

Self-directed Learning Series



Developing a Self-Directed Learning Programme on Learning English through Songs

Becky Cheung

Using songs in the classroom is always one of the motivational strategies as it quickly changes a tense and stressful classroom into a pleasant and relaxing one. Once students have experienced the benefits of learning English through songs and lyrics, their learning capacity will expand, and unexpected outcomes may occur. To keep up students' interest and boost learning advancements, launching a self-directed learning (SDL) programme that takes care of students' motivational beliefs as well as cognitive and meta-cognitive learning strategies plays a crucial role.

Creating a personal learning contract

Contract learning has been a widely used tool for SDL (Brockett & Hiemstra, 1985, 1991; Kasworm, 1983). It is viewed as a process structure that sets the climate for learners to go through the SDL cycle, which requires students to set goals, select and implement learning strategies, and evaluate performance (Knowles, 1986).

A learning contract is an agreement negotiated between two parties. It is a written record that indicates the learning goals to be achieved, the challenges and problems to be overcome, and the strategies and resources to be used. It also describes the timescale for programme completion and the assessment policies on student performance (see Appendix 1). The whole learning process emphasises “teacher-student collaboration” (Andrews, 2004, p.219) that empowers students to make decisions and take control over their learning under the supervision of their teachers (Lemieux, 2001).

Involving students in designing their own learning

contract helps to improve their readiness to learn and their self-directed learning skills. It also helps to minimise misunderstandings and poorly communicated expectations.

Working with a buddy and a parent

Two is always better than one. Students are encouraged to work with an SDL buddy so that they can be boosters for each other’s motivation, desire and, more importantly, perseverance to complete the programme. It will become a more pleasurable experience when students have a buddy to share song ideas, check song meanings, sing and cheer for each other in their learning paths.

Although a learning contract is an agreement between a student and the teacher; it sometimes involves the student’s parents. Teachers may invite the parents to be the cheerleaders to support their children in learning English outside the classroom, and a sponsor to reward the students for completing the learning programme.





A true self-access mode

Teachers need to produce an SDL Log in which stimulating learning resources are found. These resources offer step-by-step guidelines and instructions that allow students to work appropriately on their own. Teachers need to go through these resources together with students to demonstrate how they may integrate song appreciation with learning English. The design of these SDL sample learning tasks should serve the purposes of checking students' understanding of song lyrics, showing students how to connect the song lyrics with their personal experiences, and more importantly, encouraging the students to put the language they have learnt from the song lyrics into practice. To reinforce extra effort, teachers may even encourage students to record any additional song-related activities they undertake that demonstrate their learning effort.

My personal experience of learning and teaching English through songs

English songs have been a significant component of my journey as an English learner and educator. My experience of learning English through songs has inspired me to develop my own song-related teaching materials. I carefully select teaching materials in the best interest of my students and design differentiated tasks to suit the various needs and abilities of them. I find teaching with songs a useful tool in boosting learners' motivation, especially the less able learners.

Fostering students' intrinsic motivation to learn English with authentic materials is not only a mission but also an interest. Serving as a School Development Officer, I have a strong desire to promote teaching English through language arts materials and carry out in-depth studies of its impacts upon learning motivation and performance. I look forward to collaborating with many more English teachers to create school-based SDL programmes that nurture students' habits of integrating learning English through leisure activities.

References

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English through Songs

1. Things to do:

- Select songs to listen to and sing along as frequently as possible.
- Record your SDL experience and file the sources properly - state what you have learnt and found interesting.
- Share your learning experience with your SDL buddy as frequently as possible.

2. My English Learning Contract

I, Carmen Chan, am determined to learn English through *listening and singing English songs*.

My goal is to listen and sing an English song *3 times a day*.

I have invited Shirley Ko to be my SDL buddy. I will share my learning experience with her *once a week*.

I am hoping to raise my reading/writing/listening/speaking standards **from** *Grade D to Grade C* in the First Term Exam.

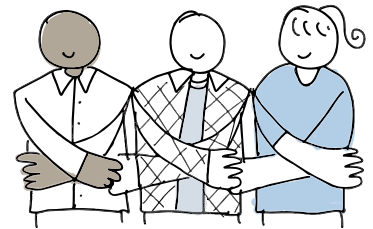
If I keep to the above program and achieve the above goals at the end of the First Term, my sponsor, Peter Chan (Father), will let me learn *hip hop dance and pay the monthly fee*.

Signature of Student: _____ Date: _____

Signature of SDL Buddy: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Sponsor: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Teacher: _____ Date: _____



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