Guide to Support Students' Learning to Learn Development through Academic Advising

Purpose of This Guide

This guide is designed with these objectives in mind: 1) to provide background information of the Learning to Learn (L2L) initiative at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University, 2) to discuss the roles of academic advising in supporting students' L2L development, and 3) to offer ideas and suggestions on how to support students' L2L development through academic advising.

1. Background of the Learning to Learn Initiative at PolyU

Learning to learn (L2L) is a multidimensional ability to engage consciously in a sustained process to become a more autonomous, effective and adaptive learner. It is one of the most sought-after abilities in university graduates. It is key to academic and professional success. It is core to lifelong learning. It is what it takes to remain competitive in a rapidly changing world. Helping students to become better learners is, therefore, a natural and important aspect of holistic education, which PolyU advocates.

Strategic Plan 2019/20 – 2024/25

Learning to learn is mentioned in the Strategic Plan 2019/20 – 2024/25: "instil in students the desire to learn and strengthen their ability to 'learn to learn'". To achieve this, one of the actions is to "strengthen the 'learn to learn' element in the curriculum".

Departmental L2L Strategy

In order to facilitate the integration of L2L into undergraduate curriculum, PolyU requires each academic department to develop and maintain a departmental L2L strategy on how students' L2L ability is developed in their undergraduate programmes. The requirement for 4-year undergraduate programmes is that there must be a minimum of four designated subjects across subject levels/years of study (i.e., one per level/year) that contain explicit L2L elements (i.e., relevant outcomes, teaching and assessment methods) in the programme curriculum. At least three subjects must be Discipline-Specific Requirement (DSR) subjects, with the capstone subject/final year project as one of them. The goal of this design is to facilitate an on-going development of L2L ability.

Although it is not a university requirement, many departments have included academic advising as part of their L2L strategy. Diagram 1 is a graphical representation of a typical departmental L2L strategy.
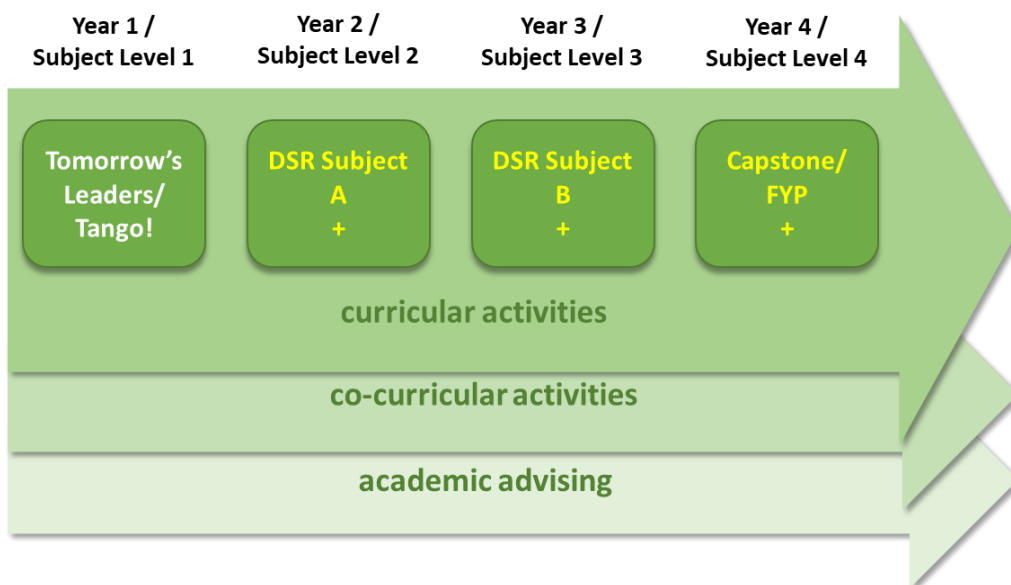

Diagram 1 A typical L2L strategy

Special notes for academic advisors

The departmental strategy gives you a whole picture of what opportunities there are in the curriculum and where they are leading to. This can help you position the role of AA in the broader scheme of things and plan your advising accordingly.

Although every departmental strategy is different, there is a general pattern in student development that academic advisors can work with. Students in junior years may be less familiar with the idea of L2L, so there may be a need to introduce the concept to them. They may also be less aware of their personal goals and strengths and weaknesses as learners, so there will likely be a stage of self-discovery and self-understanding. In the middle years, the L2L focus may shift to developing certain mindsets or skills that students are lacking. They will need to be trying things out in different learning scenarios and honing their learning approach in the process. Towards the final years of university study, the focus may switch to reviewing and consolidating the progress made so far in the L2L journey and look forward into the future where new challenges lie, demanding the students to continue to adapt, develop, and improve as learners. Considering this pattern alongside the departmental strategy may help you to identify students' developmental needs more accurately.

Special notes about senior year admitted (SYA) students

SYA students entered into their undergraduate study from Year 3. In other words, they would miss the opportunities provided in Year 1 and Year 2 of the programme to be introduced to L2L and to develop their L2L ability. Although there are online resources to compensate for this situation, academic advisors can encourage these students to draw on their previous learning experience for self-reflection, and guide them to develop their L2L ability during the course of their study.

2. Roles of Academic Advisors in the Learning to Learn Initiative

Academic advising is a natural venue for learning to learn. Among the eight goals for academic advising named in the Operation Manual for Academic Advisors (2022/23), three are relevant to L2L: 1) Help students understand their academic and personal goals.; 2) Guide students to develop realistic educational plan in fulfilling the graduation requirements and help them evaluate the attainment of the goals; and 3) Help students develop decision making skills and promote their sense of self-direction. The specific role of academic advisors in relation to L2L may vary slightly from department to department, academic advisors can do the following to support students' L2L development:

- Introduce to students the concept of learning to learn and help them appreciate it
- Prompt them to explore their academic and personal goals and learning and developmental opportunities outside formal curriculum
- Help them develop the ability to manage their learning
- Guide them to reflect on how they learn, and make plans to improve how they learn
- Help them cultivate a growth mindset

In the next section, more details will be provided for the points above.

When conducting academic advising, academic advisors may refer to the following resources (the first three resources are included at the end of this guide):

- The L2L model
- L2L self-assessment rubrics
- Online L2L resources
- Materials drawn from the programme/subjects
- Materials drawn from daily life
- Personal experience

3. Supporting Students to Learn to Learn via Academic Advising

Devising your advising plan to support students' learning to learn development

The L2L development is an on-going process. At different stages of the course of their study, the support that students need can be quite different. Therefore, you are encouraged to devise a plan ahead of time on providing scaffolding support for their learning to learn development.

▪ *Introducing to students the concept of learning to learn and discussing the relevance of L2L to their development*

At the beginning of the course of study, students may have questions about why they need to develop their L2L ability. You can help students increase their recognition of the need for L2L by explaining to them what L2L is about, and such an ability is universally recognised as essential to lifelong learning and success in their future development. Everyone can learn to learn and everyone can become a better learner. L2L is personal to every learner. It is action and improvement-oriented.

An important objective of introducing L2L to students is to encourage them to engage in L2L. You can help them appreciate the importance of L2L and the benefits and relevance of it to them in various areas, e.g. developing a new skill, improving an ability and applying for further studies and jobs, etc.

Another thing to engage students in L2L is to help them explore their developmental needs. To do that, it may be helpful to give them a holistic model of L2L, such as the one presented in Diagram 2, so that they can have a framework to refer to and work on. This particular model presents L2L ability as consisting of six interrelated dimensions and includes for each dimension two components that are of particular relevance to university students. With this model, students can reflect on their development/competence as learners and identify aspects that they need to work on (See Resources for details about the model and its accompanying rubrics).

Diagram 2 L2L model

▪ *Helping students to explore academic and personal goals and learning and developmental opportunities*

At the beginning of the course of study, students may also encounter difficulty in identifying their academic and personal goals. Academic advisors can guide them to explore their personal aspirations and goals.

Setting academic and personal goals is crucial to learning development. You can help them explore their goals by discussing with them or engaging them to reflect on questions such as the following:

- What things matter most in my life?
- What things do I want most? (Focus on your wishes, not what others expect of you)
- What really matters to me?
- What do I like to have more in my life?
- What issues do I care about?
- What are my talents?
- What legacy do I want to leave behind?
- What does my ideal future look like?
- What do I want in my career?
- What qualities/skills do I like to develop?
- What do I want to get from this subject/programme?

When students have explored their aspirations and identified their goals, you can prompt them to explore the learning opportunities and resources inside and outside their programme that they can take and use to achieve their goals. You may share your personal experience with students and refer them to programme materials and other resources provided by your department and other units for relevant information.

- ***Helping students to develop the ability to manage their learning through self-reflection***

Managing one's own learning is a big part of L2L at any stage. You can encourage them to make learning plans, keep work logs and reflect on their learning progress and process on a regular basis.

There are tools, such as personal development plan and L2L self-assessment rubrics, that can be used by students to plan their learning and reflect on their learning. There are also other instruments, e.g. learning journal and diary, that you can introduce to your students to keep track of their learning and document their learning achievements and reflective notes. You can encourage them to utilize these tools to regulate their learning and reflect on their learning. You can also guide them to make relevant and manageable goals and plans, and make use of these tools to prompt students to reflect on their learning experience, facilitate discussion on their learning, provide feedback and suggestions for improvement and prompt them to explore new developmental needs.

- ***Helping students to cultivate a growth mindset***

Students may find it difficult to keep their learning progress going at certain times because of failures and emotional setbacks. You can help them develop a growth mindset and into a resilient learner.

When a person has a growth mindset, they think they can improve their ability and intelligence to learn new skills and knowledge through hard work, training and perseverance. To cultivate a growth mindset, you can help them appreciate the progress and effort that they have made, help them identify things that they can improve, encourage them to seek training opportunities, give examples of success through hard work stories, and let them know they can improve and do better if they put more effort and/or adopt a different approach or strategy.

4. Last but not least

With appropriate guidance, support and a little push (encouragement), every student can learn better and become a better learner. Your having faith in them may just be what it takes to help them believe in their potential and ability to grow and develop.

Resources (1): Learning to learn model and descriptions of the Six Dimensions and twelve components

Learning to Learn is a multidimensional ability to engage consciously in a sustained process to become a more autonomous, effective and adaptive learner. It draws upon elements of different dimensions, like the diagram below:

Dimension and Component	Definition
Intentional Dimension	The intentional dimension represents the relationship between learning and the learner, which provides the internal forces that trigger learning and fuel sustained effort in learning to learn.
1. Sense of purpose	▪ Your tendency to learn with a sense of purpose. Sense of purpose is the feeling of knowing why you are doing something, where you are going, what you are trying to achieve; the feeling of doing something important, something meaningful to you, something that you can identify with.
2. Meaning making	▪ Your ability to give relevance and meaning to learning by seeing it in the immediate context of the programme curriculum and the broader context of life after graduation (e.g. professional, personal, family and society goals) so that it becomes an authentic personal act.
Dispositional Dimension	The dispositional dimension represents the habitual aspect of the learner, underpinned by personal beliefs about learning and personal attributes such as curiosity, which moderates how the learner approaches learning.

3. Personal beliefs about learning	▪ Your ability to examine your assumptions about your power to influence your intelligence, capability and the process and outcome of learning, and to adopt beliefs that are conducive to effective learning.
4. Curiosity	▪ Your awareness of your interest and passion and your inclination to engage in knowledge seeking.
Metacognitive Dimension	The metacognitive dimension represents the reflective aspect of the learner, which evaluates and regulates how the learner learns.
5. Self-regulated learning	▪ Your ability to engage in a mode of learning in which you plan and monitor your own learning, evaluate the effectiveness of your approach, and adjust how you learn in order to learn better.
6. Reflective learning	▪ Your tendency and ability to review your own learning approach and examine the assumptions, beliefs and values that underpin it, to see if you need to change or adjust how you learn.
Affective-motivational Dimension	The affective-motivational dimension represents the learner's ability to manage their motivation for learning and the emotions arising from learning.
7. Motivation to learn	▪ Your ability to explore factors that make learning meaningful and affect your desire to learn, to reflect on your motivational beliefs and develop regulation strategies.
8. Emotion and resilience	▪ Your ability to explore and handle learning-related emotional reactions and to persist in the face of setbacks.
Cognitive Dimension	The cognitive dimension represents the intellectual aspect of learning, which covers the range of thinking skills that a learner needs in order to achieve a desirable level of understanding and performance and the learner's ability to make the best use of cognitive capacity.
9. Higher-order thinking	▪ Your tendency to learn for understanding and your ability to go beyond memorization to operate at a level of thinking that is characterized by understanding, application, and the creation of new ideas and solutions to unfamiliar problems and situations.
10. Understanding learning	▪ Your interest in knowing more about learning theories and cognitive sciences and your ability to apply that knowledge and understanding to improve your own learning.
Social Dimension	The social dimension represents the interpersonal aspect of learning, where the learner learns from and with others in the immediate learning environment and beyond.
11. Learning from and with others	▪ Your mindset and skills to engage effectively in group work, collaborative learning and co-creation of knowledge.
12. Augmented learning environment	▪ Your mindset and skills to explore learning opportunities in the broader physical, virtual and social environments beyond the classroom and develop strategies for learning in different settings.

Resources (2): Learning to learn self-assessment rubrics

Online L2L self-assessment:
- https://www.polyu.edu.hk/L2L

Dimension	Component	Level 1: Survival Learner	Level 2: Progressing Learner	Level 3: Sophisticated Learner
Intentional	Sense of Purpose	I see learning as a task or duty; I learn because I am told or forced to do so; I do not associate with what I learn	I see learning as a means to and end; I learn for achieving short- and medium-term goals; learning becomes a personal matter to me as I begin to discover or form my aspirations	I see learning as a process of becoming; I learn for achieving long-term personal aspirations and a deep sense of purpose; learning is a personal matter for me
	Meaning Making	I often feel the subjects that I am studying are irrelevant to myself academically, professionally and personally	I actively explore the relationships among different subjects and the connections between my study and my personal development	I give meanings to what I am learning by associating it with what matters to me or what I want to achieve in my life
Dispositional	Personal Beliefs about Learning	I am not confident in my ability to learn; I believe my ability is fixed and effort does not make much difference	I become more confident in my ability to learn; I believe my ability can be developed and effort makes a difference; I tend to face challenges positively, make an effort and do not give up easily	I am confident in my ability to learn; I engage in learning with a sense of control and continuously seek to develop my ability; I embrace challenges, value effort and am resilient to setbacks
	Curiosity	I am not interested in learning new things; I feel uncomfortable with unfamiliar things; I avoid things that I do not understand	I become more aware of my interests and passion; I am open to unfamiliar things; I do not shy away from things that I do not understand	I am passionate about learning new things; I feel excited about unfamiliar things; I am eager to learn things that I do not understand
Metacognitive	Self-regulated Learning	I rely on other people (e.g. teachers) to tell me what, when and how to learn	I plan my learning, monitor my progress, evaluate my learning strategies and make adjustments as needed	I am able to improve my learning and adapt to different learning situations by regulating my affective-motivational, cognitive and social strategies
	Reflection on Learning	I seldom reflect on my learning; I rarely challenge or change the way I learn	I reflect on my learning process and outcomes to evaluate my learning strategies and enhance my performance	I critically reflect on not only learning process and outcomes but also the assumptions, beliefs and values that underpin my learning approach
Affective-Motivational	Motivation for Learning	My motivation to learn is dependent on external factors (e.g. how well the teachers teach); I have little control over my own motivation	I become more aware of the factors that motivate or demotivate my learning; I have some control over my own motivation	I am aware of the factors that motivate or demotivate my learning; I am able to apply a range of strategies to motivate myself
	Emotion and Resilience	I often feel helpless with the stress and frustration from studying; I give up easily when facing setbacks	I become more aware of the factors that trigger the negative emotions in me; I have developed some strategies to cope with them	I deploy various strategies to prevent or manage my negative emotions; I persist through difficulties and stressful situations
Cognitive	Higher-order Thinking	I learn and study for examination; I mainly learn by memorising the materials	I learn and study for understanding; I learn by comparing, analysing, relating and applying ideas	I learn and study deep understanding; I learn through reflection, critique, theorising, creating new ideas and solving problems, etc.
	Understanding Learning	I do not understand about learning	I actively seek to understand more about learning and apply that understanding to improve my own learning	I have insights into the nature of learning and adopt sound strategies to expand and make the best use of my cognitive capacity
Social	Learning from and with Peers	I see group work primarily as a division of labour; I seldom interact with others	I see group work as an opportunity to learn from each other; I actively contribute to group discussions	I see group work as an opportunity for the co-creation of knowledge; I establish rapport and engage openly and constructively in discussions with others
	Engaging in Different Learning Environments	I see learning as confined to the classroom and the study materials	I recognise that learning is not confined to the classroom; I actively explore resources and opportunities for learning in the broader physical, virtual and social environment	I actively expand and create learning environment by visiting places, making good use of learning management tools and establishing personal network for learning

Resources (3): Learning to learn online resources for students

L2L online module for students developed by EDC

- https://www.polyu.edu.hk/edc/L2L/en/resources-for-student/online-module/

L2L tools

- https://www.polyu.edu.hk/edc/L2L/en/resources-for-student/l2l-tools/

Other useful resources

- https://www.polyu.edu.hk/edc/L2L/en/resources-for-student/resources/