Developing a Classroom-Based Self-Access Learning Course: A Course Evaluation

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Abstract

This paper is based on the premise that a considerable amount of language can be acquired outside the classroom lesson, and that as educators it is our responsibility to raise awareness of the value of self-directed learning. Self-access language learning (SALL) promotes the idea that as there are different types of learners with different language needs, students learn better if they are actively in control of their own learning. The paper focuses on how a SALL course was integrated into the curriculum at a private university in Japan. A mixed method approach incorporated whole class and small group discussion, reflective diary writing, out-of-class learning and one-to-one meetings with the teacher. Feedback on the course from a questionnaire was used to evaluate learners' perception of the effectiveness of the program. Results were favorable, showing that learners found this mode of learning helpful in organizing study habits; sustaining motivation; improving specific language skills; and increasing knowledge of self-access resources.

Introduction

This paper is based on the premise that a considerable amount of language can be acquired outside the classroom lesson (Pinker, 1994), and that as educators it is our responsibility to raise awareness of the value of self-directed learning. In doing so, we can help students to acquire the skills to be better language students and gain the habit of continuous learning. Self-access language learning (SALL) is one of the methods through which students can practice out-of-class learning. It promotes the idea that as there are different types of students with different language needs, and that students learn better if they are actively in control of their own learning. One of the advantages of SALL is that it is a flexible and student-centered option, offering instructors and institutions a means of supporting students in their out-of-class learning. This, however, in no way diminishes the value of the more traditional

"teacher-centered" classroom instruction. Rather, SALL and classroom instruction should be seen as complementary to each other. Despite the interest in self-directed learning over the years, these two methods of learning continue to be regarded separately, and connecting SALL to classroom learning continues to be a challenge (Thompson & Atkinson, 2010). This paper describes a classroom-based SALL course that was blended with classroom instruction in order to provide more face-to-face support, while at the same time helping students to develop the independent language learning skills needed to become more effective language students. It concludes with an evaluation of its outcomes from student feedback and recommendations for future courses of this type.

Background

The Self-Access Learning Center (SALC) at Kanda University of International Studies (KUIS) has been operational since 2001 and was recognized as a "Center of Excellence" by the Japanese Ministry of Education in 2003. Over the past decade, thousands of students have passed through its doors with the aim of becoming better language learners. Self-access modules offered to students by the learning advisory team are all voluntary, which promotes the center's philosophy of giving the students "flexibility" and "freedom of choice." One of the modules called the "First Steps Module" is offered to freshman students and each year there is a take-up rate of about 60% (or approximately 500 students). Although the course continued to be popular with students, there was a recurring problem that the advisory team identified, and that was the lack of face-to-face time students were receiving. In these independent study self-access modules, communication was done through a written reflective diary that caused a disconnect between the learning advisor and students. In order to narrow this gap, the advisory team decided to trial self-access courses in the classroom. The first step was to decide which of the three departments at KUIS should be offered this new course on a trial basis. The International Languages and Culture (ILC) department approached the advisory team and asked if they could be a part of the trial course as they felt the students in the ILC department needed more English language support. A description of the intended course was then sent to the director and the head of the ILC department and approval was granted for the first credit-bearing classroom-based self-access course at KUIS.

The SALC Learning Course 1 (SLC1)

The SLC1 was offered only to freshman students in the ILC department and each class was capped at 20 students. The aims of the SLC1 as explained to the students were:

- To introduce students to independent learning skills (such as goal-setting, time-management and learning strategies) that they could apply to their other classes;

- To help students design, implement and evaluate an individualized learning plan relevant to their learning needs; and

- To familiarize the students with the SALC facilities and resources and to increase usage of these facilities.

In a mixed-method learning environment, students were given instruction in the classroom and they also carried out independent studies in the self-access center. The course incorporated mini workshops, whole class and small group activities, a reflective written journal, a portfolio, and individual meetings with the teacher/ learning advisor. The syllabus (see Appendix 1) was split into two sections. Section one emphasized student training in independent study skills, and in section two the students were expected to apply their new knowledge in a self-study capacity. Of particular importance to the teacher was their ability to plan, organize, implement, monitor, evaluate and reflect on their learning. The teacher assumed the role of facilitator by helping students to carry out their individualized learning plan and providing advice or assistance when needed. Students were graded on their overall development at the end of the course.

Planning the course

The course was designed using common elements of self-directed learning as defined by the research literature. Benson (1992) referred to self-directed learning as "a learning situation which calls for certain skills on the part of the student if it is to be productive" (p. 31). Pemberton (1996) considered it to be "a way of organizing learning" (p. 3). For Dickinson (1987), self-directed students take up responsibility for their own learning but will seek expert advice and help as and when they need it. This assumed then, that the design of the course be centered on the student's needs (why, what, where, when and how they planned to study), with support coming from peers, the teacher and the self-access system. In particular, the following elements were considered in designing the course:

Element 1: Student control

This assumed a major shift from teacher-directed learning to handing over control of much of the learning experience to the student. This would not be a complete shift from teacher to student, but the students were made aware that after 6 weeks of "training," they would be expected to apply their new knowledge to their own individualized learning plan. They were expected to shape their own ideas, make their own decisions, and take responsibility for their learning (Holec, 1981) with the support of the teacher. It was expected that charging the students with the task of developing their own learning would encourage them to explore the self-access facilities, increase usage of the resources and help them to understand more about themselves as language learners.

Element 2: Skill development

This assumed that the students would be able to identify their wants, interests and needs (Morrison, 2011) and discover the most effective way to learn. Skill development included learning how to set SMART (Specific – Measureable – Achievable – Relevant – Timely) goals and finding the best learning process to arrive at this goal. During this process, students learned how to plan for themselves and execute their plan; choose the best learning strategies and learn how to apply them effectively. It was expected that students would be able to transfer these skills to other classes and understand how they were connected to life beyond the walls of the university.

Element 3: Challenge

This assumed that the students would see this course as a way to challenge themselves and become more active participants in their learning, rather than being passive students in a classroom. Students would be faced with having to overcome their problem areas and find the best solutions. For motivated students, this was an opportunity to push boundaries and try something new. For less motivated students, this provided a chance to discover a new way of learning that might spark more interest. It was expected that students would feel increased confidence with the one-to-one support and individual attention and continue to seek support from the advisory team after the course ended.

Element 4: Self-management

This assumed that students would be able to learn how to manage their learning after gaining more control. This involved monitoring their learning and managing their responsibilities. As part of self-management, students had to commit to their goal and continuously monitor their time-management (in particular, meeting homework deadlines), selection of resources and balance of English studying, practicing and reviewing. It was expected that this would teach the students more about responsibility and the consequences of poor actions and improve their problem-solving abilities.

Element 5: Self-evaluation

This assumed that the students would learn how to assess their learning and check their progress. It was expected that by setting and achieving goals that they had set for themselves (weekly targets and a longer 6-week goal), students would feel a greater sense of accomplishment. It also was expected that students would learn how to ask for help in assessing their work, thinking about their strengths and weaknesses and in reflecting on how well (or poorly) they did. Reflection is an essential part of self-directed learning and was a key feature in the weekly worksheets and the final report the students handed in at the end of the course.

There were two other elements that the researcher wanted to emphasize in the design of the course: teacher and peer support. As the students were just entering university, the teacher played an important role in facilitating the process of self-discovery (Kelly, 1996). It was important for the teacher to form a close relationship with the students and to create a learning environment that would encourage them to be more active in their learning. Peer support also played an important role in the course as they were encouraged to share knowledge and experiences on the course and if needed, feel comfortable in asking their classmates for help. It was expected that this would strengthen relationships between students and that through shared reflections students would be able to find new ways of learning relevant to their immediate needs. Dam (1995) considered autonomous learning to be not only individual but social, entailing "a capacity to act independently and in cooperation with others" (p. 1). Interaction within and outside of the classroom was thus one of the most important factors of the course design. Figure 1 is an illustration of the design of the course.
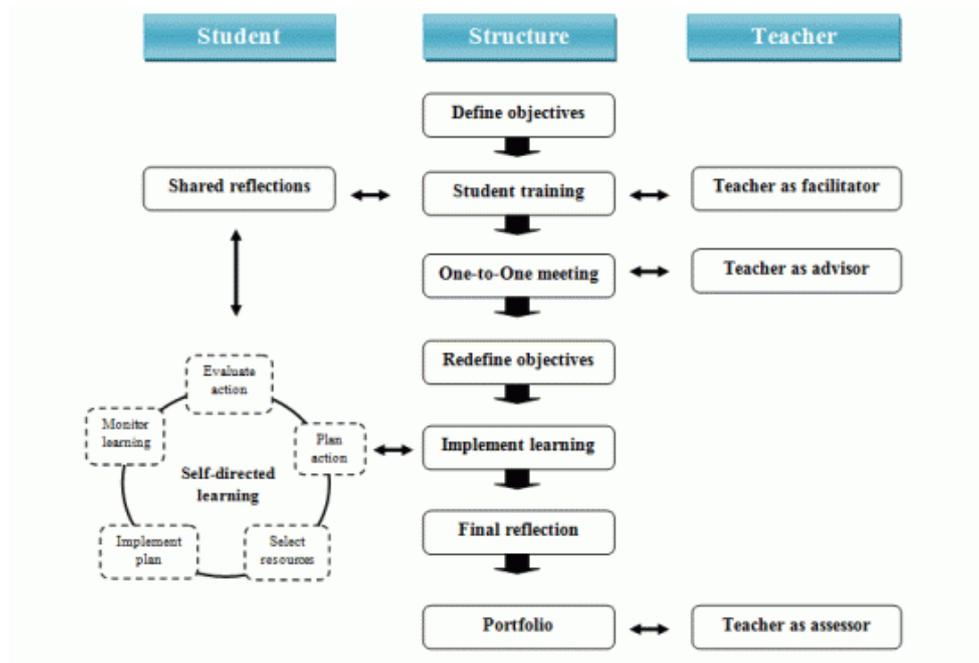
Figure 1. Course design

Implementing the course

Section 1: Weeks 1-6

In the first class, students were explained the purpose of the course and what was expected of them. An example portfolio was shown to them as a model of what they would be required to hand in at the end of the semester. They were also told that participation through sharing knowledge with each other was an important component in the course so they should try to talk with their classmates and learn from them as much as possible. Students chose their learning goals in the first class, but were told they could change their goals along the way as they reflected more deeply on their wants, interests and needs. They were asked to keep a record of their progress and development in their portfolio along with a reflective journal. The main requirement over the first six weeks was helping the learner to focus on selecting a goal that he/she was satisfied with, and learning how to connect learning strategies to those objectives. The teacher's goal was largely awareness-raising and helping the students to reflect on strengths and weaknesses as well as to become accustomed to being more responsible for his/her learning.

Meetings: Week 7 and 14

There were two face-to-face meetings in which the teacher met with each student for 30 minutes to discuss learning objectives and plan a method of learning that best suited the

student. In this first meeting some students were quite anxious as they had never been in a one-to-one session with a teacher. However, as the teacher had had so much face time with the students for 6 weeks, the students seemed to relax quickly. This was one of the positive points noted by the students in the feedback questionnaire. In the second meeting, the students were asked to discuss their learning over the duration of the course. This dialogue was recorded by both the student and teacher and used as the basis for the final reflective report.

Section 2: Weeks 8-13

The second section of the course involved the students applying what they had learned in weeks 1-6 to their self-directed learning. At this point, the teacher took on the role of advisor and shifted more control to the students. For students, this was very challenging and many faltered. Surprisingly, some of the less motivated learners in the classroom excelled at self-directed learning. The teacher allowed the student to make mistakes and stepped in if the student did not understand what to do next or how to solve the problems they were having. Students were expected to reflect more deeply on their learning and share experiences with their classmates. At the beginning of each class, the teacher and students met in the classroom for 30 minutes to share learning strategies and reflect on their learning. In the final hour, students went into the SALC to carry out their learning. The teacher was available to students during the 60 minutes for consultation if needed.

Portfolio: Week 15

In the final week of the course, students were asked to hand in their entire portfolio including all documentation (photocopies of completed worksheets, recordings, notebook, etc.), their reflective diary and a final 500-word reflective report. They were also given a questionnaire to submit comments on the course anonymously at www.surveymonkey.com. Results of this questionnaire and observations from the teacher are discussed in the next session.

Evaluating the course

As this was a pilot study, student feedback on the course played an important part in the decision whether or not to continue the course in the next year or where to make revisions. The five areas examined in the questionnaire were:

1. SALC Learning Course 1 (SLC1)

2. The SALC

3. Self-directed learning

4. Peer and teacher support

5. The student

Because three students were absent on the final day of class, out of 20 students, feedback was obtained only from 17 students. A five-point Likert scale was used which was labelled strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree and strongly disagree. For presentation of results, agree/strongly agree and disagree/strongly disagree have been combined. The researcher felt that areas over 80% agreement were acceptable results for a first-time course; 60-80% meant that that area needed some work; and anything under 60% meant that revisions needed to be made.

Students' views on SLC1

There were mixed results about the course (see Table 1). The positive aspects of the course were that the students found SLC1 useful – they felt that they improved their learning goals; they were exposed to new ideas about how to learn; and they felt an increased confidence in learning English. This then met the objectives of the course. Most surprising was the high interest in the one-to-one component of the class. At 94%, this indicated the importance of teacher/learning advisor support in self-directed learning. The areas that required some work were group work, level of difficulty and amount of work students were required to complete each week. Students were asked to do about 2 hours of independent work outside of class time. After talking with students, the teacher learned that their other classes had heavy homework loads and they just did not have the time to complete the independent component of the course to their best ability. In a class which was based heavily in concepts such as needs analysis, learning styles and learning strategies, students felt at times a bit overwhelmed with the content. With the class being taught only in English, this added more pressure to the lower-proficiency level students. It was felt then that if there were to be a next course, homework should be kept to a minimum and reflections on learning should be more emphasized. A final area that was disappointing was the lack of shared reflections. As the course went on, at times the teacher felt frustrated at the non-responsiveness of the students and the lack of understanding of some of the concepts and went into even lengthier

explanations that the students could not grasp. It was felt that less information on the worksheet and more personalizing of stories and modeling of activities would be more beneficial to the students.

Table 1. Students' views on SLC1

5 = strongly agree 4 = agree 3 = neutral 2 = disagree 1 = strongly disagree

Statement	4+5 %	3 %	1+2 %
1. SLC1 was useful.	88	12	0
2. SLC1 had an appropriate level of difficulty.	71	17	12
3. SLC1 increased my confidence in learning a language.	82	18	0
4. SLC1 gave me new ideas about how to learn.	88	6	6
5. The balance of classroom and independent study was appropriate.	59	30	11
6. The amount of work to be completed each week was appropriate.	47	41	12
7. The balance of group work and pair work was appropriate.	47	53	0
8. The one-to-one meeting with the teacher was useful.	94	6	0
9. I could understand the worksheets in class clearly	59	35	6
10. I could understand what to do each week.	59	29	12
11. I could understand the purpose of SLC1.	82	18	0
12. I understood the contents of the class.	59	41	0
13. I understood the purpose of writing reflections each week.	76	6	18
14. It was useful to write reflections each week.	59	35	6
15. I feel that I improved my study goals	82	6	12

n = 17

Students' views on the SALC

Students were very interested in learning how to use the SALC and the feedback on use of the SALC was generally positive (see Table 2). The students in the ILC department study English as a third language and in the past many said they felt a bit anxious to step into an "English-only" environment. After completing SLC1 however, they became some of the

university students who most frequented the SALC. This surpassed expectations and the researcher was excited to keep this component in the course. Areas to work on were how to find resources and how to use the facilities with more ease. The SALC has over 10,000 resources which is overwhelming for many students and at times, for the learning advisors as well. Effective use of the SALC is essential to the success of a course such as this as student participation was at its highest when students were allowed to go outside the class and explore the SALC. The more motivated students explored many sections of the SALC and tried various activities. Even the less motivated found new activities that they felt were more relevant to their immediate learning needs and that they could enjoy. The need for students to be more active participants in their learning and to go through a process of self-discovery is something that should be considered for future courses.

Table 2. Students' views on the SALC

5 = strongly agree 4 = agree 3 = neutral 2 = disagree 1 = strongly disagree

Statement	4+5	3	1+2
	%	%	%
1. I found useful resources in the SALC to help me with my studies.	94	6	0
2. It was easy to find resources in the SALC.	59	29	12
3. I could find the right level of materials for my study	77	23	0
4. The atmosphere in the SALC was suitable for learning.	77	17	6
5. I could understand how to make reservations to see the teacher.	94	6	0
6. I could understand how to make reservations to use the ELI services	88	12	0
7. I could understand how to make reservations to use the SALC services	76	12	12

n = 17

Students' views on self-directed learning

This section of the questionnaire was rather short and the researcher asked only four questions (see Table 3). Responses from students were again very mixed, probably due to

each student's readiness for self-directed learning. Most students were neutral about their feelings toward self-directed learning and the classroom, but the results show that while some students preferred one or the other, a little more than half of the students (59%) preferred a combination of both. In future courses, a discussion component will be added to the questionnaire and recorded to understand the *why's* and *why not's* behind some of the responses. The discussion will be done in the students' first language without a teacher present in the room in order to encourage students to give deeper responses about the course.

Table 3. Students' views on self-directed learning

5 = strongly agree 4 = agree 3 = neutral 2 = disagree 1 = strongly disagree

Statement	4+5	3	1+2
	%	%	%
1. I feel self-directed learning is as effective as classroom learning	82	12	8
2. I prefer classroom learning to self-directed learning	34	60	6
3. I prefer self-directed learning to classroom learning	24	60	12
4. I prefer a combination of classroom and self-directed learning	59	23	18

n = 17

Students' views on peer and teacher support

Regarding teacher and peer support, the researcher wanted to find out if the students were comfortable asking for help when needed. Results were generally positive (see Table 4). In the second section of the course, the teacher began to shift some of the control over to the students and this was a bit challenging. Some students were excited about studying on their own while other students wanted more teacher input. It was important therefore, that the students felt comfortable about approaching the teacher or another student for help. In most cases, students felt comfortable approaching the teacher (77%), but there were also some cases in which students continued to approach their friends for help instead of the teacher. The teacher however found this to be a good habit for the learners to develop as at the beginning of the course, some students preferred to sit in silence rather than ask for assistance.

Part of the course objectives is for students to build strong relationships and offer support to each other and it is felt that this is achieved.

Table 4. Students' views on peer and teacher support

5 = strongly agree 4 = agree 3 = neutral 2 = disagree 1 = strongly disagree

Statement	4+5	3	1+2
	%	%	%
1. I could understand the teacher in class.	71	29	0
2. The comments from my teacher were easy to understand.	83	17	0
3. When I had problems, I felt comfortable to talk to the teacher.	77	25	0
4. When I had problems, I preferred to talk to my classmates.	47	35	12

n = 17

Students' views on his/her own learning

The fifth section of the questionnaire sought to discover how students felt about themselves after the course had been completed (See Table 5). In a way, this was reflective of how students graded themselves on the course and it was interesting for the teacher to match these results against her own student reports. Overall, students felt positive about their efforts and accomplishments. The most positive results showed that students understood their language learning needs and tried to improve them; they tried their best to express their thoughts; they tried to use English out of class; and they asked questions when they did not understand. The areas that they felt they needed to work on were in writing reflections; doing the required amount of work; and handing the work in on time. It was noted earlier in the paper that in future courses homework would be kept to a minimum in order to give students more time for reflection. As can be seen from question number two, students found it very difficult to write reflections. The students in this class were in their first semester at university and were not in the practice of writing reflections. Therefore, it was felt that in the next course, the teacher should spend more time on developing the students' reflective skills. One of the solutions to this problem seemed to be placing more emphasis on sharing student reflections in class so that students could reflect on their current style of learning, consider different methods of learning and think about which methods suited them best.

Table 5. Students' views on his/her own learning

5 = strongly agree 4 = agree 3 = neutral 2 = disagree 1 = strongly disagree

Statement	4+5 %	3 %	1+2 %
1. I understood my language problems and tried to improve them.	88	12	0
2. It was easy to find the words to express my thoughts.	24	47	29
3. I tried my best to express my thoughts in the reflections	88	12	0
4. I handed in my work on time every week.	47	29	24
5. I tried to find opportunities outside of class to use English.	88	12	0
6. I am satisfied with the work I did for SLC.	71	23	6
7. I came to class on time.	94	6	0
8. I tried my best in every class.	71	23	6
9. I asked the teacher questions when I did not understand.	82	12	6
10. I did the required amount of independent study each week	53	29	18
11. I am satisfied with my final portfolio.	77	17	6

n = 17

Discussion

Feedback on the course was for the most part favorable, showing that students found this mode of learning helpful in organizing study habits; sustaining motivation; improving specific language skills; and increasing knowledge of self-access resources. Students also reported feeling increased confidence in other classes as their language skills improved. During the middle of the course, however, both students and teacher seemed frustrated at the lack of progress, with the students feeling that they should be better at learning and the teacher feeling that the students should be better at planning. By the eleventh week in the course though, there was a sudden change as students became more comfortable with the self-directed learning component of the class. Student reflections were more critical and their choices of materials had become better connected to their goals and interests (see Appendix 2 for a comparison of a student's earlier and later reflective diaries).

One of the paradoxes of this course was that the proficiency levels of students did not make a big difference in readiness for self-directed learning. That is, some students who were very motivated, with a high proficiency level in English, found it difficult to consider a new way of learning and tended to stick to what they knew, even if it was not the best way of learning for them. In many cases, these students relied on memorization techniques learned in high school and repetitive writing of vocabulary in notebooks. Many lower proficiency learners were excited that they were being given the freedom to choose what they wanted to study and excelled in self-directed learning. In one particular instance a student who was having a difficult time in other English classes found that going to the Practice Center[1] to speak each week boosted his confidence, so much that he was able to speak more in other classes. This showed the potential knock-on effect that this course could have on other classes.

Recommendations

For teachers intending to trial a course such as this in his/her institution, the most salient points learned from teaching this course were:

- Students need to be engaged in more group work activities in order to share learning experiences and learn from each other.
- There needs to be a good balance between time spent in the SALC and time spent in the classroom.
- The teacher needs to ensure that when the process of self-directed learning begins, the students feel comfortable asking the teacher or a friend for help.
- Homework needs to be kept at a minimum and training in how to write deep reflections needs to be increased.
- Difficult meta-cognitive concepts need to be understood through learning activities and not through the teacher's explanations.

These were the recommendations written in a report and presented to the team at the end of the course.

Conclusion

Candy (1991) described self-directed learning in terms of a willingness and capacity to conduct one's own education. This concept may not be easily explained to or accepted by

students; therefore, the teacher should be aware that some students will respond better to different aspects of the course than others. If the aims of the course are made clear from the outset, then this would create less of a gap between the expectations of the teacher and students. The point of the course, as explained repeatedly to students, was not for them to be taught the English skills of reading, writing, speaking or listening, but for them to discover ways of learning that best suited the their individual learning goals and interests. As far as this objective was concerned, the researcher felt that the course met its aim. With regard to the other two objectives, the researcher believes that the students, at times with difficulty, managed to learn more about themselves as language learners, identify their language needs and discover the best learning strategies to meet those needs. Furthermore, students were able through self-discovery to increase their knowledge of the SALC, its facilities and improve their overall learning experience.

A classroom-based self-access course does not guarantee improved learning, but it does provide an environment for students to become better language learners. The provision of various kinds of activities along with strong teacher support in the first few weeks of the course gave the students the necessary training they needed for later self-directed learning. Students cannot be expected to be given full control over their learning at once, so this has to remain an integral element of the course. The one-to-one component also proved to be very effective in helping students to be more conscious of their learning needs and remained a second crucial element in the course. A final element that the students benefitted from was the flexibility of the course which students could use to shape their learning around their needs. That is, students who preferred to do more passive types of activities could select a quiet corner to do their work; and students who were energetic were free to move from place to place to actively explore the different options. In both cases, the SALC offered a plethora of choices which Esch (1996) considers to be a good start for learners. The main drawback of this course was the lack of shared reflections. Interaction with others is one of the important characteristics of self-directed learning (Benson, 1996; Tyacke, 1991) and should be made central to the course. This would help the students to acquire new skills and build on their existing knowledge.

Results of this study were presented to management and because it was deemed to have been effective in getting more students interested in their learning and in the increased use of the

SALC resources, the advisory team was given the opportunity to offer it to freshman students once again in the following year. Although there were a few problems along the way, the teacher felt that this classroom-based self-access learning course achieved its aims and the students walked away with a new outlook of language learning and of themselves.

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Appendix 1: SALC Learning Course syllabus

Week 1: Introduction and goal-setting	
Week 2: Time-management	
Week 3: Learning styles and Learning strategies	*Think about language learning to find ways that suit you best*
Week 4: Selecting resources	
Week 5: Writing a SURE plan	
Week 6: Making a learning plan	
Week 7: *(no class)*	*Meet with your teacher for 30 minutes*
Week 8: self-study	
Week 9: self-study	
Week 10: self-study	*Carry out your learning plan*
Week 11: evaluate learning	
Week 12: self-study	
Week 13: progress check	
Week 14: *(no class)*	*Meet with your teacher for 30 minutes*
Week 15: Hand in final portfolio and do a survey	*Reflect on your learning and the course*

Appendix 2: Comparison of a student's week 1 and week 6 diaries in the SLC1 course
*Note: The diaries presented here are transcribed verbatim from a student's diary. A pseudonym is employed to protect the identity of the learner.

Example of Miki's week one diary (Level Check)

Goal:

I *want to improve speaking. Because I often stop speak when I talk with someone in English. So I want to speak more fluently. And I will learn vocabulary. It will useful for daily speaking.*

1. **What is your target this week?**

    I will talk about school life. My goal is Not stop to talk. I will learn 20 new words.

2. **What resources will you use?**

    Practice Center

3. What did you do this week?

- *Prepare vocabulary that I use conversation. Search vocabulary for dictionary.*
- *Make sentence*
- *In Practice Center, I talked about topic that I decide.*
- *Teacher checked my conversation.*

4. Reflection

My speaking goal is achieved. Because I decided topic, so we talked about school life. But my vocabulary goal isn't achieved. Because this time, I use vocabulary that I know already. So next time, I use new words.This conversation, I talked only 30%. It's not good. So next time, I prepare sentence and try to talk 50%. And I will enjoy conversation!

Feedback from your Learning Advisor

I'm glad your study went well this week. Even though you were not able to speak as much as you wanted to, you understand how you can do better next time! Here is my question: ①. Where did you find the new words? If you used a textbook, please tell me about it in the "resources" section.
Good work this week!

Example of Miki's week six diary (Final evaluation)

1. What is your target this week?

I will go Practice Center. And after, I will listen conversation with IC recorder. I will listen first conversation with IC recorder again.

2. What resources will you use?

Practice Center   IC recorder

3. What did you do this week?

- *I make sentence list. I learn vocabulary with textbook "hyakushiki eitango" and I search with dictionary.*

- *I talk with (teacher's name) in Practice Center. Topic "summer vacation". I use IC recorder.*
- *After conversation, I review myself.*
- *Use IC recorder and check sentence list*
- *I listen first conversation again.*
- *I evaluate my learning. First time, I couldn't speak 50% of conversation. It's a good way to make sentence list. Because I could learn many vocabulary and natural sentence for conversation.*

4. Reflection

When I did level check [in diary one], I couldn't speak 50% of conversation. I spoke only 20%. So I decided to make sentence list. Because I could learn new vocabulary when I make sentence list. Vocabulary is my small goal, so it was a good way. Every week, I found my weak points. I couldn't speak loudly, I couldn't tell detail information. However, every week, I found plan of improvement. Because I review myself with IC recorder, and sometimes I asked (teacher's name) or (teacher's name) to improve speaking. So as I practiced in Practice Center, I could improve my speaking. However, now, I use sentence for conversation and vocabulary more. It will be very good way for me.

Feedback from your Learning Advisor

Hi Miki!

I can tell from your diary that you have found a good way to learn. You learned a lot about conversation and found new ways to learn useful expressions and vocabulary. I really like your notebook and think it is a useful way to learn vocabulary. I hope you share your idea with your friends, too!

Thank you for your hard work this semester.

Example of Miki's notebook

* ☑ = *I used in conversation*

Topic: Summer vacation

☑ *Do you like summer?*
☐ *What's your favorite memory in summer?*
☑ *I have played basketball for 11 years, so every summer, I played basketball.*
☑ *I will go to Bali next September.*
☐ *My grandfather and mother is a farmer. So I often go to field, and get many vegetables.*

[1] The Practice Center is a service offered by teachers whereby students make an appointment to speak with a teacher on a one-to-one basis for 15 minutes.

About the Author

Tanya McCarthy has earned an MA in TEFL/TESL from the University of Birmingham, UK. She currently works in Japan as a learning advisor/lecturer at Kanda University of International Studies and advises/teaches in courses related to self-directed language learning. Her main research interests are self-access, curriculum development, materials development and self-directed professional development.