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THE CLASSROOM

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SUPPORTING INDEPENDENT STUDY IN THE CLASSROOM

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ABSTRACT

In addition to improving their language skills, language students also need to develop their learner autonomy in order to take more control over their learning. At Kanda University of International Studies, there is a strong focus on helping students become more autonomous, and many of the curriculums include classroom activities that also promote learner autonomy. In this paper I will introduce and discuss two classroom activities I developed to better scaffold my students in becoming more independent learners. The first activity is an adaptation of the required Independent Study activity in the Freshman English program, and the second activity focuses on raising students' awareness of learning strategies they can use as part of their independent study activity. Through these activities, students learned how to plan and complete successful independent study projects, and increase their awareness of useful learning strategies.

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper is a written report of a workshop I gave at CAMTESOL 2012. The purpose of the workshop was to introduce and discuss classroom materials I developed as part of the independent study component of my Freshman English class. Examples of student work and reflections were also presented in order to illustrate how students' independent study skills developed over the course of an academic year.

2. BACKGROUND

Freshman English (FE) is a required two semester class for all incoming English Department students at Kanda University of International Studies. In addition to teaching students language skills, another goal of the curriculum is helping students develop greater learner autonomy. In order to achieve this goal, students are required to plan and complete an

independent study project during the Orientation Unit which is taught during the first five-weeks of the first semester.

In past years when I did the independent study activity with my students, I always felt it was too rushed and left students more confused than autonomous. For many students this activity is the first time they have planned their own independent study project, so one cycle is not enough practice for them to become confident in their ability to do independent study on their own. Further, with only one cycle, students did not see the benefits of reflection because they did not use their reflections to make changes to their independent study activities. It often felt like the project was left half finished. Additionally, I realized that students often knew what skill they wanted to work on, but they had difficulty thinking of good activities they could use.

In my opinion, my students were not receiving enough training or scaffolding to successfully complete the independent study activity. For this reason, I developed two classroom activities that would better support students in developing their independent skills. First, I modified the standard independent study activity so that the activity reflections drew the students' attention to what type of problems they had and how they could avoid those problems in the future. I also changed from a one-cycle activity in the Orientation Unit to one cycle per unit totaling in six complete cycles over the course of the academic year. This gave students more opportunities to reflect on and make changes to their independent learning activities and experience how the benefits of the entire learning process.

In addition to the independent study activity modifications, I also sought to raise students' awareness of learning strategies by making it a regular habit to end each class reviewing what activities the students had used and what skills they had practiced. Students also discussed in small groups what activities they enjoyed and how they could adapt them to

be used outside of the classroom as part of their independent study. Students then reported their ideas to the class, and finally, students were given a few minutes to record activities they were interested in trying in their learning strategy journals.

The learning strategy journal is a document I created to provide students with a permanent place to write down learning strategies they had tried or wanted to try. My students would often tell me that they wanted to study on their own outside of class, but they did not know what activities to do. Even though they were exposed to a large number and a wide variety of activities throughout the year, they reported not being able to remember the activities later because they had not written them down. Additionally, although they had said they did not enjoy or think that an activity helped them improve their language, they would continue to do the activity because they either forgot their past experiences or could not think of other activities they could try.

Using the learning strategy journal, students can keep a record of the learning strategies they have learned. The journal is organized into eight skill areas (speaking, listening, reading, writing, pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary), and in each section there are spaces for students to record the activity name, step-by-instructions, necessary materials, time needed to complete the activity, a 5-star rating system, a reflection, and sub-skills. When students want to do an activity on their own, they can easily look through their journal to find activities for the skill they want to practice. They can also confirm that they have the necessary materials and sufficient time to complete the activity. Finally, they can also look at their past reflections to help them remember if they liked the activity, or if they needed to make any changes to the activity.

In the next section of this paper, I will introduce and discuss selected students' independent learning activities and passages from learning strategy journals that illustrate how students used and benefited from these two classroom activities.

3. DISCUSSION

3.1 Independent Learning Cycles

After six cycles of independent study, there is evidence that students showed better self-reflection skills and the ability to make changes to their learning plans in order to better achieve their learning goals. For example, Student 1 wanted to improve her vocabulary skills, so as part of her independent study she decided to use a music activity. In her first activity log (See Figure 1), she planned the activity, and after five weeks of doing the activity she reflected on it. In her reflection she wrote that she enjoyed the activity because she likes music, however, since she did not do the activity according to her plan, she did not improve her vocabulary skills. She also wrote that to improve the activity, she should look at the song lyrics while she listened to the song.

ACTIVITY LOG 3	
Plan your activity: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What is your activity?: <u>Listening to music</u> How much time do you need to do this activity?: <u>10 minutes</u> What materials do you need to do this activity?: <u>Walkman and lyrics</u> When & where will you do this activity?: <u>everyday / at home</u> 	
Write a step-by-step plan on how you will complete your activity: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Listen to music with looking at the lyric Write down the words I don't know Guess the meaning and check dictionary Listen again without lyric 	
Do your activity: Use your plan and do this activity for the next several weeks.	
Reflect on your activity: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Did you do your activity the way you planned? What changed? <u>I just listened to music.</u> What did you learn from your activity? <u>Just listening to music was not good for study because I only enjoyed.</u> How was your activity useful or not useful? <u>If I did this activity the way I planned, it was useful.</u> Did you enjoy your activity? Why? <u>Yes, because I love listening to music!</u> Did you do your best? Please explain. <u>No, I should look at lyrics when I listened to music.</u> 	
Grade: Think about your activity and your performance. What grade do you think you deserve? Give yourself a grade for this activity.	
2 /10	

Figure 1. Cycle 1 vocabulary activity plan and reflection from Sstudent 1

In the next cycle, Student 1 chose to continue her music activity (See Figure 2). She did not change her activity plan, but in her reflection at the end of the cycle she noted that this time she did look at the lyrics while listening. Even though she had solved one problem, she discovered another. She was using a computer to look up the lyrics, but she sometimes did the activity when she was not near a computer, so the activity was not always successful. Although she recognized that this activity was still problematic and might not be helping her

improve her vocabulary, she still wanted to continue the activity because she enjoyed it. She reflected again on how she could fix the problem and this time decided she would print out or write down the lyrics which would allow her to do this activity whenever and wherever she wanted.

ACTIVITY LOG 2

Plan your activity:

- What is your activity?: Listen to music
- How much time do you need to do this activity?: about 30 minutes
- What materials do you need to do this activity?: Walkman & lyrics books
- When & where will you do this activity?: everyday / at home

Write a step-by-step plan on how you will complete your activity:

6. Listen to music with lyrics book
7. Write down unknown words and check the meaning of th
8. Listen again without lyrics book
- 9.
- 10.

Do your activity: Use your plan and do this activity for the summer.

Reflect on your activity:

- Did you have to change your study plan? Why and how?
I listened to music with lyrics, however, I didn't write down words and look at lyrics everytime because I looked it by using computer but I didn't use computer everyday.
- Did you enjoy this activity? Why?
Yes, because I really like listening to music!
- How can you make this activity better for you?
If I look at lyrics by using computer, I print it, and I can look at lyrics easier than using computer. Good
- Did this activity help you improve your English? If "yes" how? If "no" why?
No because I just enjoyed listening to music. so I have to look at lyrics and write down words everytime.
- Do you want to continue doing this activity? Why?
Yes, because I didn't do this activity well this time, however, I learn how I can do better, so I want to try again.

Grade: _____

Think about your activity and your performance. What grade do you think you deserve? Give yourself a

Figure 2. Cycle 2 vocabulary activity plan and reflection from Student 1

In cycle 3, Student 1 changed her learning plan to include the initial step of looking up and printing or writing down the lyrics (See Figure 3). At the end of the cycle, she acknowledges that the current activity plan works well and that she still enjoyed the activity. She also realized that this activity could help her improve her pronunciation if she sang the songs out loud. Finally, she also wrote that this activity was improving her listening skills but not her vocabulary skills, so she decided not to continue this activity in the next cycle since it was not helping her achieve her learning goals. By going through the independent study cycle

multiple times, this student was able to use her reflections to change her study plan so that it better fit her needs, and in the end she was able to realize that a good activity was not the best activity for her learning goals.

ACTIVITY LOG 2	
Plan your activity: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What is your activity?: <u>Listening to music</u> How much time do you need to do this activity?: <u>10 minutes</u> What materials do you need to do this activity?: <u>CD or Walkman / PC</u> When & where will you do this activity?: <u>everyday / at home</u> 	
Write a step-by-step plan on how you will complete your activity: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <u>Listen to music with lyrics card or Website</u> <u>Write down unknown words</u> If I looked, I copy it or write it <u>Listen again without lyrics</u> 	
Do your activity: Use your plan and do this activity during this unit.	
Reflect on your activity: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Did you have to change your study plan? Why and how? <u>No.</u> Did you enjoy this activity? Why? <u>Yes, because I like to listen to music and I could listen various music, so I enjoyed.</u> How can you make this activity better for you? <u>I want to improve pronunciation with this activity, so if I can, I want to sing with the songs.</u> Did this activity help you improve your English? If "yes" how? If "no" why? <u>I think this activity is helpful to improve listening skill, however, I couldn't improve vocabulary skill not so much. Therefore, if I improve listening skill, it is useful.</u> Do you want to continue doing this activity? Why? <u>No, because I want to improve vocabulary skill.</u> 	
Grade: Think about your activity and your performance. What grade do you think you deserve? Give yourself a grade for this activity.	
5 / 10	

Figure 3. Cycle 3 vocabulary activity plan and reflection from student 1

Another student also identified vocabulary as her primary goal, but she decided to use vocabulary cards as her activity. After five weeks of doing this activity, she wrote that she enjoyed the activity and wanted to continue it, but she could improve it if she made example sentences using the words she learned (See Figure 4). In the next learning cycle, she changed her learning plan to include a step where she practiced using the words she learned (See Figure 5). In her reflections, she wrote that she tried to use the words in class and that she felt the activity was helping her improve her language, but she did not enjoy the activity because

it was just memorizing. She also wrote that she did not want to continue the activity because she was tired of the activity and had other activities she wanted to try. This student was doing a common vocabulary activity many students use, but through reflection she was able to recognize that the traditional method of drilling the words was not effective. She made changes to the original activity and was satisfied with how it went, but by that time in the year she had grown tired of this approach and wanted to try other activities she had discovered, so she chose to quit this activity. Again, without completing multiple cycles, this student may have continued using the flawed activity indefinitely.

ACTIVITY LOG 1	
Plan your activity: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is your activity?: <u>Study vocabularies.</u> • How much time do you need to do this activity?: <u>20 minutes.</u> • What materials do you need to do this activity?: <u>Vocabulary card</u> • When & where will you do this activity?: <u>Every Tuesday, in the room, at home.</u> 	
Write a step-by-step plan on how you will complete your activity: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Find and copy vocabulary card in SAC. 2. Review the vocabularies on the train. 3. Answer the questions. 4. Review on my note at home. 5. 	
Do your activity: Use your plan and do this activity for the summer.	
Reflect on your activity: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Did you have to change your study plan? Why and how? <u>No, I didn't.</u> • Did you enjoy this activity? Why? <u>Yes,</u> <u>I focused on the vocabularies about travel so I could imagine my travel.</u> 	

Figure 4. Cycle 1 vocabulary activity plan and reflection from student 2

ACTIVITY LOG 2	
Plan your activity: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What is your activity?: <u>Study vocabulary</u> How much time do you need to do this activity?: <u>20 minutes</u> What materials do you need to do this activity?: <u>Vocabulary card, Note book</u> When & where will you do this activity?: <u>Every Tuesday & on the train</u> 	
Write a step-by-step plan on how you will complete your activity: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Choose and copy the vocabulary card. Remember the vocabularies. Answer the questions on the last page. Check the answers. Practice the new words. 	
Do your activity: Use your plan and do this activity during this unit.	
Reflect on your activity: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Did you have to change your study plan? Why and how? No. I wanted to change something to enjoy more but I didn't have any ideas. Did you enjoy this activity? Why? No. It is just memorizing and answer the question. It's little boring for me. How can you make this activity better for you? I tried to use the vocabulary that I learned in classes. Did this activity help you improve your English? If "yes" how? If "no" why? Yes. I could increase my vocabularies. Do you want to continue doing this activity? Why? No. I got tired of this activity because I continued it for a few unit. I have some activities that I want to do. 	
Grade: Think about your activity and your performance. What grade do you think you deserve? Give yourself a grade for this activity.	

Figure 5. Cycle 2 vocabulary activity plan and reflection from student 2

2.1 Learning Strategy Awareness

The following are three examples of learning strategy journal entries from three different students. The first entry is a grammar activity the student had discovered during a

class activity (See Figure 6). He enjoyed the classroom activity and wanted to do it again, so at the end of the class period, he and his group adapted the activity for independent study. After their discussion, he wrote about it in his journal in order to remember the activity and how to do it. Later he did the activity on his own using his own materials and wrote a reflection about it. In his reflection he notes that the school's Self-Access Learning Center (SALC) had similar materials that he could use so he did not have to create his own materials. He also noted that in addition to grammar, he could also improve his vocabulary and listening skills. By writing down the classroom activity in his journal, this student was able to see how activities done in the classroom are not confined to the classroom and could be done on his own.

Activity Name: music unit : Station 4 "Correct the mistakes"	
Description/Instructions: First, correct lyrics without listening song. ↓ Correct mistakes with music ↓ Check the answer and find what I could listen and what I couldn't.	
Materials: Uncomplete lyrics	Time Needed: 10 ~ 20 minutes.
	Rating: ★★★★★
Reflection I found that I can do this activity in SALC! Because in SALC, there are a lot of activities like this activity. Also, I can know the true meaning of song and build vocabulary.	
Other Skills: Listening	

Figure 6. Student learning strategy journal, class activity

Next, in addition to discussing classroom activities, students also had the opportunity a few times a semester to exchange learning activities with each other and add them to their

journals. The next entry is an example of a student who wrote down a writing activity he learned from a classmate during one of these exchanges (See Figure 7). After hearing about his classmate's experience, he became interested in the activity and decided to try it. In his reflection about the activity he noted that he changed the activity to better suit his study habits. The original activity was to simply write a journal entry in English each day, but this student enjoyed using social media, so he decided to write his journal in English on the social media site, Twitter. After making this change, he wrote that the activity was simple and that he enjoyed it, so in the future he can remember the changes he made and that he wanted to do this kind of activity again.

Activity Name: <i>Write a short diary (wakana's)</i>	
Description/Instructions: <i>Write a diary everyday in Eng.</i>	
Materials: <i>diary, the schedule books, pen, dictionary</i>	Time Needed: <i>5~10min</i> Rating: ★★★★★
Reflection <i>I changed the content of this activity a bit. I tried to write short diary on my twitter. This is easy to do, and I want to continue this.</i>	
Other Skills:	

Figure 7. Student learning strategy journal, classmate recommendation

Finally, I also encouraged students to look for activities in the places they studied, or in the materials that they used. The next example is from a student who spent a lot of time in the SALC doing homework and talking to friends but did not use many of the materials. One day he decided to explore the SALC for new learning activities, and he discovered this activity (See Figure 8). This activity is an idiom card game that he felt helped him remember idioms

through pictures and guessing, and he gave it a 5-star rating. This student used the learning strategy journal as an opportunity to explore a familiar place for new ways to learn, and he found an activity that he enjoyed which he might have never found otherwise.

Activity Name: <i>Idioms card game.</i>	
Description/Instructions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Go SALC and find idioms card game. · Play the game, which we have to guess the idioms' meaning and find appropriate word to make a pair. 	
Materials: <i>Idioms card, dictionary, notebook (if it is needed)</i>	Time Needed: Rating: ★★★★★
Reflection <i>I could find that this game helps me guess idioms intensively and also help the way to memorize idioms through game.</i> <i>I can memorize idioms connecting with the pictures.</i>	
Other Skills:	

Figure 8. Student learning strategy journal, SALC activity

In general terms, there is evidence that by becoming more aware of learning strategies they could use to study, and by having a place to record their activities, students were able to improve their independent learning. They also became more aware of the different activities that they can do, and that they could change these activities to better meet their own needs. Also, students now, through this classroom intervention, had a way to organize and remember the activities they tried or wanted to try, and when they wanted to do an activity, they knew that they could refer to their journals for ideas. By the end of the year, my students had each created a personal book filled with activities they had tried and reviewed that they could use in the future.

4. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, these two small changes I made to classroom materials and how I taught and managed the required independent study activity seemed to help students reflect more deeply about their independent study and improve their study skills. There is evidence that they learned the importance of completing the entire learning process because they were given the opportunity to complete several cycles where they planned, did, reflected and re-planned activities. Additionally, as students searched for new activities they could add to their journal, they had the opportunity to become more aware of the wide variety of learning strategies they could use in their independent study. They discovered many activities that they might not have otherwise tried if they did not take time to look for and record them.

Often students want to study on their own but they report that they do not know how to do it, so there is a tendency for them to either give up, or to not even try. Even though independent study is done outside of the classroom, it is important for teachers to support students through classroom activities in order to ensure that students have a positive, successful experience. The activities introduced in this paper are simple ways that teachers can scaffold students while still allowing them a certain degree of autonomy. After doing these activities, students may be more likely to try independent study having first learned how to do it in the classroom.

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