

## **Expanding a Self-Access Center's Contact: Finding Opportunities for Bridge-Building on Campus**

**Lucius Von Joo**

*Ryutsu Keizai University*  
*vonjoo@rku.ac.jp*

**Robert J. Werner**

*Ryutsu Keizai University*  
*rjwerner@gmail.com*

**Suzune Suga**

*Ryutsu Keizai University*  
*ssuga@rku.ac.jp*

### **Author Biographies**

Lucius Von Joo is a teacher and learning advisor at Ryutsu Keizai University. He has taught deaf education, elementary education and EFL/ESL in California, Japan and New York. His research interests include computer assisted learning, media literacy, learning approaches, video-cued multivocal ethnography, and family and communities as educators.

Robert J. Werner is a teacher and learning advisor at Ryutsu Keizai University, and he helped to start the self-access center there. He has taught EFL/ESL at elementary schools, junior high schools, and universities in Japan and the US. His research interests include self-directed learning, autonomy, and motivation.

Suzune Suga is a self-access center (SAC) administrative staff member at Ryutsu Keizai University. She used to work as a computer applications instructor at the same university and held workshops for thirteen years before being transferred to the SAC. She is a newcomer to the field of self-access learning and continues to work to become more skilled at giving advice to her students.

### Abstract

This article discusses outreach and bridge-building between a self-access center (SAC), called the Community Learning International Plaza (CLIP), and various groups at a sports-focused university in greater Tokyo. When the SAC opened three years ago (April 2017), students and faculty did not know its purpose. Therefore, CLIP teachers and administrators (the authors of this paper) saw the need to conduct outreach to educate teachers and students about self-access language learning (SALL) and the services offered. Through orientation sessions, we were able to informally speak with subject teachers who were accompanying their students, learn if they might be interested in collaborating on future student programs, and plan accordingly. We were also approached by student clubs and teams to make workshops that fit particular needs (e.g., English for life saving and Indonesian/English communication for teaching rugby in Indonesia through JICA). Outreach and bridge-building connect the CLIP to users who otherwise may not have sought out services. In this way, the SAC acts as a bridge between language classes and real-life English opportunities (Cotterall & Reinders, 2000) through workshops that simulate real-life situations and promote self-efficacy and second language use. Outreach has been successful both in making the SAC relevant and in helping us set up English for specific purposes (ESP) programs tailored specifically to the needs of students at this campus.

本記事では、“Community Learning International Plaza” (CLIP) という自律学習センター（セルフ・アクセスセンター (SAC)）と首都圏にあるスポーツ中心の大学に所属するさまざまなグループ間におけるアウトリーチや橋渡し活動について述べる。センターが3年前（2017年3月）に大学に設立された時には、学生も教職員もその目的についてよく理解していなかった。そのため、CLIP 教員及び事務スタッフ（本記事の共著者）は、教員や学生に向け、自律語学学習（SALL）とは何か、またそれに関してセンターが提供できるサービスはどのようなものかにつき説明する必要があった。センターの新入生オリエンテーションの際には、学生を引率する教科教員に対し、将来的に学生向けのプログラムを共に企画・実施することに興味があるかを非公式に問うことが出来た。また、クラブ活動やチームからは、特定のニーズ（ライフセービング活動における英会話スキルや JICA を通したインドネシアでのラグビー普及活動におけるインドネシア語／英語でのコミュニケーションなど）に合わせたワークショップの開催についての依頼があった。アウトリーチや橋渡し活動は、CLIP と想定外の利用者とを結びつけてくれた。このように、現実の生活に沿ったワークショップの開催や自己効力感の向上、第二言語の利用促進により、SALL が語学クラスと実際に英語を話す機会とを繋ぐ (Cotterall & Reinders, 2000) ことができると分かった。アウトリーチ活動は SAC を大学とより結びつけ、この大学の学生のニーズに合わせた「特定の目的のための英語」(ESP) プログラム開催の一助となった。

**Keywords:** outreach, bridge-building, sports, English for specific purposes, self-access language learning

As the field of self-access language learning (SALL) continues to grow, we need to assess what our centers currently do for the larger communities they are housed within. It is also fair to wonder whether self-access centers (SACs) are currently being used to their fullest potential (Berman, 2020). One possible area of concern is that they often cater to those who would most likely seek out services. Research is conducted on those individuals, and centers improve their services based on the needs of these particular users. While this research has enabled SACs to come a long way and continue to advance the field of autonomy, what about learners who have not yet been reached? This attrition misses data from potential users, and this biased data may perpetuate services that do not fit these potential users. There has been little research into potential attrition in the field of education and even less in self-access. On the other hand, healthcare is a well-researched field, and like education, it often focuses on access for all as a basic need. Marcellus (2004) found that attrition in healthcare studies often led to biased data. This in turn affected the validity of research, and services developed were not representative of all participants. If the goal of a SAC is to serve the needs of everyone on campus, researchers should make an effort to avoid selective attrition. Even though the nature of services in SALL and healthcare differ, missing input from potential users would have a similar effect and result in biased data collection. One way to connect with unrepresented users is by reaching out to programs on campus they are involved with.

In this report, we will discuss outreach and bridge-building that occurred between a SAC, called the Community Learning International Plaza (CLIP), and various groups on a campus of about 2,000 students in the greater Tokyo area. Most students are sports majors, with smaller numbers studying sociology, economics, logistics, or law. English is not offered as a major; however, there are compulsory once-a-week English classes for freshmen and sophomores, with the option of continuing through electives (Werner & Von Joo, 2018). Beyond that, students can visit the SAC or study abroad for more opportunities to use English or another language. The CLIP is located in a high traffic area of campus near the entrance to the library. Since the majority of students have participated in freshman orientation sessions, most have interacted with the center. The authors of this paper are the three people who primarily run the CLIP (two teacher/advisors and one administrative staff member).

### **Conducting Outreach**

When the CLIP opened three years ago (April 2017), neither students nor faculty were aware of its purpose. Therefore, outreach was a necessity, and we had two general goals: (1) educate teachers about the center (so that they could direct their students to the SAC), and (2) inform students about what they could do there. Matsuo et al. (2015) discussed how teacher support is crucial for the success of a SAC. Furthermore, Mynard and Stevenson (2017) emphasized the importance of transparency when building bridges with other departments: “Gradually build trust and they are likely to support you later” (p. 179). Therefore, we aimed to gain teachers’ understanding and support early on.

To address the first goal, we initially visited the English teachers, who had not been consulted when the center was planned (before we were hired). We wanted them to know that we were there to support them. After that, we went to the departments and gave a presentation to all five deans<sup>1</sup> (department heads) about the history and background of self-access centers, including how our SAC fits into the big picture. They were then equipped to relay the information to teachers in their departments.

Next, we were able to address the second goal by conducting freshman orientation sessions. Since seminar teachers attend the session together with their students, an unintended consequence was the opportunity to meet and interact with subject teachers from all of the departments. It was a low-pressure situation for those who might not be comfortable with English, as they were free to join their students in the treasure hunt activity, help them, do it by themselves, or simply observe. According to Horwitz (1996), speaking a second language in an instructional setting can cause anxiety for teachers. While Horwitz’s discussion concerned language classes, the dynamic is similar because seminar teachers are in a leadership role. During the orientations, we were able to speak with them informally and learn which teachers had an interest in English. This knowledge became useful later when we considered who we might approach to collaborate on new student programs. For example, informal conversations led to the Basketball in English workshop (co-designed with the basketball coach), where students warmed up through a shooting game, learned terms and rules, and played an actual game, all the while trying to use only English.

### **Programs with a Need**

In addition to conducting outreach, we were approached by students, staff, or faculty when there was a specific need. For example, one student in the life-saving club asked us to teach practical English that members might use to ensure the safety of English-speaking beachgoers during their summer jobs as lifeguards. The resulting program included over 40

student participants. English for specific purposes (ESP) programs such as this one may be a common need for learners who are not English majors (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). CLIP materials and services are often sports-related, whereas other contexts would reflect their respective disciplines.

In another example, members of the men's and women's rugby teams have been participating in a month-long Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) program for the last three years. Each time, up to ten student-athletes teach rugby at schools across Indonesia. What started out as one-on-one English conversation practice has developed into an almost semester-long communication program to learn basic Indonesian conversation and rugby terms. The program also aimed to increase students' self-efficacy and willingness to communicate in any language. In each case, we designed a series of workshops that met weekly for approximately one to three months, depending on the needs of the program. Outreach and bridge-building connected the CLIP to users who may not have otherwise sought out services.

### **The SAC as a Bridge**

Cotterall and Reinders (2000) described SALL as a bridge, and also at times a fortress. In their view, the center acts as a bridge between the classroom and language experiences in the real world. The CLIP has served this purpose for many students by offering original workshops that simulate real-life situations and promote self-efficacy and second language use. However, in our case, the bridge does not necessarily start in the classroom because students do not participate in many language classes in their degree programs. Instead, the CLIP (and by extension SALL) acts as a bridge between students' past language class experiences and present real-life English settings.

In the same study, Cotterall and Reinders (2000) found that lower-level language learners rarely used resources outside the SAC. They questioned whether the center might "become so comfortable for learners that it functions more as a fortress (discouraging them from venturing out) than as a bridge to the outside world" (Cotterall & Reinders, 2000, p. 30). Because of outreach and bridge-building efforts, the walls of the CLIP are metaphorically and literally open, with a two-meter high glass partition instead of a wall. Due to the center's proximity to the library's Learning Commons, students frequently come and go between the two. A fortress supports those who are inside its walls and could keep students in, as Cotterall and Reinders discussed. However, this metaphor might be taken a step further, as those same walls can also serve as a barrier to keep others out. Berman (2020) supported this contention

by noting the possibility of individuals being regularly excluded or awkward social situations arising and becoming the norm in an informal learning space. Additional research can help us learn more about student-to-student interactions and further promote a space of inclusion.

Ideally, one would want an effective center with walls that are open to the entire campus. However, Datwani-Choy (2014) cautioned that a balance should be maintained between effectiveness of services and growth in users. Interdisciplinary activities with established groups bring new expectations and may put pressure on the center, thereby disrupting its balance. In thinking of new directions in self-access, further research might measure the initial person-environment (PE) fit between center and potential users to assist in identifying feasible adaptations (Caplan, 1987). If this were to be measured, P would represent student language needs, while E would be physical space, layout, and existing support services (for example, see Augeri & Kajita, 2017; Berman, 2020). The PE fit would not only assist with the initial assessment, but also potentially help map which approaches produce the best balance through periodic measurements.

### **Conclusion**

Conducting outreach dramatically affected the trajectory of the CLIP. The partnerships mentioned in this paper (and others) allowed the developing center to create services tailored to fit the needs of its environment. The CLIP now offers unique sports English services thanks to our reaching out to existing campus programs. Because the dynamic of each SAC is unique, the appropriate degree of outreach may vary from center to center. However, the fact remains that there are always potential users who would benefit from the services offered by a SAC. Additional research is necessary on the applicability of outreach and the different forms it might take. For example, there is a need for further inquiry to explore the ways in which outreach has been incorporated in the development of other SACs. This data would assist both established and developing centers. As the field of self-access learning continues to grow, so too should its breadth of inclusion.

### **Note**

1 The director overseeing the CLIP at the time advised us to meet with the head of each department before approaching teachers and staff. Face-to-face relations are crucial for Japanese universities (and businesses) so that all members are in the know. Informal

discussions such as this precede circulating a *ringisho* (document to ‘sign’ by stamping a personal seal) to employees in order to approve new policy or services (Brown, 1966).

## References

- Augeri, J., & Kajita, S. (2017). Trends and outcomes of the innovative physical learning spaces: An international comparative approach. *Information Processing Society of Japan*, 42, 264–270. <http://id.nii.ac.jp/1001/00182882/>
- Berman, N. (2020) A critical examination of informal learning spaces. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 39(1), 127–140. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2019.1670147>
- Brown, W. (1966). Japanese management: The cultural background. *Monumenta Nipponica*, 21(1/2), 47–60. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2383405>
- Caplan, R. D. (1987). Person-environment fit theory and organizations: Commensurate dimensions, time perspectives, and mechanisms. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 31(3), 248–267. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0001-8791\(87\)90042-X](https://doi.org/10.1016/0001-8791(87)90042-X)
- Cotterall, S., & Reinders, H. (2000). Learners' perceptions and practice in self access language learning. *The TESOLANZ Journal*, 8, 23–37. <https://www.tesolanz.org.nz/publications/tesolanz-journal/volume-8-2000/>
- Datwani-Choy, D. (2014). *Evaluating a self-access centre's effectiveness and efficiency: A case study* [Doctoral dissertation]. Northeastern University, USA. <https://repository.library.northeastern.edu/files/neu:349607/fulltext.pdf>
- Horwitz, E. K. (1996). Even teachers get the blues: Recognizing and alleviating language teachers' feelings of foreign language anxiety. *Foreign Language Annals*, 29(3), 365–372. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1944-9720.1996.tb01248.x>
- Hutchinson, T., & Waters, A. (1987). *English for specific purposes*. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511733031>
- Marcellus, L. (2004). Are we missing anything? Pursuing research on attrition. *Canadian Journal of Nursing Research*, 36(3), 82–98. <https://cjr.archive.mcgill.ca/article/view/1901/1895>
- Matsuo, S., Maxwell, S., & Pileggi, M. (2015). An introduction to self-access learning centers at the university level. *The 2015 PanSIG Journal*, 114–119. <https://pansig.org/publications/2015/2015pansigjournal.pdf>

- Mynard, J., & Stevenson, R. (2017). Promoting learner autonomy and self-directed learning: The evolution of a SALC curriculum. *Studies in Self-Access Learning Journal*, 8(2), 169–182. <https://doi.org/10.37237/080209>
- Werner, R. J., & Von Joo, L. (2018). From theory to practice: Considerations in opening a new self-access center. *Studies in Self-Access Learning Journal*, 9(2), 116–134. <https://doi.org/10.37237/090205>