



Student Involvement in Self Access Centers Conference Reports

Of the Students, By the Students, For the Students



Edited by Vick L. Ssali

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Editor's Note



At JALT 2012 a brave suggestion was made during the JASAL meeting to hold a conference organised by and for the student users of Self-Access Centres. Nobody had the slightest idea then of how the first such a conference in the history of SALL (at least in Japan) would be realised. One JALT conference later, we are proud to report that the conference did actually take place, and that these conference reports are the fruits of a praiseworthy follow-up of the theme and spirit of that memorable conference with 5 articles written by some of the student participants, and 3 others by teachers who work with learners in their respective universities' SACs, and who helped with the preparations for and promotion of the event. We are happy to be able to bring to JASAL and other readers the voices of these students, either reflecting on the day-to-day running of their respective SACs and the challenges therein, or on their impressions and lessons learned from the conference. It is a fascinating mix of articles. I also expect reading them will be exciting, not least because we are not so used to reading students' EFL experiences written by the students themselves! I reckon the results have exceeded the organisers' original expectations!!

Congratulations to Umida and her Sugiyama SAC team. Both the conference and these reports wouldn't have been possible without their determination and hard work. Thanks to JASAL too, for supporting and promoting the event. Special thanks to Katherine Thornton (JASAL President) for her support and bountiful advice both on the conference and on the preparation of these reports. Her own article will assure readers that JASAL will from now on prioritise not only Involving Students in Self-Access, but also listening to their experiences and voices both as users and organisers. The article by Robert Crocker, who was one of the teacher-facilitators and plenary speakers, builds on the theme of the conference, "of the students, by the students, for the students", and so underlines the meaning and beauty of this unprecedented achievement. Umida herself takes us through the events and experiences that gave birth to this memorable event. I am sure this is just the first of many SiSAC conference reports still to come.

Enjoy.

Vick L. Ssali (Editor)

Challenges in Promoting the Self-Access Learning Center



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& Yuka Yamagishi,

SALC Student Committee

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Introduction

The SALC Student Committee (SSC) promotes active use of the Self-Access Learning Centre (SALC) at Kanda University of International Studies (KUIS). The SSC works for making the SALC more fun and useful place. There are 15 members and we are a volunteer group.

The SALC provides an English-only environment with full-time English teachers and Learning Advisors on site to help students with their independent learning. This article outlines SSC's activity to promote our SALC such as promoting the sections of the SALC, organising parties, and using SNS. It also introduces the results of our questionnaire about using the SALC.

Promoting the sections of the SALC

The SSC has been working on making four areas within the SALC easier to access. Those areas are: reading section, speaking booths, DVD/TV section, and worksheets section. In the reading section, we give some tips for students to choose books with a recommendation board so that students feel easy to use materials in the SALC. The speaking booths do not get busy despite their usefulness for practicing pronunciation with computer programs. The reason for that may be that students do not know how to use them or what is good about the place. We have been preparing to launch an awareness-raising project for the area. We noticed that while many students enjoy watching DVDs, few watch satellite TV. We put a sign up explaining how to access 18 different channels in 15 different languages through satellite TV. We put the same kind of sign to help students pick the right ones from our vast collection of worksheets for vocabulary and grammar learning. We just started to put the sign of TV and worksheets so we are checking if it works well or not.

Organising parties

To invite more students to the SALC, SSC organizes three parties a year with teachers at the SALC, the *Wafuku*, Halloween, and Christmas parties. At the *Wafuku* party in July, we focus on Japanese

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It was a success in terms of getting the attention of students but how much of that contributes to regular use of the SALC was a question. At the Christmas party in 2012, we introduced new activities to reward frequent SALC users and those who try to learn. Instead of handing out the lottery ticket at the party, as we had done at the Halloween party, we hid prize certificates in materials in the SALC in a form of a bookmark, prior to the party. We wanted there to be more chances to win a prize as students use more materials and more sections. With "A Letter to Santa" activity where students wrote their wishes with their good behaviours in the year and they submitted them to the SSC, we read through all entries to reward those with effort, not luck. The funding for the prizes from SSC comes from the profit made by the group at the school festival in October. We sold Tapioca drinks in 2011 that was the first time we joined the school festival and we sold 7 kinds of soft drinks in 2012.

Using SNS

SSC also utilizes Social Networking Service such as Mixi, Twitter, and Facebook to promote the SALC. We started using Facebook in 2011. The first year, we just put photos from the parties and we had only 12 'Likes'. Last year, we ran a Facebook campaign using a QR code. We gained about 80 Likes. We started using Twitter last year and we already have 150 followers. We would like to continue using SNS not only giving information but also communicating with KUIS students who are interested in our activities.

Survey about the SALC

Prior to the SISAC conference, we administered a short survey to find out how students use and what they think about the SALC. We used a free online questionnaire tool. The survey was a good opportunity to know how students think about the SALC and we can make the good use of the survey to promote the SALC. Some of our findings from 112 responses are:

- 1) 44% of the students only sometimes or never use the SALC.
- 2) Those students say they are too busy doing their assignments and other activities, or use the MULC that is another language centre for Spanish, Brazilian Portuguese, Chinese, Korean, and other languages which students can learn at KUIS instead.
- 3) The use of SNS to promote the parties is a success.
- 4) Many students think they have to speak English fluently before they come to the parties.

Conclusion

To conclude, the SSC would like to mention two things. First, SSC would like to be more active in promoting the SALC so that students do not miss opportunities. Secondly, the SSC would like to let all students know that the SALC is a learning community and they do not have to speak perfect English there so we should use SNS to tell what the SALC is. The SALC is a place where students can individualize their language learning. We hope all SALC users achieve their goal while we achieve our goal as well.





i-Books Project for the GSGU Lounge

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Introduction

The lounge at Gifu Shotoku Gakuen University (GSGU) used to be a club room and was mainly used by students who were in the Chinese club and English club. In February 2013, the lounge was redesigned by our teacher, as part of a research project exploring how to create an atmosphere to speak and study English. I (at that time a third year student in the department of foreign language) and my classmates got interested in her research and wanted to become involved. We participated in the design process and helped choose the furniture for the lounge. The lounge now has a coffee machine, a DVD/CD player, sofas, tables, a carpet, bookshelves, books, games (such as Scrabble), an iPad, and DVDs.

After the lounge reopened, we became lounge staff. There were 13 active staff members working in the lounge. Our role was to make coffee, give a tour of the lounge, enforce the language policy, stop people sleeping, and lock the iPad in the cupboard. As staff, we began a project to create student-produced materials for our lounge. In this project, we decided to use a software called i-Book Author, which allows you to create interactive textbooks for iPads. Our first book was an introduction to our lounge and we presented on this project at the Student Involvement in Self Access Centers (SISAC) conference in Nagoya. This paper examines how the project and the conference have helped us reflect on our role as staff.

The i-Books project

The first i-Book we made was for lounge visitors. The purpose of making the i-Book was to convey information to lounge visitors. We wanted them to understand what the lounge is, what you can do there, and what the rules are. What is more, we wanted to use the functions that paper guide-books do not have, so we chose interactive functions. When readers touch contents in our i-Book, the contents become bigger and wider. It makes readers more interested. In the i-Book students can learn the lounge rules easily through answering quizzes about the rules.

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That took time because making the i-Book was much harder than we expected. There were some problems to solve. First of all, we had to think of copy rights. We used many pictures, but we had to ask people if they were happy having their pictures in the i-Book. The second was to consider which colors to use. When we created the lounge, we learnt red affects learners negatively, so we used pink instead of red in the i-Book.

When we were making the first i-Book, we reviewed the lounge roles, and we realized that lounge staff are important to create the atmosphere for the lounge. We are hoping that all lounge visitors have fun and enjoy studying in the lounge, so we should make sure that people keep to the rules. This is what we have to do as lounge staff.

The SISAC conference

At the SISAC conference, we presented about our i-Books project and learned a lot of things from meeting other staff from self-access centers. Some of us got ideas about how to promote our lounge. One idea was for the lounge staff to distribute fliers. Previously, teachers had given out fliers for the lounge in their classes. Before we started our new semester, we made lounge handouts, and decided to visit classes to hand them to students.

Furthermore, lounge staff began working in earnest more than before. When the lounge was opened, we were working as volunteers. We are still working as volunteers, but our motivation for attracting students to the lounge has increased. We confirmed how to use the projector and connect the iPad to the WIFI. Also, each staff member really keeps the lounge rules in mind, so we keep speaking English and Chinese as long as we can. For welcoming new students, we prepared and made sure what we knew how to introduce the lounge to newcomers. Some of us did not even know how to use the coffee machine, but before our work began this semester, all of us learned it again, to be able to serve coffee to lounge visitors.

Moving forward

About 7 months have passed since the lounge was opened. It is already more attractive than before, but we can do something more. The fourth year students have 10 months left to work here. In the beginning of the lounge project, we were worried about whether it would go OK because we all had never experienced such a thing, but now we have more confidence.

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The SISAC conference had a strong influence on us. It made us want to be staff who help other students. We rediscovered our responsibility as staff, and realized how important it was. We are working at the lounge, and helping visitors because we want them to enjoy studying and talking in the lounge. The lounge is getting better with our work.





ESS Activities

Chiaki Fukui

Osaka Institute of Technology

Introduction

In 2012, the Osaka Institute of Technology built the LLC. LLC stands for Language Learning Centre, and it is a place for students who want to learn English together. There is a multi-purpose room, consultation room, presentation room and in the living room there are many book shelves. Here, we can study English, use computers or watch DVDs in the multi-purpose room. And in the consultation room, we can talk with English teachers. In the presentation room, we can practice presenting. And there are a lot of English books that students can read. Also some students work as LLC staff. They help students to know how to use this centre, how to make reservations and how to borrow the books.

ESS (English Speaking Society), which is an English club, also makes use of this centre. Last year, there were only 4 ESS members, but now we have more than 20 members! We are still growing! We get together at LLC during lunchtime, enjoying chatting with other members or doing activities. This paper will describe the different ESS activities focusing mainly on the play that we perform together at the Christmas party.

When we started the club, we had a big problem. It was too difficult to speak English without Japanese. However, we tried to speak easy English more and, we are able to talk to each other a little bit better. ESS members meet sometimes and we watch a DVD. We always enjoy watching the DVD, and we can improve listening skills, but I think only watching DVD is unsatisfying. We want to use this movie night effectively. So, we tried to talk with members about the movie after watching.

Christmas party

When the school festival took place in September, we tried to create a scenario reading, and playing a part of The Pirates of the Caribbean. We had some problems. We could not play emotionally. Then we introspected, and decided to practice hard the play of Pirates of the Caribbean. The play was very short. We had to reconsider those things for the Christmas party. First, we divided members into groups, 'Making props and costumes', 'Making manuscript', 'brochure', and action'. It was difficult for us to get together and have meetings with all members. Because we were all busy with classes and part time jobs, we thought dividing members would be good because they can communicate on Skype with all the group members and complete their tasks.

Making manuscript

We thought about the script again and decided to make it easy enough to understand. This play is about Elizabeth kidnapped by Barbossa, and Jack ,Will and Norrington went to her rescue. We thought samurai also helped her. But there are many characters, so this story became confusing. We didn't let samurai to come on stage. Then we showed our final script to our English teacher.

Making props and costumes

The "Props and costumes" group worked hard. They made swords and costumes and prepared wigs. It cost about 6,000 yen in total. The costumes were cut from shirts, vests, boots and bandannas. The swords were made of used pairs of blinds and CDs. During action practice, some of them bent so easily we had to fix them again and again.

Action

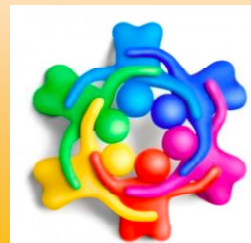
Team action usually had a rehearsal during lunch time. That was the only time everyone could meet since they were in different departments and had different class schedules. Still, it was not enough time; therefore, they had to practice by themselves. Only a couple weeks before the play, we had rehearsals with our costumes on in the LLC which actual play was held.

Brochure

To advertise our play, we had to make brochures. One of our ESS members from design department helped us to make it. She was a new ESS member and busy, so she had no time to practice team action. This is why we asked for her to make brochures. We photocopied about 100 and gave out to all students before the play.

Conclusion

We want to speak English and have to practice. In 2013, we will try to speak English more! However we have original question, which was "What can we do to study English as a group?". These days, it is easy to study alone because we can access a lot of materials to study English like podcasts, video, apps etc., but we also think there is something that we could never get by studying alone. Studying English alone is boring for us. If we meet together, we can enjoy studying and keeping on motivation for English.





The Importance of Student Staff in Self-Access Center

Nao Noguchi

Otemon Gakuin University

(Formerly a student staff in Kanda University of International Studies)

Introduction

On February 2nd 2013 I joined the Student Involvement in Self Access Conference (SISAC) in Nagoya. I participated in this conference as a Kanda University of International Studies (KUIS) Self-Access Learning Center (SALC) student staff member. In this report I will talk about the different roles students play in a self-access center, what I learned from the conference, and what I'm planning to do to make the new Self-Access Center at E-CO (English Café at Otemon), my new position as a full-time staff member after graduating from my university.

The SALC in KUIS

SALC student staff are mainly working behind the counter, helping students and assistant managers. The work that we do includes helping students and teachers, issuing and returning material, helping book rooms, processing new books, typing book data into computer, training new staff, and so on. By doing these jobs SALC staff can develop English skills, computer skills, training skills, hospitality skills, a sense of responsibility, and greater confidence. I think that the training skills we develop are the unique skills that we can get from working at the SALC. Experienced SALC student staffs are chosen by managers to train new SALC staff. Trainers will train new staff for one whole semester. The trainer and the new staff member are both Japanese, but the training is done entirely in English. Through this training we have to reflect about our job and explain it in easy and understandable English. Being a trainer helps us rethink our SALC roles, and develop a wider perspective.

Different Types of SALC

In this Conference I was surprised that there are many different types of self-access centers in different universities. I felt almost every university was different. In the KUIS SALC, we have over 20 student staff working part-time. Also, there is the SSC (SALC Student Committee), a volunteer group which takes charge of events in the SALC. So, in our SALC, there are two different student roles, SSC and SALC student staff. SALC student staff and SSC do totally different jobs, but both are essential for the SALC.

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Depending on the purpose of the center, each one is a different size, and has different rules, different student systems (for example paid staff or voluntary system), and different peer advisors programs. Our center has a strong “English only” policy. Even if students can’t understand our explanation, we have to use English to explain how to use the reservation system or other facilities. Other universities have “a little Japanese is okay” policy. Also, some centers are run only by student staff, who make the student work schedule, clean the café space (Gifu Shotoku Gakuin), or having conversation leaders (Sugiyama Jogakuen) to talk to students. I feel there are many different ways of running a self-access center, depending on what kind of students use it, how they use it, and their English levels.

From hearing about different kinds of self-access centers, I thought students’ involvement is really important to make a self-access center successful and useful for students. Student staff are really close to center users, so they can be role models for other students. Working as a student staff member or volunteer they can learn many things from jobs that students are in charge of. Therefore, student staff in self-access centers can also learn by self access.

Starting a new self-access center

Now I am working as an assistant manager in E-CO (English Café at Otemon) at Otemon Gakuin University in Osaka. My three years of experience in SALC help me a lot to run the E-CO management. However, there are some different situations from the KUIS SALC. For example, the English level at Otemon is different from the KUIS SALC. I have to use easy English words to explain or talk with students. Sometimes I need to use Japanese to explain things. I feel that it is really difficult to make an “English only” space. From this conference, I got some new ideas from each different university’s self-access center. Students who come to E-CO are not used to speaking English with Japanese students, so I think that students have to get used to talking in English with their Japanese friends. Therefore, the Sugiyama Jogakuen University Chit-Chat system might be helpful to get students used to speaking in English with other Japanese students. Different universities have different English levels, students, culture, and so on. I have to find what fits my school to make our self-access center useful and try to make a space that helps people speak English.





Learning from Sugiyama

Serina Nishio

Kanda University of International Studies

My name is Serina Nishio and I work as one of the student staff at the Self-Access Learning Centre at Kanda University of International Studies. In this essay I will explain about a conference on Students' involvement in Self Access Centers (SISAC) that I attended in Nagoya. The conference was organised by students from the Self-Access Centre at Sugiyama Jogakuen University, which we also had a chance to tour as a pre-conference activity. I will therefore first explain what the SAC at Sugiyama Jogakuen University is, and then outline the basic points about this conference. After that, I will explain what kind of people attended this conference. I will particularly explain the spirit behind this special conference and its connection to the activities of the students at Sugiyama Jogakuen University. Finally, I will highlight the ideas that I thought will be good for our own SAC.

This conference was organized by students from Sugiyama Women's University's self-access centre. Sugiyama students have had the experiences of working as peer advisors at the Self-Access Centre of their university. They have also worked at JALT, ETJ and ER as volunteer interns. Through both kinds of work, they have had great experiences and got motivation to organize a student conference by themselves. Since then, they started to think about how they would actually be able to have a conference. The motto of the conference was "Of the students, by the students, for the students". At the conference, there were about fifty or more SAC-staff students from about ten universities. They all work there or have some involvement with the Self Access Centres at their respective universities.

Everyone of those who attended the conference had strong feelings for their Self-Access Centres. They always think about students. How students can improve their English skills? What will make students to feel more confident in English? At this point, student staff are also students. The position is the same. However, student staff can say they are more professional than other students. They can give students good advice through their experience. From this conference, I learned that student staff are very special human resources for all Self-Access Centres. This is because they can understand students' feelings about learning English more than teachers and they will not give students pressure of being afraid of making mistakes when they try to use English. That will make students feel more comfortable.

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There are two good ideas that I would like to try in my university. These are the "Chit Chat" and the "Listener Tag" systems that have been introduced at the Sugiyama Women's University SAC. "Chit Chat" is a system where students have English conversations in groups under the supervision of the student-staff, and without any native English speaking teachers around. For example, if the conversation stops they will give students a suggestion of the next topic or ask students a question to make them understand more about the topic and facilitate conversations. Also, they will do the time management. I thought that this is a good idea because we have a policy that students speak only English while they are in the SALC. If some students talk in Japanese, other students will feel very uncomfortable. If we are more involved with students' conversations in our self-access centre, this problem will be solved. Moreover, we can give each student equal chances to talk in English.

Another good idea was the listener tag. This idea was brought up in a discussion with students from other universities. In my university, there is a place where English teachers are always waiting for students to have free English conversations. Any students including exchange students can join the conversations or just relax there any time they like. That place is called "yellow sofa". Students can drink or eat there, so often students come to relax or have lunch in an English environment. The listener tag will suit the situation that students have. Many students are feeling nervous or shy to talk to other people in English. This is a common problem especially for freshmen. Freshmen are not used to being in an English environment yet, so they need to get used to this environment first. They need to have more chances to have a feel of English. At this very early stage, we believe that listening is important. The listener tag is a very effective way to help this situation. It is used as a sign to show what students would like to do. Students who are wearing the listener tag only would only like to listen to the conversations and not to talk. If we start this yellow sofa system, I thought that not only freshmen will feel it easier to come, but also other students who have hesitated to come to the SALC before can feel more comfortable to come. We can provide an easy first step for students.

I would like to try these two great ideas in my university. I'm sure that these ideas will be a good change to our SAC. I'm looking forward to trying the ideas and make a change to our SAC to be more comfortable for all students. Also, I had a great experience in this conference and this experience gave me an opportunity to reflect upon my own work at my SAC. I would like to create this wonderful chance again and create the "Self-Access Center Network" all around Japan in order to share our ideas and experiences as the conference chair said



Involving Students in Self-Access: an Overlooked Priority?

Katherine Thornton, Otemon Gakuin University

President of Japan Association of Self-Access Learning (JASAL)

While students have always been involved in self-access centres (SACs) as users of the facilities and services, in fact they are their *raison d'être*, it is only in recent years that much attention has been paid in the SALL literature to their role as organisers and providers of services in SACs. Several recent articles have focused on the roles they can play (Malcolm, 2011; Heigham, 2011). However, few conference presentations on self-access language learning (SALL) that I have seen have featured research into student experiences of SALL, either as users or as organisers and those few that have presented student voices have been, quite naturally, framed by the academics conducting the research. Until the SiSAC conference held in Nagoya in 2013, I had not heard of occasions where students themselves had the opportunity to express their opinions about the SACs they use and the roles they play directly to other students and professionals involved in SALL. That's why JASAL jumped at the chance to support Umida and her formidable team of student organisers in hosting the conference.

The SISAC Conference

The SISAC conference was unique in two respects. Not only did it consist almost entirely of student presentations (supported by excellent opening and closing sessions given by David Barker and Robert Croker aimed at the student audience), but the organizing team itself was also made up entirely of students from Sugiyama Jogakuen University, building on their experience as conference interns at JALT and other conferences. The organizing committee handled the proposals, organized the schedule, corresponded with students about their presentations, and gave a wonderful tour of their own self-access centre as part of the conference, in addition to running the conference on the day, from staffing the cloakroom to conducting the plenary session.

JASAL was involved as an event promoter, reaching out through our website and mailing list, asking members to encourage their own students to attend and present, but the work was all done by the students themselves, both the organizing committee and all the students who presented on the day.

Throughout the day, through 9 student presentations, conference attendees were treated to high quality presentations, delivered sincerely and confidently by many young people whose passion for their own self-access centres and eagerness to learn about others' experiences was inspiring for all to see. This created a real buzz and excitement rarely felt at EFL conferences! We were able to hear first-hand about all the different roles that students play: as counter staff, peer advisors & grammar tutors, event organizers, English-speaking society members, conversation partners, SAC committee members, and, of course, as users of SACs.

Speaking as a learning advisor and director of a SAC, the presentations reminded me of all the benefits of involving students in self-access: we can give them a sense of ownership over their centre and by extension their learning, promote authentic English interaction, and make the centres themselves more relevant to and appealing for other students, who may initially fear to enter an English learning space.

Benefits of holding a student conference

By not just involving students in a conference, but facilitating a student conference run by the learners themselves, I hope we have helped students to claim their places as legitimate members of our discourse community. Events such as this ensure that students' voices are heard and valued, give them the confidence to express their ideas and make further contributions to their SACs, as well as helping them to develop vital life skills for the world of work after graduation.

This truly was an event "of the students, by the students, for the students", as Conference Chair Risa Hayashi said, but I would go further than that. I think everyone who participated will agree that its benefits were felt by all, not just the students. For those of you who were not able to attend the event itself, I hope these reflections and articles written by the participants will give you a sense of the passion and professionalism that the student presenters displayed, and will inspire you to involve students still further in your own SACs.

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*Robert Croker
Nanzan University*

As Katherine Thornton noted in her paper, one of the themes of the SISAC conference was “of the students, by the students, for the students”, as Conference Chair Risa Hayashi reminded us in her remarks. I would like to reflect about the meaning of this statement, as this is also the motto of the SAC at Nanzan University, which is called the World Plaza. In that context, students have found this motto to be motivating as it provides a sense of identity for the learning community that has emerged there.

Of the students

When a student enters most university student facilities in Japan, such as a university library, the staff is composed of university employees not students. However, when a student walks into a SAC staffed by students, they do not see university employees but rather student assistants providing services. If they visit the SAC often, such student visitors would also notice that these student assistants are also involved in the managing the SAC. For teachers used to standing in front of a class of students, seeing a group of students together is perhaps not particularly noteworthy, but from the students’ perspective such an experience can be a unique and important one of their time at university. Similarly, the SISAC Conference, like such SACs, was student lead. Students’ sense of empowerment there was palpable, particularly due to the competent leadership of the team of students from Sugiyama University.

By the students

As the SISAC presentations illustrated, many of these SACs benefit from the contributions of the student assistants in both creating the SAC vision and bringing that vision to fruition. That is, these student assistants play creative and management roles as well as very practical, service roles. Students often help plan activities in the SAC, that is, the creative dimension, suggesting tasks and events they feel would attract other students. As these students are of the same age as the student users, they have access to similar cultural perspectives. They often also manage the day-to-day operations of the SAC, such as scheduling student assistant shifts and SAC events.

Finally, in almost all SACs, students work behind the counter, assisting student who walk in and use the SAC. Similarly, in the SISAC Conference, the main presentations were organized and given by the students, a unique opportunity.

For the students

The purpose of all university SACs is to facilitate the development of student users. However, the SACs that first opened in Japan focused on providing services to students - they viewed students as being passive recipients of educational experiences in the SAC. The recent rise of SACs which are student lead have recast students not just as SAC users but also as active managers and creators of the SAC experience. That is, it is not only through just being in the SAC that benefits students; it is also through the process of being managers that students benefit and develop educationally. The purpose of student involvement in SACs has broadened to encompass a larger vision of what SACs are for. As with many other SACs in Japan, over the past four years the goals of the World Plaza at Nanzan University have been to make the transition from being faculty lead to being student lead. Participating in the SISAC Conference made me feel that we are all on a journey of handing over control of SACs to students - and that they are rising to the challenge and taking over that responsibility.

As Katherine noted, it is not only the students who benefited from the SISAC Conference - all of the attendees did. Equally, it is not only the students who benefit from and learn from students participating in the running of a SAC - we teachers do as well. I congratulate the students for their hard work, both at the SISAC conference and also in their own SACs.

Believing in the Power of Your Students

Umida Ashurova

Nanzan University

Through learner-generated materials and learner-initiated events, self-access language learning can expose students to simultaneous opportunities of language input and output and encourage the active participation of these wise learners who “adopt the view that classroom and out-of-class learning are equally important” (Benson and Reinders, 2011: 7). This view played a key role in forming the community of extraordinarily active learners at the self-access center (SAC) at Sugiyama Jogakuen University (SJU), who, as you can see from the articles in the current collection, served as the initiators and organizers of the groundbreaking Student Involvement in Self-Access Centers (SISAC) Conference.

As Heigham (2011) describes it, the SAC at SJU was established in 2009 and, with its pedagogic rationale of near-peer role modeling, it employs six Peer Advisors (PAs) every year. The PAs are third and fourth year students hired because of their “exemplary dedication to studying English” (ibid: 82). From 2011 to 2013 I worked as a SAC coordinator and guided this group of talented young women in various projects. They did not limit themselves to only SAC-related activities, but also organized numerous extracurricular events, hosted English-only cafés during university festivals, and served as interns at several conferences for English teachers in Japan. At one of the TEFL conferences the group suggested organizing a conference where the central role would be given to students; where students would be presenting about their language learning experiences. In her proposal their leader, conference chair Risa Hayashi wrote: “I worked as a Peer Advisor for the last two years and I had a chance to work as a student-intern at several conferences (e.g. JALT, ETJ and ER). During these conferences my friends and I gained invaluable experience and had an indescribable feeling of satisfaction from using our language skills in real-life situations. This gave birth to an idea of holding a students’ conference; the *Conference Of the Students, By the Students, For the Students*”. With this enthusiasm they started organizing the SISAC Conference. The preparation lasted for nearly four months and included several steps. As their coordinator, my main aim was to stay involved and avoid intervening in this process. I made myself available for guidance and consultation, but did not dictate any rules!

The group wrote the call for presentations and its representatives Risa and Ai announced it at the IASAL and LD Forums of the JALT 2012 International Conference.

As they recalled later, this process helped them to learn specific academic vocabulary and understand the importance of precision in writing. "Making the announcement was not difficult because we are used to giving presentations in front of many people in our classes" - reflected Risa on her short speech at JALT. Upon returning to SJU, they held regular weekly meetings and continued preparing for the SISAC Conference. At one of the meetings the group divided up roles in accordance with their personalities- strengths and weaknesses. For instance, Risa Hayashi-the most enthusiastic member of the group with the highest responsibility and flexibility shown in PA work and other extracurricular projects- was elected as conference chair. Ai Sugiura-who impressed her peers with her organizational skills and thoroughness at work, - was appointed as program chair. Shoko Okuda was chosen as treasurer/sponsor liaison for her logical-mathematical intelligence and exceptional communication skills. At one of those discussions I emphasized the fact that success in any event depends on three things: a collaborative team with each of its members focusing on their role, strictly following a set timeline and deadlines, and effectively communicating accomplished assignments and expected further undertakings. Although the students were busy looking for jobs and writing graduation papers, to my biggest surprise, letters of acceptance were emailed to presenters on time, conference booklets were designed in a professional way, sponsors were impressed with requests written in good English, a pre-conference SAC tour was organized and thoroughly rehearsed, creative slides for their own presentation were made, and their contents were discussed for hours (in English only!). Even post-conference social activities were planned cheerfully and with utmost fun.

I believe that the learners felt a strong sense of ownership on every aspect of this groundbreaking project and that a collaborative learning environment encouraged and inspired each member of the group (and surely their coordinator) from the starting point on that lovely day in October till the end on that memorable day in February. Addressing student-attendees in her closing remarks, Risa Hayashi said that she would feel extremely happy if *her peers* could learn something new from this conference. "I sincerely hope that this event gave you energy and motivation to work hard on each of your tasks regardless of where you are. I believe that the conference will be just the beginning to build the bonds of friendship between different universities. It will be wonderful if we can create our own *Self-Access Center Network* all around Japan and share our language learning ideas and experiences". Risa's words show that the SISAC Conference achieved its goal: it truly was the conference of the students, by the students, and most importantly for the students.