A Study Progress Guide to Promote Learner Development

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This paper looks at the use of a Study Progress Guide (SPG) designed to help students develop self-regulated skills they can apply to their language learning. After presenting a brief background to this resource, consideration is given to various issues related to its use. Suggestions will be made on how to address these issues if a resource like the SPG is to be used effectively.

この論文では、学生の言語学習における自己調整能力の開発を支援する「学習進捗ガイド」の使い方について解説する。このガイドが作られた背景を示した後、これを授業で実際に使用する上での様々な問題点について考察し、その上でこのようなガイドの効果的な使い方を紹介する。

Helping our students to develop as successful learners involves equipping them with skills and strategies they can use in and out of the classroom to successfully engage in learning. One approach is to provide resources that make explicit to students what they are expected to learn in a course, and the processes they can use to assess their progress. This paper looks at one such attempt, a study progress guide (SPG) based around goal-setting and self-reflection to help students develop as autonomous, self-regulated learners.

Rationale for the SPG: Self-Regulated Learning and Metacognition

One key aspect of most theories of self-regulated learning is that successful learners engage in a cycle of planning, monitoring, and reflecting when engaged in academic tasks. The ability to bring self-regulatory *metacognitive strategies* to bear throughout this cycle, along with recognition that these strategies are key in contributing to academic outcomes, increases self-efficacy and builds and sustains the motivation essential to academic success. While self-regulated learning is something that any learner can learn, knowing or understanding the various strategies is not enough. Learners need the *metacognitive knowledge* to recognize how and when to apply these strategies, which varies both inter- and intrapersonally depending on the particular learning situation (see Zimmerman & Schunk, 2001 for an extensive overview).

Metacognitive Knowledge

Wenden (1998, 2001) based on earlier work by Flavell, defines metacognitive knowledge as "the relatively stable information human thinkers have about their own cognitive processes and those of others" (Wenden, 1998, p. 516). Metacognitive knowledge can be classified into three categories, as follows.

1. *Person knowledge*: General knowledge a learner holds about various factors of the person that influence learning, and how these factors relate to oneself.
2. *Task knowledge*: This includes knowledge of the purpose of a task, or its pedagogical aims and usefulness for the learner. The second type of task knowledge is of task type; for example whether a task is something the learner has done before, or if it is new. Thirdly, there is task demand; knowing how difficult something will likely be, and knowing what skills and knowledge are necessary to complete it.
3. *Strategic knowledge*: This relates to what learners know about strategies, how useful they are and knowledge of how and when to use them.

It is believed that metacognitive knowledge develops as early as preschool, and that it is stable, but importantly, subject to change (Wenden, 2001).

A pivotal part of the self-regulated learning cycle is the metacognitive strategy of goal setting and understanding what constitutes an effective goal. Through the pursuit of goals, self-regulated learners are able to use their metacognitive knowledge to understand to what extent their learning or study strategies are working, to recognize when they need to modify or change strategies, and to help them plan for subsequent learning tasks. This is as true for language learning as any other domain (Anderson, 2008; Chamot, 2008; Wenden, 2001). Anderson (2008) in his brief discussion of metacognition, argues it is something that should be taught to language learners and is effective in helping them improve their skills. Kawai (2008) in a small-scale study of strategy use of successful language learners in Japan showed his subjects recognized the importance of both in-task and post-task metacognitive strategies in developing communication or speaking skills, reinforcing the importance of monitoring and reflecting on performance.

Cotterall & Murray (2009) make the claim that, given the importance assigned to metacognition, there is a surprising lack of published research focused on how to encourage its development. As a step towards remedying this, their paper considers the results of an attempt to develop learner metacognition in a self-directed learning course which directly engaged the students in the self-regulated learning cycle of planning, monitoring, and reflecting. Their results showed an increase in student awareness of the importance and value of metacognitive knowledge and skills.

While on a smaller scale than Cotterall & Murray (2009), we share common goals with our Study Progress Guide and hope to encourage similar growth in our students. The aim is to encourage students to focus on areas where they are experiencing problems and difficulties with their language learning and get them to identify why they have these problems. From here, the next stage is for students to set goals to help themselves improve, and to experiment with different language-learning strategies to realize improvement. In other words, the intent is to promote the development and implementation of metacognitive strategies to help our students develop as self-regulated learners.

Features of the Study Progress Guide

The creation of the SPG has been a work-in-progress based on teacher and student feedback. What follows is a brief outline of the different sections we have felt are necessary in a resource such as the SPG. Remembering that the main point here is to en-

courage students to engage in planning-monitoring-reflection, the exact nature of the resource can obviously be varied. We offer the following as one possibility.

Course-Wide Goal Setting

Initial Goal Setting

Students are introduced to the study progress sheet in the first class of the semester. They are asked to think about a long-term goal they have for the class, and record this in the SPG. It may be necessary at this stage to ensure students understand the link between what they will be studying in class and the long-term goals they may hold (for example, attaining a high grade in a practical test such as TOEIC®) so they can better envision the kinds of skills they need to improve and set goals to help develop these skills. It's also recommended to encourage students not to set overly distal or long-term goals, as these can be demotivating if learners are not able to see that they are making progress to attain them.

Mid-Semester Reflection

As the students progress through the semester, they may need to reset or modify their initial goals if for example, these have proven to be too ambitious, or if they have managed to complete what they initially decided. Obviously, a self-directed learner is not going to need to be told to reflect on their goals, but for the majority of learners who are not at this level, this section is aimed at encouraging them to reflect on their progress.

Final Course-Wide Reflection

Providing students with a chance to reflect on their final outcomes is important in helping them set goals for the next stage of their language learning, as well as to help make it clear that their language learning doesn't necessarily end at the end of a semester-long or year-long language course. Ideally, students will be able to see in which areas of the course they succeeded, and where they may have faced difficulties, and use their experiences in the class to understand how the strategies they applied (or otherwise) worked for or against their learning.

Unit-Based Goals

This section constitutes the main body of the SPG, and as such is one of the key parts. The unit-based goals are derived from a unit-by-unit breakdown of course expectancies in the form of *can-do* statements (see Collett & Sullivan, 2010). Here, we have the following:

1. An area to assess progress in each unit
2. A section to outline what particular strengths and weaknesses students feel they encountered in the unit
3. A section for students to note goals they have for improvement related to the unit
4. Tied into (3), an area for students to outline how they are going to achieve their improvement goal, either through direct examples of practice of the language point they wish to improve, or a more reflective narrative of the study techniques they have engaged in.

Other Content

A final section allows for students to keep track of their scores in the regular unit review tests carried out in class, ensuring students are easily able to monitor their progress in relation to class assessment, and where needed, adjust their goals and strategies to accommodate for problems they may identify.

SPG Development

As outlined in Collett & Sullivan (2010), the SPG was initially set up in a much more "bare-bones" style, but we soon found it was lacking in some areas. After listening to student reactions & teacher responses, we added more sections to help our students better negotiate the SPG, including suggestions on homework activities and guidance on how to effectively use the guide.

Student Reactions

Whilst any kind of classroom intervention is likely to have its detractors, not least amongst the learners themselves, it appears a majority of our students do regard the SPG as something useful for their studies. Surveys administered at the end of both the first and second semester, 2010 to users of the SPG found that they felt it helped them to improve their English ability (Q. 7, Table 1), that it helped them to recognize good or effective goals (Q. 16), and helped make the course requirements increasingly clear (Q. 21). Finally, the majority of students indicated a willingness to use the SPG in their future studies (Q. 25).

While these figures provide a positive picture of the efficacy of the SPG, we need to look at actual classroom use and individual student responses to gain a clearer understanding of how the SPG is used. We address some of these issues below.

Table 1. SPG Usage Survey Responses

Survey Item[1]	Response[2]	1st Semester 2010		2nd Semester 2010	
		1st Year (n=369)	2nd Year (n=214)	1st Year (n=247)	2nd Year (n=178)
Q 7: I could improve my English ability through using the SPG	SA	12.2%	9.4%	11.7%	13.5%
	A	51.6%	41.5%	56.3%	48.3%
	D	32.1%	42.0%	29.6%	34.3%
	SD	4.1%	7.1%	2.4%	3.9%
Q 16: Through using the SPG I could understand what a good goal was	SA	12.2%	8.9%	13.8%	15.7%
	A	50.8%	46.7%	50.4%	52.2%
	D	34.2%	40.7%	32.1%	30.9%
	SD	2.7%	3.7%	3.7%	1.1%
Q. 21: The SPG made it clear what needed to be studied to achieve a good grade	SA	13.1%	13.1%	17.8%	14.7%
	A	51.8%	49.1%	53.8%	55.9%
	D	32.2%	32.7%	26.7%	28.2%
	SD	3.0%	5.1%	1.6%	1.1%
Q 25: I don't want to use the SPG again in the future	SA	6.5%	11.7%	4.5%	6.2%
	A	23.6%	32.2%	26.3%	22.5%
	D	52.3%	43.0%	49.4%	51.7%
	SD	17.6%	13.1%	19.8%	19.7%

1. Translated from Japanese
2. SA = strongly agree; A = agree; D = disagree; SD = strongly disagree

Usage Issues

Teacher Role

If students are not using the SPG, it is of little value, and its actual usage will be determined by the degree to which students are already prepared for self-regulated learning. As Wenden (2001) makes clear, it is important to gather an understanding of students' metacognitive knowledge to recognize when and where they may need help in using something like the SPG. This can be done through surveys or interviews, for example. It then becomes a matter of providing the necessary support to students to help them realize the value of the SPG. If used on a small scale, perhaps this is not so problematic, but in a situation where it is used across a number of classes taught by different teachers, one needs to consider carefully how to best ensure the aims and benefits of the SPG are clearly and equally communicated to all students. In our case, administrative issues have prevented us from running any kind of school-wide orientation where the SPG could be introduced, explained, and modeled to new students; instead we need to rely on individual class teachers to do this, which results in varying degrees of success. Interviews with students regarding their use of and understanding of the SPG illustrate some of the issues faced here (the interviews were conducted in Japanese with 1st-year students at the end of the 1st semester, 2010). One respondent, "A", reported that as her teacher hadn't incorporated the SPG into the class in a significant way, she did not use it effectively. While she regarded it as something that may have been helpful, she reported having completed it in a cursory manner at the end of the course when it was to be submitted. A second subject, "F", reported his teacher stressed some sections were to be filled out (which he failed to do) but the overall aim of the SPG was not clear to him. Beyond concluding it was to encourage students to study at home, "F" admitted he had not gained anything from the process of using it. Clearly, in these cases the SPG was not fulfilling is intended purpose of helping students to take more responsibility for their learning. Furthermore, these cases support recent clarifications of theories of self-regulated learning noting that while self-regulation is *of* the self, it is not necessarily *by* the self. Instead self-regulated learning is coregulated and socially regulated (Hadwin & Oshige, 2011; Brown, 2009; McCaslin, 2009), and it is very much within the teacher's control, along with other significant figures in the students' lives such as peers or parents, to successfully promote its development. Showing students how to set effective goals, monitor their progress, and self-evaluate in their attempts to successfully negotiate learning tasks needs to be clearly modeled and explained.

Student Goals

Getting students to use a resource like the SPG is only the beginning; if not used properly, it can hinder students' development as self-regulated learners. Consideration should be given to the type of goals students are setting, which, if not mediated by their particular learning orientation (Zimmerman, 2008) or self-theories of intelligence (Dweck & Master, 2008), could be a consequence of class content. In our situation, we are using the SPG with conversation-based classes where it may not be clear to students what they will be learning above and beyond general speaking and listening skills. While we have worked to break the course content down into clear expectations, we need to balance how technical the can-do statements are without obfuscating the aims of the curriculum, as it is not much help if students don't know what they should be able to do by the end of the course. Even when students understand the goals of the course, we have to accept that they may not necessarily give adequate consideration to the can-do guidelines presented and may set goals based on their own understanding of what the teacher wants, which may prove counterproductive.

A study by Donato & McCormick (1994) addresses this issue. Their research involved the use of a portfolio system to help their learners (native English-speaking university students studying French conversation) to monitor and reflect on their learning strategies. The researchers found that when their students first started working with the portfolio, they seemed to be setting goals or using strategies at odds with language learning, orienting instead towards simply passing the course. However, providing the conditions for critical examination of their learning helped their students to develop strategies that were personally meaningful. By having their students situate their learning in concrete circumstances rather than "abstract conjecture" (p. 462) the students became increasingly aware of strategies they could use to assist themselves. "The classroom culture can…be designed to move students beyond thoughtful consumption to reflective construction of language learning strategies" (Donato

Table 2. Student Entries from Study Progress Sheets

Student	Initial Goal	Mid-semester reflection	Final reflection
1. Male, 2nd year	*Through this class, I want to improve my spoken English. While I am able to read English, I feel I am poor at speaking. Therefore, I want to try speaking a lot, and be able to speak fluently.	**No /** I feel that my skill of speaking English [did] not change compared with before [the] beginning of the semester. I also feel that [there are] a lot of English words that I can't understand meaning. My skill of English was good when I was a high school student. I think that a better goal is to keep in mind a lot of English words [we learned] in class. I need to study English myself. If think if I can understand a lot of English words, I think that I can speak English fluently.	I think that I have reached the goal that I can speak English better. I feel that my skill of speaking English is better than [at the beginning of this course]. At first, I [scored] low score for unit tests. At that time, I felt that I could not understand the English that [we] learned in this class. And I began studying English very harder than before. At the last unit test, I could [get] a higher score than before. I was happy. I also [scored] the highest score in my class for [the school-wide spelling contest and entered the final]. I could become speaking fluently English because I study English very hard. I think that my skill of speaking English will grow if I study English after the end of [this course]. My English study goal for the future is to have a wide vocabulary.
2. Female, 1st year	*I will be able to speak English as best as I can. I will listen to Western music CDs to improve my English.	**No** / I listened to Western music...A better goal is getting to like English and talking [in] English with friends. I don't know [many] English words. I think that I should write and learn the spelling of English words of the textbook.	I don't become to like English. But, I like English better than before. Because I [became] familiar with English. I listened to Western music and talked [in] English with my friends. I knew that studying pleasantly is most important. I want to get a score of 600 on the TOEIC test. It is my English study goal for the future. For that reason, I want to keep listening to Western music. And, I must write and fix more and more English words.
3. Male, 1st year	*I want to get a score of 650 in TOEIC within a year.	**No** / I should remember many words. And it's important for me to adjust [to] a native speaker's English. So, I listen to the TOEIC CD everyday.	I was remembering a lot of words during the semester. It helps me to study English very [easily].
4. Male, 1st year	English songs translation. My plan has three steps. First, listening to the English song and reading the...words. Second, singing the song. Third, translating the...words.	**No /** I could not achieve my goal. It was English songs translation. It was very difficult for me. I couldn't translate when the song was playing. However, I could sing a song in English. So I learn words. It is the next goal.	I think that [the class] homework is very important because English skill and vocabulary skill...improved by this homework. And my last target is to translate English songs and singing. Homework was useful to achieve this target. Beside this the vocabulary skill rose through music, and it was very significant.

& McCormick, 1994, p. 463); in other words, getting students not to present what they think the teacher expects, but rather what the students themselves find useful for their development.

To some extent, we are seeing a similar process with our learners who are actively using the SPG. Table 2 illustrates some of these cases taken from SPGs completed by non-English major tertiary-level students enrolled in first-year English Practical classes taught by the author in the second semester of 2010. The students were of mixed ability, but most could be classified as upper beginners in terms of their speaking skills. I actively encouraged the students to use the SPG and provided guidance on its use. The students were asked to write the three different sections listed in the table as as homework in the first week of the 14-week course, in the seventh or eighth week of the semester, and the final week of the course, respectively. For the mid-semester reflection, they were asked to state if they thought they had achieved their initial goals (yes/no), and to set new ones. The responses were written in a mix of English and Japanese, in the case of the latter, translations (marked with an asterisk) are mine. The English entries are presented as much as possible as written, edited slightly for clarity; changes are marked by square brackets.

It seems that even in cases where students are setting what may be classified as either evaluation goals or working goals, both of which are seen as problematic for developing as self-regulated learners (Lemos, 1999), they are later recognizing that these initial goals have not been helpful and are reformulating them to set goals they seem to regard as more useful for themselves, with resultant positive effects on self-efficacy and motivation. Student 1 for example, goes from a vague goal of wanting to speak better but with no strong outline of how to achieve this, to a realization that he needs to increase his vocabulary to reach his goal. This, in turn, leads to an increased sense of self-efficacy. Similarly, student 2 has reformulated the initial, rather vague goal towards something that seems to have increased her self-efficacy and motivation towards learning English. Student 3 is quite typical; many students in our classes set the same kind of initial goal but without any kind of indication about how they plan to achieve it. These broad goals often end up being modified as students reflect on their progress; in this case the student recognized the need to increase his vocabulary and recognizes this had a positive effect on his learning outcomes. Student 4 is an interesting example of someone who had set an initial goal not related to class content and was able to recognize how to incorporate the class material into helping him attain his goal with positive effects.

Space limitations preclude including additional samples of student responses, but those above should demonstrate how the SPG allows us as teachers to see students are using strategies to help attain their goals and recognizing that their goals and strategies are contributing to their success. To what extent this is a result of *the use of* the SPG needs to be investigated further, but it is worth noting that students interviewed from classes where SPG use was not strongly supported reported forgetting their initial goals, not making an effort to achieve them, failing to reformulate them if not appropriate, and felt that, overall, their goals had not been helpful.

Monitoring of Progress

We have to accept that one of the current weaknesses in our SPG is with the monitoring phase. The student data presented in Table 2, which applies to course-length goals, suggests students are able to monitor their efforts over the course of the semester, and to adjust their strategies when they can see that these are not helping them. However, how about in the actual moment-by-moment flux of the classroom? We ask that our students keep a record of areas in which they think they were successful or otherwise while working on each unit, and the SPG contains a space in which they are asked to note their strategies for improvement based on

their class performance; either a direct example of their work, or an account of something they have done to remedy weaknesses. Beyond this, we are not asking them to provide any evidence based on whatever metacognitive monitoring they might have engaged in during an activity to account for their final evaluations, nor are we attempting to ascertain this ourselves, instead making the implicit assumption they are basing their judgments on self-monitoring, and that they have the metacognitive capacity to do so. It might be helpful to have the students record instances of problems they encountered, why they think they experienced these difficulties, and what they think they can do to overcome them. Challenges may arise when dealing with immediate and spontaneous speaking or listening activities, especially in situations where students are still at a low level and lack the automaticity required to, for example, engage in a speaking task whilst metacognitively monitoring their performance. However, helping students to recognize why activities they engaged in were successful or otherwise, and recording these observations along with thoughts on how they could overcome problems, is as important for immediate classroom work as it is for long-term course progress. As Anderson (2008) notes, teaching language-learning strategies alone is not effective in improving learner outcomes; rather *metacognitive training* is more effective.

Technical Issues

The actual physical structure of the SPG is another issue that needs to be considered. The SPG we used was printed on A4 paper, stapled at the top left corner. In early implementations, we produced these on a per-semester basis, but from 2011 decided to make a yearlong version. While this has timesaving advantages, it means the guides became increasingly ragged as the year progressed, with pages coming detached or damaged; we have also had students lose or misplace the guides over the long break between the first and second semesters, compromising the usefulness of the SPG.

While we can't do much about lost copies other than have replacements on hand, it is possible to make the SPG longer-lasting and sturdier by, for example, formatting it as a booklet stapled down the spine. Other options include using heavy card stock for the covers to better protect and preserve the inner pages. While this may seem like a small issue, it is important to not only ensure the students understand the SPG is something they should value, but also that it is something their teachers place importance in. The SPG's appearance should contribute to this.

One other approach here that eliminates the forgoing problems of wear and tear is an electronic version of the SPG, allowing for online entry and storage of student content. This opens up numerous possibilities in relation to the kinds of entries students can make in the SPG, as well as in terms of sharing and tracking student entries, and is something we will be looking at for future implementations of the SPG. Of course, making this kind of change brings its own issues, and we would want to mitigate, as much as possible, any potential problems here.

Future Directions for Research

As mentioned earlier, the SPG is a work-in-progress; this continued development along with research into its effectiveness has identified a number of additional factors we hope to address in further research. One particular area relates to language learner histories and expectations. A common theme emerging from student interviews suggests that a handful of students have encountered some kind of catalyst in their past, usually involving a respected role model, that has exemplified for them the possibilities inherent in developing strong English skills, or shown them a possible future outcome of their English studies. Unfortunately, this seems to be the minority of students, and it appears the majority have little reason to form a strong image of themselves as future English users. One question we would like

to address is how this impacts their motivation and engagement with their studies. Dörnyei's (Dörnyei, 2009; Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011) development of Markus & Nurius's (1986) concept of possible selves, along with related research into how the role of identity (Murray, Gao, & Lamb, 2011) and (for example) imagination (Murray, 2011) can contribute to language learning may be fruitful avenues for consideration, as they suggest imagined future selves may play a part in development of self-regulated learning. It may be worth incorporating material or activities that promote consideration by the students of their conceptions of themselves as future users of English into future versions of the SPG. However, we should also consider Bandura (1986) who, in developing his influential social cognitive framework which lies at the heart of the theory behind the SPG, argued that helping learners develop self-efficacy is preferable to focusing on outcome expectations. While this may seem at odds with the importance placed on goals in conceptualizations of self-regulated learning, a key point is that successful self-regulated learners "focus proactively on learning processes (i.e., as a means to an end) during the...[planning and monitoring]...phases rather than merely focusing reactively on outcomes (i.e., ends) during self-reflection" (Zimmerman & Schunk, 1997, p. 339). Goals are important, not so much as final outcomes, but because they allow the learner to better monitor and reflect on the strategies and processes they work through when engaged in learning tasks. So, although not necessarily contradictory, there is a certain tension between promoting possible selves (if these are conceived as *ends* or final outcomes to which students can aspire) and with the development of self-regulated learning. Exploring how these various approaches can work together seems a useful line to pursue, and will hopefully make a valuable contribution to the next stage of the SPG.

Conclusion

Results to date suggest that, where properly supported, the SPG is helping students develop an understanding of the importance of goal setting and other metacognitive strategies. It needs to be noted, however, that while the SPG offers benefits, creating and implementing such a resource does require a time commitment from the teacher, both in planning and implementation. Issues relating to SPG formatting, the mode of presentation, and teacher attitudes towards the SPG will all impact on its success or otherwise. Likewise, it requires a commitment from the students; an acceptance on their behalf to take more control of their learning, which in turn is informed by how their role in the classroom is situated by their teacher(s). Importantly, consideration must be given to whether students are *capable* of developing the metacognitive knowledge the SPG is intended to promote.

However, in that such a resource helps make clear to both teachers and students what is expected to be mastered, and (if properly utilized) how to master and move beyond the class content, the SPG is something well worth incorporating into a course curriculum.

Bio Data

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