

Developing Linear and Rotational Pathways For Self-Access Center

Agnes Santi Widiati
Aniek Setiawaty
Davy Budiono

Abstract. *Self-Access Center is a system which makes materials available for its users so that they can choose to work as they wish. As a bank of materials, it gives freedom for the users to roam in the forest of Self-Access and explore various learning materials with or without teacher's assistance. In this self-directed situation, users have more autonomy and responsibility on their own learning. However, in such situation, they may lose directions in choosing the materials. Therefore users need pathways as a guideline to direct themselves to choose the appropriate materials. Pathways have the capacity to provide routes to make connections between materials so that the real power of self-access is unlocked. Furthermore they direct the users not just through one text-book or worksheet, but through hundreds or thousands of them. The creation of entire webs of such pathways can be developed through rotational and linear types of pathways. This workshop is intended to give the Self-Access staff and English teachers some possible ways in developing Self-Access rotational and linear pathways for their learners.*

Key words: *pathways, linear, rotational, self-access center, self-instruction*

What is a Self-Access Center?

A self-access center, as explained by Gill Strurtridge (1992), is 'any system which makes material available to language learners so that they can choose to work as they wish, usually without a teacher or with very limited teacher support'. The basic consideration for setting up a self-access center is to enable learners to have access to language learning materials outside the lockstep of the classroom. Physically, a self-access center can be in the form of a well-staffed purpose-built center or just a small room or cupboard containing learning materials organized by one teacher working alone.

The learning materials for a self-access center can be taken from three sources; they are authentic texts used directly by learners, commercially available courses, and materials which are specially developed by the staff. The self-access materials cover materials specially prepared for each of the four language skills, or units of materials concerning the four language skills integratedly. Graded materials are developed to enable learners to use them according to their level of language proficiency. A well established self-access center also enables

learners to have a practice on the listening skill with an individual listening booth. A learner may also work on the computer for a certain task, and he may also select a video tape for a film in the target language. A self-access center in well-purposed built area also provides a space for groups of learners to have a discussion in English.

What is a Pathway?

It is said that any up-to-date self-access center should provide pathways for its users (Kell and Newton, 1997). A pathway is a map to guide users in making use of the facilities at the self-access center. It is compared to a route a person has to take when he wants to reach a certain destination; therefore, a pathway guides a user of the self-access center to move from one activity to the other as he wants to learn the materials available there. As a simple map, a pathway will be useful if it is directional, has options within each stage of learning, is simple and easy to manage, and is easy to design.

An example of a part of a pathway is as follows:

Step 1 Core material: New Cambridge English Course 2, Unit 4 Topic: Nature and outdoors Part 1-5
Step 2 Supplementary materials Unit 4 G New Cambridge English Course 2, Practice Book, Unit 4 V Test Your Vocabulary 1, Test 44 L Tuning In, Unit 19 R Streamline Departures, Unit 32 C Storyboard Eskimos

Source: Kell and Clive (1997)

Key:

- G : Grammar
- V : Vocabulary
- L : Listening
- R : Reading
- C : Computer

According to the above pathway, a user of a self-access center who wants to learn an integrated set of materials on Nature and Outdoors will start with the materials from New Cambridge English Course 2, Unit 4. After he has finished step 1, he can go to step 2 by learning the

supplementary materials and other sets of materials to practice the four language skills and components based on the same topic, i.e.: grammar (G), vocabulary (V), listening (L), etc. When a self-access center user works based on the above pathway, he will learn, step by step, materials which are in fact connected one to the other.

The Roles of Pathways

As pathways guide self-access center users in learning the materials in the center, they can take full advantage of the materials available to them in the center. While using pathways, the learners are – at the same time – being trained in skills in accessing information and in planning their own learning program. In this way, they are encouraged to view the pathways as a study. After using the pathways, they are expected to be able to produce their own.

In line with the stages of autonomous learning of the self-access center users, pathways take on different roles, according to the learners' current stage. Different roles of pathways are described as follows (Kell and Newton 1997):

No	Learner' stages	Role of pathway
1	Learners do not know where to go.	A map
2	Learners are not familiar with materials.	A sample
3	Learners may not have used an SAC before.	A stepping stone
4	Learners may be <i>gob-smacked</i> by the quantity of material.	A counselor
5	Learners may need to be pushed into self-study or may not trust anything which does not directly involve a teacher.	A coaxer
6	Learners may need extra practice or something different from the book.	A release / escape / boost

In learning to be autonomous in learning at the center, at first, a self-access center user may be confused by the display of various learning materials; therefore, he needs a kind of map to guide him to explore the center. If he is not familiar with the materials available there, he may not know which material to choose based on his need, and in this case he need sample materials which can be easily browsed through a pathway. As a new user of the center, he needs a set of *stepping-stone* materials to start with. A learner might also be worried by the quantity of the materials in the center used to be dependent on the presence of a teacher; and therefore, he needs some kind of advice and assistance to increase his self-confidence to be more independent. Besides all those roles, pathways can also be a release from the required course book when a learner needs extra practice or something different from the course book.

Rotational vs. Linear Pathways

Based on the consideration that a user might need to concentrate on integrated materials arranged in a set of timetables or to move forward in learning hierarchical sets of materials, there are two main types of pathways that can be developed: the rotational and linear pathways.

Rotational Pathways

A rotational pathway is a pathway developed in the form of a timetable covering a set of learning materials to be learned one each day. Each daily-set of materials may consist of language components, i.e.: grammar and vocabulary, and the four language skills. They are arranged based on a more or less fixed pattern for each day, for example:

Mondays

V: V5 - 214 - Phrasal Verbs

GT (Verbs): G10 - 209 - Past Progressive

GB (Other): 'Get' HEW p186 - 187

L: BBC News for Today: Write a summary

V: E/BUS - Word partnerships Build Your
Business

L: E/BUS 318 - Describing Trends, Presenting
Facts and Figures, Unit 3

E: How to pass FCE.

MM: The Grammar ROM\ Modals

Key:

V : Vocabulary tasks

GT : Grammar Tasks

GB : Grammar Books

L : General Listening

E : Examination practice (testing)

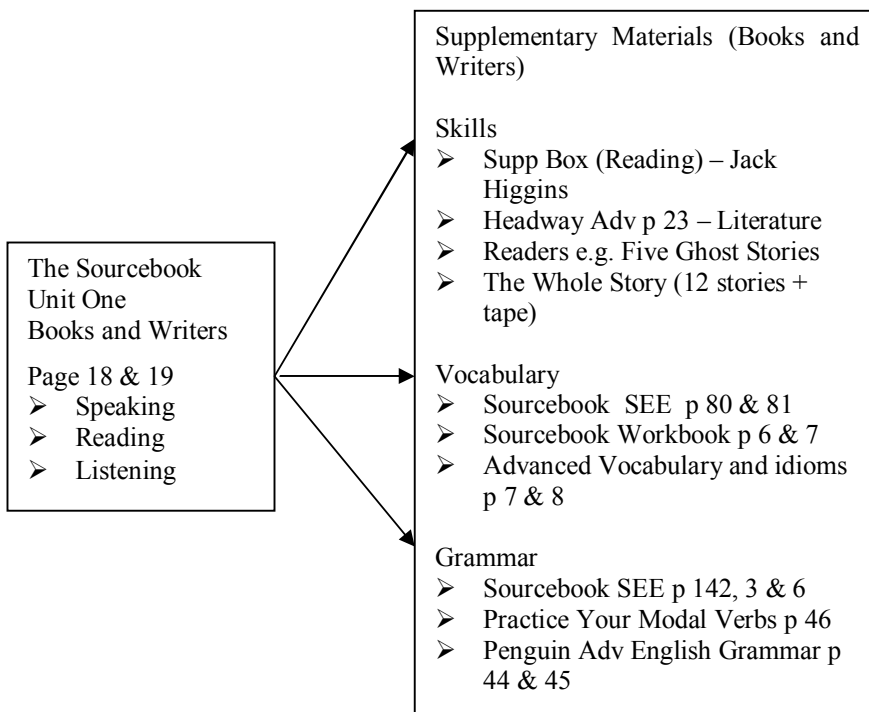
MM : Multi Media

The timetable describes what a user must do on Mondays, Tuesdays, etc. If the rotational pathway is prepared for the user to be finished in a number of days, the timetable for the other days will take the same pattern of materials arrangement.

Linear Pathways

A linear pathway is developed based on *core material focus*. The *core-material* may be a course book which is not used in the main taught course the students are following. The user of this pathway has more freedom to finish the materials to be learnt as he does not work based on a

fixed timetable. A user will start with a certain unit of materials taken from a certain course book before he will then move to a set of supplementary materials in the form of exercises of language components and skills as a reinforcement of the topic to be learned. An example of a part of a linear pathway is as follows:



Note: The two examples above are adapted from the rotational and linear pathways available at The Bell Language School, Saffron Walden, England (presented in a summer course on Developing Materials and Resources for Self- Access in English Language Learning, November 1997).

Developing Pathways

As pathways have the capacity to have many roles for the students, a clear process of designing pathways is really beneficial to help the pathways designers to know what to do in designing pathways. There are several steps that should be taken into account in order to design pathways for the Self-Access Center. They are as follows:

1. Deciding two macro approaches

In a self-access center which is designed to be attached to a teaching institution, there are two reasons of why students come to the center. The first one is due to individual needs while the second is due

to requirements of certain subjects. In the first use of the center, a student has his specific purpose in learning in the center, for example, the need to pass a certain standardized exam (to reach a certain level of the TOEFL for example). In the second use, a group of students may make use of sets of materials in the center as their assignment in line with the course they are taking. The two general reasons for coming to the center lead the designers of pathways to consider the two macro approaches in designing the pathways. They are

a) *Pathways for people*

These are useful for one-to-one student or perhaps groups which have generalisable needs. This individual reason approach for designing pathways requires the designers to create various pathways for different purposes to support individual learner needs. When more and more pathways of this type are designed, the center can keep them as pathway banks.

b) *Pathways for purpose*

This second approach requires the design of the pathways related to certain course objectives. Pathways, which are designed in this approach, can give extra practices as a group of students take a certain program.

By considering the reasons why the students come to Self-Access Center, the center can decide which approach is suitable for its users. As a Self-Access Center can serve the two main purposes, it should also provide pathways designed based on the two macro approaches so that all students' needs can be met.

2. Deciding pathways Focus

Having known which approach the pathways designers would like to take into account, the designers then need to decide what the designated pathways would focus on. There are two pathways focus in which pathways can be constructed. They are as follows:

a) A weekly timetable

The pathway with weekly timetable focus helps the students to plan what they need to do on Mondays, Tuesdays etc.

b) Core material + topic

This pathway is designed with the addition of supplementary materials while the core materials would most likely be a course book which is not used in the main taught course the students are taking.

3. Deciding the level of difficulty of the pathways

Deciding the level of difficulty of pathways plays an important role because it helps the designers develop and choose pathway materials both from the textbooks and self-access materials. Whenever the designers of pathways have decided the approach and focus of the pathways they want to design, they should then continue with the level of difficulty of the pathways. If they want to design an elementary pathway, they have to be able to find various self-access materials

developed by the staff and the ones taken from the textbooks with the same level of difficulty.

4. Using simple and clear pathways' format

Since one of the roles of pathways is as a map or direction for the students, pathways should be simply and clearly designed. It means that the pathways' format should not be complex and difficult to follow. In designing simple and clear pathways, the designers should first classify the self-access materials and text- books used into study skills (Listening, Reading, Writing and Speaking) and language components (Grammar, Vocabulary etc.). Furthermore, abbreviations are also needed to avoid complexity of pathways. To make pathways' format easy to read, the designers can give abbreviations to the study skills, language components and the name of textbooks and self-access materials used for pathways, for example, 'R' for Reading, 'L' for Listening, 'V' for Vocabulary, 'EGB' for English Grammar Book etc. However, the abbreviations used in designing pathways' format should explain what they stand for. If not, the students will get confused and have no clear direction where to go and what to do. As a result, they do not know which worksheet they have to do or which text book they have to read. In response to this, the designers of pathways are expected to give information or note that explains what the abbreviations stand for.

Having done all the steps above, the designers of pathways are expected to be able to design the pathways that provide admirable network of topics, structures, notions, and study skills, all ingeniously interwoven to meet the needs of almost any student. As a whole, before giving the pathway to the students, the designers have to make sure that the abbreviations are easy to follow, the pathway itself is easy to read, one stage of the pathway leads on logically to the next one and the tasks in designated materials easy to find.

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