

## NGO Outreach

### NGO アウトリーチ

#### Cycling into the Student Ambassador Program's second year

Since early 2013, the LD SIG NGO Outreach coordinators have been encouraging teachers to extend their students' experience of English language beyond the classroom through the Student Ambassador initiative. From April and through the summer vacation of 2013, nine students from Soka, Toyama, and Tokai universities became 'student ambassadors' and volunteered at three non-government organizations (NGOs). Their early experiences - illustrated in Figure 1 as recruiting, finding NGOs, liaising, and volunteering - have been reported previously in Learning Learning (<http://ld-sig.org/LL/20one/ngoOutreach.pdf>, <http://ld-sig.org/LL/20two/ngoOutreach.pdf>). Now students have completed the "ambassador" component of the program by representing their NGOs, and the first full cycle of this program is almost complete. So in this article, we would like to report the latest developments, reflect on the whole process, and invite you, LD SIG members and your colleagues, to contribute to this evolving project.

One of the early challenges we faced was to ensure a clear English language objective in the program. Since the Student Ambassador Program is specifically aimed at students becoming involved in the operations of NGOs in Japan, opportunities to use English during the volunteering part of the program cannot be guaranteed, as the daily language of most NGOs in Japan is Japanese. This may even be the case in organizations whose activities are mainly abroad and whose staff are very internationally minded and multi-lingual.

Indeed, while two out of the three NGOs provided more English-using opportunities than we thought, one student commented that a problem with volunteering was too few opportunities to use English.

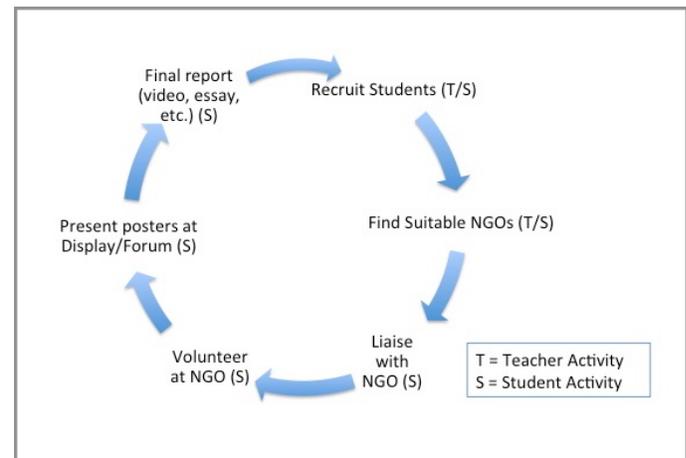


Figure 1. The Student Ambassador Program Cycle

To ensure that students use English, the project requires students to prepare posters and presentations for an NGO display and forum (Figure 1), which - for this cycle - was held as part of the LD SIG 20th Anniversary Conference in Tokyo on 23 and 24 November 2013. All nine students who volunteered at an NGO prepared posters about their NGO's activities and their own experiences as volunteers. One group of students representing Shanti Volunteer Association (SVA) took the initiative to recruit three students who had not been able to volunteer to help prepare posters, staff their information desk, and sell SVA's fair trade goods.

Other organizations which did not host any students this time also joined in the forum to

encourage collaboration with students and teachers. These included Shine On! Kids, which sent their own interns and a project officer, and a student group from Action against Child Exploitation (ACE). The forum featured short presentations and open discussion among students, NGO representatives, and teachers about the benefits of the Student Ambassador Program and possible future directions.

As a venue for reflecting on their experiences and for using English, the display and forum seemed very successful. Two students travelled all the way from Toyama University to report on their volunteer experience with Japan Tent, where they acted as guides to Japanese culture for international students visiting Ishikawa Prefecture. One wrote in her final report that:

*My experience in Tokyo is the first for me and I felt so fresh and interesting. It was not a serious atmosphere and I felt comfortable. I think I could have a precious experience so I want to say "Thanks." Every foreign teacher was so kind and it was interesting for me.*

Her colleague chose to make a video report, and commented that:

*After this [volunteering] experience I made posters for my presentation. It was a little bit difficult for me to make it in English because my English skill is not so good, but it wasn't too hard because my English teacher always helped me. ... it was a really good experience to speak English in that place, to talk to other university students, and teachers. It was good experience. I'm really happy to share my experience with other people, and I'm really appreciate that I can be an NGO Outreach project member.*

In a survey completed after the display and forum, a Tokyo-based participant commented that when preparing her poster, "I enjoyed collecting photos to illustrate my experience and enjoyed also talking about how this internship could affect my future career". She also noted that at the display and forum, it was good "hearing about other NGO volunteers' experience and what they were working for".

One of the early objectives for the NGO Outreach team has been sustainability, both for our students, and the Student Ambassador Program itself. According to one definition, sustainability is "the extent to which the positive effects of the project will continue after external assistance has been concluded" (FASID, 2000). In this case, "external assistance" is the initiatives of the NGO Outreach team to facilitate connections and collaboration between teachers, students, and NGOs. There are already signs that a good degree of sustainability of this kind exists.



**Picture:** Three Student Ambassadors and Sanae Nakajima (Right), chairperson of Free the Children Japan, stand in front of their display at the NGO Outreach Display and Forum at the Learner Development SIG 20th Anniversary Conference.

One student decided to transform her volunteer experience into a full six month internship at Free the Children Japan (FTCJ). Another commented about the importance of her experience to her future career, and her plans to keep in touch with and visit FTCJ. An example of an ongoing NGO and university relationship is that FTCJ has agreed to participate in the Global Lecture Series at Soka University, where most of the student ambassadors study, as well as visit the campus with student volunteers to talk about their activities.

Regarding the sustainability of the Student Ambassador Program itself, we have encouraged students to complete a final report on their volunteering and ambassador experience - in either video or written form - for the explicit purpose of promoting volunteering among other interested students (Figure 1). This reliance on student to student contact will hopefully maximize student initiative and NGO benefit, allowing the NGO Outreach coordinators and teachers to step back a little and refocus their efforts on emerging issues.

Keeping sustainability in mind, several issues have emerged. Firstly, the cost of food and commuting in both the volunteering and the display and forum stage can mount quite significantly, so it would be beneficial to seek funding to offset these costs away from the student. Secondly, some students only *learned* about their NGOs activities, without really having an opportunity to *engage* in them; this may be linked to time spent volunteering. We are reflecting on the potential advantages and disadvantages of encouraging students to allocate a minimum engagement of 20 hours with their respective NGOs. On the one hand, this may discourage students - who are already very hard pressed for time - from joining the program. On the other, it may allow us to negotiate further with NGOs to help draw out the kind of tasks student volunteers

could expect to undertake - including more English-related tasks during the volunteering stage.

Finally, it is difficult to get survey responses and reports from students when they think the “event” is already over. Having completed one full cycle, now we have a much clearer picture of what we can offer to all parties involved - students, teachers, and NGOs. We can now make an Ambassador Program Calendar and use it in the initial recruiting phase, so that everyone knows that they will be expected to answer some simple questionnaires and complete a final report, in order to reflect upon their experience and continue the flow of the Program cycle.

We are now transitioning into the second cycle and are actively seeking an appropriate event for Student Ambassadors to participate in after their summer volunteering experience. Since this really sets the target for students’ use of English, it is important that the Japan-based event be one with participants coming from a variety of countries. At the time of writing we are still exploring options and warmly welcome your suggestions. We are also keen to hear from teachers across Japan who may be interested in promoting this program to their students in the current school year. As one teacher said in the NGO forum, “My feeling is that (the students) did all the hard work and I mostly met them to say go ahead and do what they were planning to do anyway”. We are looking forward to you and your students joining us as we move into our second year!

#### References:

FASID, 2000. PCM (Project Cycle Management): Monitoring and Evaluation Based on the PCM Method, 2000, FASID (Foundation for Advanced Studies on International Development), Tokyo.