Making 'autonomy given' the 'sweet spot' for learning: Scaffolding students with self-assessment practice

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Structure of the presentation

- **Introduction of COMM 1068**
- **Problem identification**
- **Theoretical background about learner autonomy, scaffolding and self-assessment**
- **Research question**
- **Plans for action**
- **Data collection**
- **Initial findings**
- **Conclusion**

The course

▶ Communication or Academic Purposes (COMM1068)

▶ Students learn a new style of writing each week

▶ They have about 30 minutes to write the first draft of their writing (300 words) in the class

▶ They have to post their draft to the Discussion Board on Friday each week

▶ Students have to download first draft of blog (w1), argumentative paragraph (w3) and news story (w4) and edit, proofread and polish them into 200 words each for assessment 2.

▶ Students have to choose two of the three writings in weeks 7, 8, and 10, and develop them from 300 words to 500 words for assessment 3. They also have to choose one of the two writings in week 9 and 11 and develop them from 300 words to 1000 words for assessment 3.

▶ In tutorial classes, students are introduced to these writings, each with its own structure, format and tone to suit its audience, purpose and content.

▶ Each week students have a live-editing workshop in which a sample writing will be edited.

▶ Editing checklists for most writings are also available in the course resources.

What was the problem?

- ▶ Students did not seem to make use of the useful resources provided on the Learnonline site to improve their writings. – students did not demonstrate as much autonomy in learning as they should.

- ▶ Many students made the same simple and rectifiable mistakes, especially mistakes relating to writing format, and writing tone that significantly impacted their A2 grade.

Blog	Structure	9/23
	Tone	22/23
	Formatting	19/23
Argumentative	Structure	20/23
	Tone	22/23
	Formatting	23/23
News story	Structure	19/23
	Tone	20/23
	Formatting	22/23

➡ **How to engage students in using self-assessment checklists to help them avoid these mistakes and improve their grade?**

Theoretical background about learner autonomy, scaffolding and self-assessment

▶ Learner autonomy can be conceptualised as *Autonomy offered* - the level of freedom or opportunities created for learners to exert their control over learning   and *Autonomy demonstrated* - the extent to which the students actually exercise their capacity to take control of their learning in different learning situations (Tran 2019)

▶ *Autonomy offered* can be of different levels (Willison, 2006, Tran 2019) and *autonomy demonstrated* can also be of different levels (Littlewood 1999, Tran, 2019)

▶ Interplays exist between teachers' external regulation of learning processes and students' self-regulation (or *autonomy offered* and *autonomy demonstrated*) (Vermunt and Verloop 1999). When *autonomy offered* and *autonomy demonstrated* are compatible, congruence occurs, resulting in optimal learning. Otherwise, friction will occur. Friction can be constructive or destructive, depending on whether the friction challenges students to increase their learning and cognitive strategies or decreases students' learning and thinking skills

How to make congruence and constructive friction happens?

Theoretical background about learner autonomy, scaffolding and self-assessment

▶ The term 'contingency' in scaffolding indicates that teachers have to be sensitive to the level of autonomy that their students can work with so that they can create situations which best support their students' demonstration of LA (Van Der Stuyf, 2002; Van de Pol et al., 2015)

▶ There is no optimum pre-determined level of autonomy. Instead, teachers have to be sensitive to find out which level is appropriate for their students (Willison, Sabir & Thomas, 2017)

Theoretical background about learner autonomy, scaffolding and self-assessment

▶ Self-assessment can promote LA, but on the condition that self-assessment tasks are carefully designed and delivered (Berry 2009);

▶ Self-assessment needs to be introduced to students deliberately and with sufficient support if it is to develop LA (Sambell, McDowell, and Sambell 2006)

▶ Gradual and scaffolded introduction of self-assessment is necessary for students to take up incremental levels of LA through self-assessment. At the initial stage, they might need a lot of support and scaffolding from the teacher in order to develop necessary skills and abilities, while in the later stage, they can demonstrate more autonomy in this respect (Sambell, McDowell, and Sambell 2006)

- Students seemed to be given very high level of autonomy in their learning

- They seemed not to be able to manage that level of autonomy

- Some scaffolding may help students manage their autonomy in learning better

Connecting with culturally responsive pedagogy?

Scaffolding students with self-assessment practice so that they engage in that activity to identify

- what they have done right in their writing

- what mistakes they make/ what they still miss in their writings

and use this information to improve their writings while editing and polishing their writings for assessment.

Research question

How does utilising scaffolding increase students' engagement with self-assessment, editing and polishing of their writings, and improve their understanding of writing format, structure and tone of different writing genres?

What I planned/hoped to do differently. Why?

▶ Adapt the editing checklists in the course resources into self-assessment rubrics which are shorter and easier to use.

▶ The self-assessment rubric focuses on areas that students often make mistakes

▶ Scaffolding students in self-assessment practice by modelling self-assessment, explaining assessment rubrics, allowing them time to practice peer-assessment before doing self-assessment.

Making the task of self- assessing and editing become more manageable for students to encourage them to carry out this activity and avoid mistakes in their writings.

What I did?

▶ Adapted self-assessment checklist in week 1, 3, 4

Original checklist-blog → Adapted rubric

Original checklist-argumentative → Adapted rubric

Original checklist- news story → Adapted rubric

▶ Posted the adapted rubric to the discussion board

▶ In weeks 2, 4, and 5, at the beginning of the tutorial class, I modelled self-assessment, explained the assessment rubric for students, and then asked them to spend 2-3 minutes to self-assessment their writing on the discussion board. After they had done their self-assessment, I asked them to post their self-assessment rubric to the discussion board for future use (in A2)

Data collection

▶ reflections over 3 weeks 2, 4, 5, especially about any difficulties I may have when having students apply self-assessment practices, and how they engage with the activity.

▶ short survey (Likert scale) to understand students' perceptions about how self-assessment rubric: sent to 23 students, 11 responded

▶ Comparison of assessment 2 results of students in SP5 and students in SP2

What I found from my observations?

- "It makes much more sense now"
- "I have some 'no' in my assessment rubric, so I will need to change my writing to make the answers to 'yes'"
- Students seemed to engage in self-assessment practice

What I found from the results of two semester?

- ▶ Mean of grade for assessment 2 in SP2 was 60.05
- ▶ Mean of grade for assessment 2 in SP5 was 68.18

What I found from the survey questionnaire?

Did you use self-assessment checklist before editing and proofing your writings for assessment 2?

11 responses

- Not all all
- For only one writing
- For two writings
- For all three writings

45.5%

9.1%

45.5%
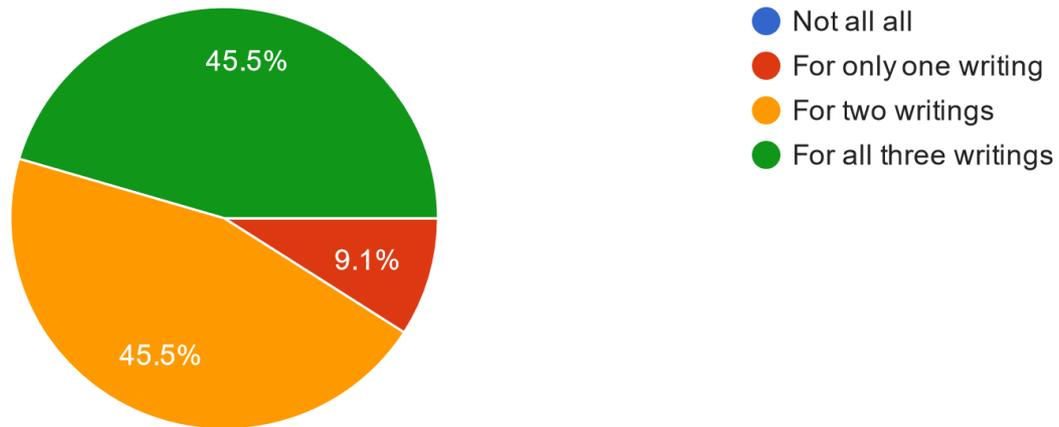
Positive attitude towards self-assessment rubrics

- 9/11 (81.6%) students want to use similar rubrics with the future writings
- 10/11 (91%) students agreed that being trained to use self-assessment checklist is useful

Self-assessment rubric is useful

- ▶ 10/11 (91.9%) students agreed that self-assessment rubric helps them realise their mistakes in their writings for A2

- ▶ 8/11() students agreed that self-assessment rubric helps them fix their mistakes in their 3 writings for A2

- ▶ 11/11 students agreed that self-assessment rubric helps them understand the structure, tone and format of 3 writing for A2

- ▶ 9/11 and 8/11 students agreed that self-assessment checklist helps them most in improving writing format and structure respectively.

Self-assessment rubric may help students become more autonomous

8/11 (72.8%) students agreed that self-assessment rubric helps them learn independently

Conclusion

▶ Teaching is also a learning process which requires constant reflection and reflexivity. Participating in action research helped me learn about my teaching and improve it to fit with different cohorts of students and find the solutions for the teaching challenges I had in a systematic and 'scientific' way.

Thank you for your listening!

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