

NGO Outreach

NGO アウトリーチ

“The power of ordinary people, who today tend to feel utterly powerless, does not lie in starting new lines of action, but in placing their sympathy and support with minority groups which have already started.” (Schumacher, 1973, p. 167)

We recognize our students cannot be considered as distinct from the society in which they live. Similarly, language teaching is both influenced *by* and influencing the society in which language teachers live. We must reflect upon this and empower ourselves to ensure that the ways in which we affect the wider world accord with our morals and beliefs, and are not simply the product of passive and unthinking conformism. After the successful collaboration between the Learner Development SIG (LD SIG) and Shanti Volunteer Association (SVA) at the Realizing Autonomy Conference in 2011, there was a strong feeling that further developing this connection could offer fruitful opportunities for both. Consequently, an NGO Outreach team was formed within the LD SIG committee, aiming specifically to build links with educationally oriented NGOs that have a learner development focus.

Poignant similarities can be found between the overarching philosophies guiding SVA and the LD SIG. One of SVA’s basic policies is that of *Localized Operation*, emphasizing talent

development in order to transition to local and autonomous operations. SVA encourages understanding through collaboration, simultaneously deepening community ties. For example, they hold library seminars in Cambodia, where school librarians, teachers and principals learn and practise how to operate a school library. Furthermore, SVA actively promotes understanding between various cultural groups; the “Cultural Festival for Refugee Children” in Myanmar (Burma) attracted 18 different ethnic groups. Similarly, autonomous learning and teaching are key interests for LD SIG members, and regular get-togethers offer opportunities to connect with others in our field. SVA’s work in book publication utilizes stickers that show local language translations, whereas LD SIG members are better equipped for assisting with English language translations. Such divergence may lead us to the issue of linguistic imperialism (Phillipson, 1992), compelling us to reflect upon the nature of the English teaching profession and its influence on the world.

Now, the LD SIG and the NGO Outreach team are standing at the beginning of an uncut path, looking forward and considering what may lie around the next corner, and imagining the experiences that may unfold along the way. A

group met with a representative of SVA's Kessenuma office during the Tohoku Outreach weekend and we are also in the process of contacting NGOs to invite their participation in the LD SIG 20th Anniversary Conference on November 23 and 24 2013.

- We plan to have members of the LD SIG provide student volunteers who will learn about NGOs and their programmes and train to staff an information booth in order to share that information with conference participants. Students will thus learn deeply about an NGO while the conference context necessitates the use of English.
- SVA market a range of handmade Fair Trade crafts which they hope the student volunteers could sell at the conference booth.
- A book donation drive will raise funds for SVA's Book-to-Book Project, whereby donated books are sold to Book Off, who also contributes a further 10%. In 2011 using these funds, SVA published 10,400 copies of four picture books in six different languages (such as Karen and Burmese) through refugee camps in Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar (Burma) and Afghanistan.
- The conference will host a roundtable event featuring educators and representatives of NGOs finding ways in which they can cooperate, collaborate, and create further connections. In keeping with the outreach philosophy, it would be exclusionary to demand that the language of this be English, so once again, student volunteers can be invited both to participate themselves, and to assist in overcoming possible language barriers.
- SVA are looking for interns to join either their Domestic Program or their Public Relations

Division, both of which require English and Japanese skills.

We believe that these activities create genuine and engaging opportunities for all involved, sowing seeds for future collaboration between the LD SIG, NGOs and students, while highlighting the fact that the needs of one set of people, (students' need to *use* their language of study) may well be satisfied by the needs of another (NGOs' need to overcome language barriers). The NGO Outreach team are clearing a space in which various groups and individuals can make connections, appreciating similarities as well as differences, to harness the value and inspiration of diverse interdisciplinary collaboration. We are keen to hear your ideas, suggestions, or from anyone who would like to join us.

If you personally have any suggestions or personal links with NGOs who might want to partake, we would love to hear from you.

Please contact us on

ldngooutreach@gmail.com.

References

Phillipson, Robert (1992). *Linguistic Imperialism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Schumacher, E.F. (1973). *Small is Beautiful Economics as if People Mattered*. New York: Harper & Row.

Weblinks:

- Shanti Volunteer Association: <sva.or.jp/>
- LD SIG Conference: <www.ldsigconference2013.org>