 5: Introduce to the students a monitoring mechanism/tool (e.g. a self-assessment form) which helps them monitor their attainment of the specific goals they set at the post-writing stage
Complete the left three columns based on the information in the above tables.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Specific Goal Pointers set for the Writing Task</th>
<th>Goal Setting (To be completed at the pre-writing stage)</th>
<th>Goal Attainment (To be completed at the post-writing stage)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How I aim to achieve the goal pointers</td>
<td>How much time I plan to spend on achieving the goal pointers</td>
<td>What I have actually done to achieve the goal pointers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>How much time I have spent on achieving the goal pointers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>What else I can do to better achieve the goal pointers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. (C/L/O)

2. (C/L/O)

3. (C/L/O)

...
SDL in Pre-writing 2

Jeremy Harmer’s EAS Approach:

- **Engage:**
  - Funny video on sleeping in class:
    - [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-us4mPj9_C8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-us4mPj9_C8)

- **Activate:**
  - Graphic organiser on falling asleep experience

- **Study:**
  - Research on reasons for tiredness and useful tips to avoid that:
    - YouTube video search by entering keywords: e.g.
      - [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u86F23IwYdU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u86F23IwYdU)
      - [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pTYyy8tHhCk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pTYyy8tHhCk)
SDL in Pre-writing

The EAS Approach:

- **Engage:**
  - Funny video on sleeping in class:
    - [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-us4mPj9_C8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-us4mPj9_C8)
  - Watch the video and jot down five words/phrases that you can immediately think of. Share your list with your classmates.

- What do you think will happen next?
SDL in Pre-writing

The EAS Approach:

- **Activate:**
  - Graphic organiser on falling asleep experience

- **Recall one special experience of either you or your classmate(s) falling asleep during class. Construct a graphic organiser to sum up that experience. You may use the template provided or your own format. Make sure you include all the details. Do not write complete sentences though!**
SDL in Pre-writing

The EAS Approach:

- Activate: Graphic organiser on falling asleep experience
SDL in Pre-writing

The EAS Approach:

**Study:**

Research on *reasons for tiredness* and *useful tips to avoid that*:

- If we want to know more about a topic, we can access the Internet and search for relevant information with search engines like **Google**.
- Alternatively, we may access **YouTube** and learn more about a topic through watching videos.
SDL in Pre-writing

The EAS Approach:

- **Study:**
  - Now, refer to the set of **goals** you’ve set under Content(C) and decide what information you need to collect for accomplishing the writing task.
  - Internet searches require our skills in identifying **keywords** related to the topic. Identify some keywords on your list of goals. Would the **five words** that you jotted down after watching the video, the **underlined phrases** in the question, and those ideas in the **graphic organiser** help with your searches too?
The EAS Approach:

- Study:
  - Do the searches at home and answer the following questions. Present your answers in your self-designed graphic organiser (i.e. with pieces of information connected together):

  - **Why do some students feel tired at school?**
  - **Is starting school at 8:00am common in other places?**
  - **What methods can be used to help students beat sleepiness? Why are they helpful and practical?**

- YouTube video search by entering keywords: e.g.
  - [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u86F23IwYdU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u86F23IwYdU)
  - [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pTYyy8tHhCk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pTYyy8tHhCk)
SDL in Pre-writing

Other possible SDL strategies at the pre-writing stage:

- **Collaborative pre-writing discussions** (e.g. Fernandez Dobao, 2012; Wigglesworth & Storch, 2009, 2012):
  - Learners **scaffolding** each other within their ZPD
  - **Generation** of ‘**language-related episodes**’ (Swain & Lapkin, 2009), where learners ‘talk about the language they are producing, question their language use, or correct themselves or others’ (p. 328)
SDL in While-writing

- Reading to Write
- Use of Google Doc
SDL in While-writing

- Reading to Write:
  - Reading sample texts of the target genre and identifying the typical **rhetorical structure** and **language patterns**
  - Compiling a **graphic organiser** mapping the **language patterns** with their **communicative functions** and the **rhetorical structure** of the target genre (i.e. a ‘sentence making table/powerhouse’)
  - Using the graphic organiser as a **checklist** to refer to while the students write the different parts and to **self-assess** their work before submitting their composition (assessment as learning)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policies needed for ageing issues</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The subject of Hong Kong's ageing population has received a lot of media attention.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hong Kong will inevitably face even greater challenges as a consequence of more of its citizens living for longer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With a steady increase in the greying population and therefore a greater dependency, the need to deal with this issue and the problems it will bring should be high on the list of the government's priorities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We cannot afford to neglect this ageing trend and officials must come up with effective policies as soon as possible.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Luk Mei-yan, Tai Kok Tsui*

*Letters to the Editor, May 6, 2013*

*South China Morning Post*
Reading... to write

Which phrase tells us that many people are concerned about Hong Kong’s ageing population?

Who are the ‘greying population’? Why do they show greater dependency?

Is the writer satisfied with the government’s current policies to cope with the ageing population? Why/why not?
Step 2: Let’s work out the rhetorical structure of a letter to the editor

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
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Hong Kong will inevitably face even greater challenges as a consequence of more of its citizens living for longer.

With a steady increase in the greying population and therefore a greater dependency, the need to deal with this issue and the problems it will bring should be high on the list of the government's priorities.

We cannot afford to neglect this ageing trend and officials must come up with effective policies as soon as possible.

---

_Luk Mei-yan, Tai Kok Tsui_

_Letters to the Editor, May 6, 2013_

_South China Morning Post_

Task developed by Prof. Angel Lin and Dr. Tracy Cheung, with contributions from HKU facilitators © 2015_
The subject of Hong Kong's ageing population has received a lot of media attention.

Hong Kong will inevitably face even greater challenges as a consequence of more of its citizens living for longer.

With a steady increase in the greying population and therefore a greater dependency, the need to deal with this issue and the problems it will bring should be high on the list of the government's priorities.

We cannot afford to neglect this ageing trend and officials must come up with effective policies as soon as possible.

Luk Mei-yan, Tai Kok Tsui
Letters to the Editor, May 6, 2013
South China Morning Post
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Structure</th>
<th>Language Features</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Policies needed for ageing issues</td>
<td><strong>Title</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The subject of Hong Kong's ageing population has received a lot of media attention.</td>
<td><strong>Introduction</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hong Kong will inevitably face even greater challenges as a consequence of more of its citizens living for longer.</td>
<td><strong>Supporting Reason 1</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With a steady increase in the greying population and therefore a greater dependency, the need to deal with this issue and the problems it will bring should be high on the list of the government's priorities.</td>
<td><strong>Supporting Reason 2</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We cannot afford to neglect this ageing trend and officials must come up with effective policies as soon as possible.</td>
<td><strong>Conclusion</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Luk Mei-yan, Tai Kok Tsui
Letters to the Editor, May 6, 2013
South China Morning Post
Useful sentence starters or lexical phrases for writing letters to the editor

• The recent …. has aroused much interest.
• The recent … has started heated debates on…
• It would be …
• I strongly disagree with the comments made by …
• I am writing to support the view expressed by …
• I would like to comment on…
• I am writing in response to…
• I believe that…
• I think it will be a good idea to…

• I think the government should..
• In my opinion… / I wish to point out that…
• First of all… / First… Second… Third…
• For one thing..
• In addition… / Moreover…
• The reason why… / The reason is that… / Because… / Since…
• If this were the case…

• To conclude…
• I hope…
SDL in While-writing

- Use of Google Doc:
  - https://docs.google.com/

- Creating a 'community document' in which the teacher can track individual group member's contribution to its development (in collaborative writing tasks)

- Allowing the students to revise and comment on their own and each other's work during the writing process (i.e. assessment as learning for ideas and language)

- Drafts with revisions and comments automatically saved for later access (writing portfolios automatically produced to keep track of the writing progress)

- Creating mini-tests through the 'Forms' function for checking the students' attainment of the goals set during the writing process
SDL in While-writing

Use of Google Doc

Demonstrations on some potentially useful applications:

- **Creating New Document (and a name for it)**

- **Share**: “can edit” for collaborative writing (in real time!), “can comment” for peer evaluation/assessment as learning

- **Define (Tools→Define)**: to look for dictionary definitions and synonyms, to expand range of vocabulary

- **Forms (File→New→Forms)**: Highlighting specific goals against which the students evaluate their work
We’ll explore how to promise SDL in the context of a pedagogic sequence helping the students for accomplishing a writing task.

Hidden suggestion: of setting goals with them at the prewriting stage.

Writing Task:

(Adopted and developed from 2015 HKDSE English Language, Paper 2, Part A)

Selected text

pedagogic

Simon Chan
8 Apr 2016, 9:28 PM

Why not use teaching?
accomplishing a writing task

Hidden suggestion of setting goals with them at the prewriting stage.

Writing Task:

(Adopted and developed from 2015 HKDSE English Language, Paper 2, Part A)

A recent article in the Young Post suggested that an 8:00 am start to the school day makes

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Simon Chan
8 Apr 2016, 9:29 PM

Replace: “by means of” with “for sake of”

---

Accept  |  Reject  |  Reply
We’ll explore how to promise SDL in the context of a pedagogic sequence helping the students for accomplishing a writing task.

Writing Task:

(Adopted and developed from 2015 HKDSE English Language, Paper 2, Part A)

Comments

Simon Chan 8 Apr
Replace: “by means of” with “for sake of”

pedagogic

Simon Chan 8 Apr
Why not use teaching?

Simon Chan 1 reply

Simon Chan 8 Apr
Suggestion accepted
SDL in While-writing

Other possible while-writing SDL Strategies:

- Co-construction of written texts (prior to individual construction) (Elola & Oskoz, 2010; Storch, 2005):
  - Increased linguistic accuracy and complexity
  - Enhanced content

- Focused process writing, i.e. production of multiple drafts with self-/peer evaluation in between

- **Google Docs** can be used as a means to achieve the above
SDL in Post-writing

Possible Strategies:

- Effective use of rubrics/task-specific feedback forms (building on the list of goals the students have drawn up) to guide the students through the reflection on their learning strategies and performance

- 'Two-stars-and-a-wish’ method for generating immediate feedback

- Developing self-/peer assessment skills
SDL in Post-writing

Possible Strategies:

- Teacher-student ‘feedback conference’
- ‘Focused’ composition corrections (by grammar item(s) or by section)
- Supporting the students in carrying out revisions with reference to the teacher’s feedback (e.g. through using marking codes)
- Realising the publishing potential of the students’ essays (making writing tasks more authentic and meaningful)

http://www.scmp.com/letter-to-editor