(ii) Dissemination article/note, and video

Developing second language learners' autonomy in writing assessment

In recent decades, the approach to assessment has significantly evolved, placing a stronger emphasis on learner-centred methods. These methods aim to enhance active involvement and promote self-regulated learning among students. Learners are now encouraged to take a more proactive role in learning by using assessment information to self-assess, self-monitor and self-reflect their learning. Not only does this shift of assessment empower learners, but it also fosters a more engaging and effective learning experience. The active involvement of learners in the assessment process is key to boosting their motivation and improving their overall learning outcomes.

Facilitating learners' understanding of assessment criteria

To empower students to take charge of their learning, teachers can begin by raising students' awareness of the structural elements and language features of the target text type. This can be achieved by deconstructing a sample text of the target text type with their students before assigning a writing task. To further enhance students' comprehension of the expectations and standards they need to meet, teachers should ensure students fully grasp the assessment criteria, enabling them to assess their own learning. This process can be supported by providing students with writing samples for discussion. Through these discussions, learners can identify the assessment criteria and exercise judgement on how and whether the criteria are met, thereby developing an enhanced understanding of the writing task.

Encouraging learners to set goals

Teachers can actively involve students in setting goals for their learning and growth. By using personal learning goals as a guide, students can effectively regulate and monitor their writing progress through subsequent rounds of revision and reflection. To facilitate this, teachers can provide students with a goal-setting sheet with items related to content, structure, and language use in the target genre. It is essential for teachers to ensure that these goals are closely aligned with the assessment criteria. This alignment helps students understand what they should strive for. Learners can then select the learning goals they feel confident in achieving. Such a structured approach helps students take ownership of their learning and track their development more systematically.

Engaging students in peer assessment

Peer assessment, as a complementary assessment resource that emphasizes the role of students, can enhance student agency. Peer assessment is both cognitively and linguistically demanding. To help students more effectively assess their peers' work, teachers must provide appropriate training. This can involve analysing and assessing writing pieces of differing quality against assessment criteria in whole-class or group activities. Teachers can also model how to write constructive feedback for peers. For students who finds it challenging to use a second language to carry out peer assessment and to discuss their peers' writing, teachers can consider allowing the use of the students' native language to reduce the linguistic demands. When students have the capacity to evaluate peers' work, they gain a heightened awareness of the strengths and weaknesses of their own writing, thus improving their ability to assess their own work.

Providing learners with constructive and manageable feedback to act upon

Feedback and assessment are closely intertwined. Students need to know their progress in learning and how to close the gap between their current and desired performance. To scaffold this process, teachers can provide constructive yet manageable feedback to avoid cognitive overload. Specific, descriptive and actionable feedback in the form of questioning or statements, with language pitched at the students' level, can facilitate their understanding of the feedback and encourage them critically evaluate their work. Teachers can also provide further support by engaging students in dialogue with them about feedback they may not understand and address any concerns they may have. To boost students' motivation and engagement with teacher feedback to improve their writing, teachers should consider providing appropriate praise and encouragement.

Giving students an opportunity to perform self-reflection

Learners have to be provided with an opportunity to reflect on their work to foster deeper understanding of their abilities and continual improvement. Reflection serves as an analytical means for students to evaluate their progress against specified goals. When students revisit their writing, focusing on areas such as content, language use and organization, they develop a heightened awareness of the overall strengths and weaknesses of their writing. This reflective process enables them to identify areas they have excelled in and those that require further improvement. Such awareness is crucial as it allows learners to set more realistic and achievable goals for their next writing piece. Reflection, therefore, promotes a growth mindset and encourages students to develop strategies for continuous learning.

Learner autonomy is a crucial skill for the twenty-first century in this rapidly changing global landscape. By constructing a non-threatening and cohesive learning environment that values open communication and collaborative learning, teachers can empower students to assume more ownership in the assessment process. This can help students develop their competence in adopting the various strategies for making continuous improvement in their writing.