

The LLL SIG Newsletter

Guest speakers as bridges to the community

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This paper is based on the second of three presentations in the Lifelong Language Learning SIG's annual forum entitled "Lifelong language learning and community involvement" at JALT 2013 in Kobe.

Why guest speakers?

Guest speakers (GSs) in the EFL/ ESL (or any language learning) classroom can be a valuable resource that facilitate learning in a wide variety of ways, serving as a vital bridge between the classroom and the outside world. By carefully choosing guests who embody lifelong learning principles in their own lives, exemplary role models can be provided. Students may also benefit through exposure to language varieties and communicative styles that are different from those of their usual teacher.

Although one of the most common reasons for inviting GSs may be to provide a reward for students and give them a break from the usual classroom routine, there are a number of far better justifications. They include:

- Inspiring and motivating students.
- Plugging students in to what is going on outside the classroom.
- Potentially, providing a life-changing experience.
- Helping students decide a career path.
- Aiding non-profit organizations in promoting their cause by supporting them through an honorarium and possibly through the recruitment of student volunteers.

This paper will cover the kinds of talks which feature speakers who come to an individual class to speak and those arranged for a large group of students (and teachers) that is offered program-wide. The points that will be dealt with concern 1) ways of selecting guest speakers, 2) how to prepare students for a talk,

3) interacting with the GS, 4) arranging practical details, 4) debriefing students after the event, and 5) thanking the GS and offering feedback so that subsequent visits can be even more productive. Finally, case studies will be presented showing how some regularly occurring guest speaking engagements are conducted at Aoyama Gakuin University's English Department.

Selecting speakers

It is best to allow for the workings of serendipity when seeking GSs. Louis Pasteur, the famous French chemist and microbiologist, once said that "Chance favors the prepared mind." In the same way, by being receptive to opportunities when they present themselves and by having some preset standards for the kinds of GSs that would be the most appropriate for a particular group of students, teachers can maximize the chances that someone they encounter in their day to day life will be identified as being a potential GS.

As NGOs/ NPOs (non-government and non-profit organizations) can offer a large pool of wonderful GSs, teachers are advised to attend events where many of them congregate. A few such events in the Kanto area include the Earth Day Festival at Yoyogi Park that is carried out each year on the weekend closest to April 22nd, Earth Day (<http://www.earthday-tokyo.org/2014/>) and the Global Festa that takes place in Hibiya Park each autumn (<http://www.gfjapan.com/>) and features UN Refugee Film Festival screenings and the stalls of a plethora of domestic and international non-profits. Through patronizing these events, for example, I was referred to speakers representing Médecins Sans Frontières and Médecins du Monde. Contact information for them, and other non-profits, will be noted at the end of this paper.

Teachers should not hesitate to make inquiries at the offices of NGOs/ NPOs about possible speaking engagements. They are eager for recognition, new supporters, and volunteers, so they are usually more than glad to send GSs, and only modest honorariums are requested, if any. Sometimes only transportation expenses are required.





Preparing students for the talk

Students can get the most from talks if they are properly prepared for them. Ideally, the talk should figure in their curriculum in some way. Nearly all non-profits have excellent Web sites, which offer an ample amount of reading material, not to mention photographs, videos, and podcasts. These materials can be tapped by teachers as a rich source of input. For lower level students, the content might have to be adapted in order to make it more comprehensible. Alternately, the learning tasks can be adjusted to the material to make them more or less demanding. The more demanding ones would require high levels of critical thinking based on an advanced degree of comprehension, and the less demanding ones simple tasks, such as “treasure hunts” for facts and details, or matching text and photos, etc.

In the case of classes or programs that are theme based, if the themes are broad enough, it does not require much imagination on the part of the teacher to connect the curriculum to the themes of the guest lecture. For example, at Aoyama Gakuin University, we frequently have representatives of the Tokyo English Life Line give talks to large groups of our freshmen and sophomore English majors enrolled in an Integrated English (IE) program that has four themes at each of three levels. One of the themes in each level can be connected to a theme of the special lecture (IE I: childhood (bullying), IE II: biography (founders of life lines), IE III relationships (DV, grief and loss, and other relationship issues). Table 1 shows a jigsaw reading assignment using the content on the Web site of the Tokyo English Life Line, which is used to help prepare students for the lecture.

Table 1: Students are asked to access and read assigned sections before reporting and commenting on them in an online message board.

Interacting with/ treating guest speakers

Making the arrangements for GSs may take months of planning. Just to decide upon the mutually convenient timing of a speaking engagement can require a lengthy exchange of emails or periods of “phone tag.” So, patience is of the essence. It is important to be candid about whether an honorarium and/or transportation expenses will be provided.

Student 1 and Student 2

Describe and comment about the Tokyo English Life Line’s suicide prevention program

http://www.telljp.com/index.php?en/suicide_awareness

Student 3 and Student 4

Read about “bullying and peer pressure” and follow the link to the UK site that gives further information/ Summarize some of what you learned and give your opinions about it.

<http://www.telljp.com/index.php?en/parentspace/#bullying>

Student 5 and Student 6

Read about “Body Image” and follow the link to the UK and Australian sites that give further information/ Summarize some of what you learned and give your opinions about it.

<http://www.telljp.com/index.php?en/parentspace/#body>

Inquire if the speaker will show a PowerPoint or need special equipment. Assume nothing! Also, be sure that the speaker is aware of the audience and their language level. Be clear about what you want the speaker to talk about. Most speakers are more than willing to customize their talk for the audience, which can increase the likelihood that what is covered will touch upon course themes or other aspects of the curriculum, increasing the relevancy of the talk.

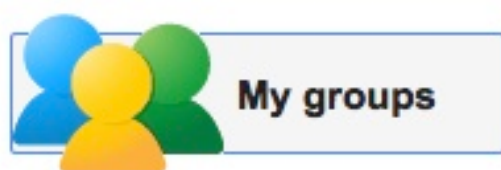
Arranging for practical details

A GS may decline the offer of an honorarium or the reimbursement of transportation expenses, however, it is polite to offer the latter as a bare minimum and educational institutions often have special budgetary provisions for the payment of honoraria to guest lecturers that are worth inquiring about. Of course, make sure that a funding source has not evaporated before making an offer to a GS, otherwise a teacher may be obliged to pay out of pocket for the engagement.

If using an unfamiliar venue, it is important to familiarize oneself with the AV equipment, microphones, computer connections, and even lighting well BEFORE the event. It is a shame when a carefully planned event is marred by technical difficulties and GSs may be unnecessarily stressed by such mishaps. So, a preparatory run through, and securing technical support on the day of the talk should unanticipated quirks arise, are highly recommended.

Ways to promote the talk

Talks may be promoted through a mailing list (Google Group, Yahoo! Group) for teachers or some sort of student portal for students.



If the teacher (or program) maintains a blog, the event might be announced there. Figure 1 shows a blog entry posted on the blog of Aoyama Gakuin University's Integrated English Program announcing a talk by the director of the Tokyo English Life Line, while Figure 2 shows how students in the program can better anticipate the content of the talk and therefore be better prepared for comprehending it by having some scaffolding in place.

Students in these teachers' classes will be attending this lecture, but all others are also welcome:

IE Seminars: Jerome Martin, Joyce Taniguchi, Joseph Dias

IE II Core: Terry Browning, George Okuhara-Caswell, Jeff Bruce, Graham Courtney



EVENT: IE PROGRAM OPEN LECTURE SERIES

WHO: MR. JASON CHARE

TOPIC: TALK ON THE “TOKYO ENGLISH LIFE LINE”

WHEN: DECEMBER 21TH; 1:10 PM – 2:40 PM

WHERE: SAGAMIHARA CAMPUS, F-308

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH

Figure 1: Blog entry at <http://www.aogaku-daku.org/2012/12/20/5673/> promoting a special lecture.

Read this fascinating article about a recent film which suggests steps Japan might take to reduce cases of suicide or suicide attempts: http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/social_affairs/AJ201212200011. This is a Website that presents information about the film: <http://www.saving10000.com/>.

Find out the wide variety of work that TELL is involved in by accessing this interview with Jason Chare, published on the Website of "Tokyo Expats by Tokyorelo.com": <https://tokyorelo.com/wordpress/tag/jason-chare/>.

Read about the activities of TELL in this article published in The Magazine of the British Chamber of Commerce in Japan: <http://bccjacumen.com/issues/2011/04/lending-a-listening-ear/>.

To better prepare for the lecture by getting exposure to some of the words and phrases that may come up, why not take [the WB-DAT \(Web Based Depression and Anxiety Test\)](#), "a clinically validated electronic screening program that asks you a series of questions about depression, anxiety and panic symptoms."



Figure 2: The rest of the blog entry suggests to teachers in the program and their students what they can read, watch, and respond to in order to be better prepared for the GS.

An idea for using social media

If the group that the GS represents has a social media presence (like the Twitter feed of Médecins Sans Frontières, Figure 3, or the Facebook community page of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees--UNHCR, Figure 4), preparation activities can be set up related to tweets or status updates. Students, for example, might be encouraged to follow a Twitter account or like a Facebook community page associated with the GS's organization and report back to the class about recent postings. They might even be encouraged to write comments on the postings (if allowed) and engage in discussions with others.



Figure 3: A screenshot of some recent tweets on the twitter feed of the American branch of Médecins Sans Frontières.



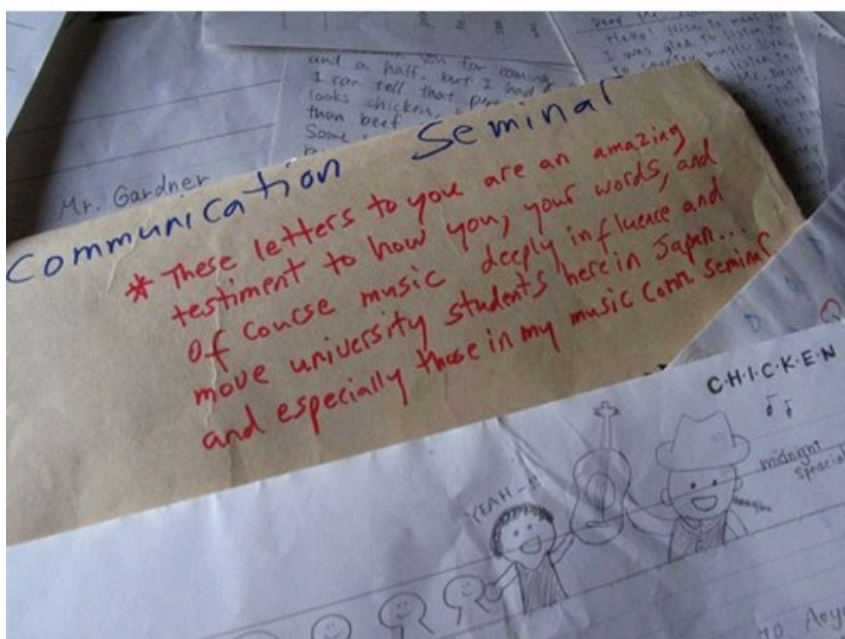
Figure 4: A screenshot of a status update on the Facebook page of the UNHCR.

Debrief students and provide follow-up tasks

Students can solidify what they learned from a GS through a debriefing session and by carrying out follow-up tasks. The debriefing can be as informal as a group discussion about the students’/ learners’ impressions and thoughts about the lecture during a subsequent class, or as formal as “response papers” written with the intention of providing the speaker with feedback on the talk. For talks arranged for students in an entire program (e.g., multiple classes, as in Aoyama Gakuin University’s IE Program) some teachers may wish to have their students give written feedback while other teachers may prefer to organize a discussion, depending on the skills being emphasized in the particular class. Figure 5 shows a Facebook status update posted by a grateful GS who received a packet of response papers from students and expressions of gratitude.

Many thanks Joseph...It looks like the C-H-I-C-K-E-N song went over pretty well! (hahaha)

Letters from Students after Rambling Steve Gardner American Roots & Blues Music Seminar Aoyama University 2013. Music Communication, Cultural Communication and American Literature. A very motivated group of students and professors. Thanks to Joseph Dias, Richard Basso and Greg Strong. Along with Hideki Kamei.



Like · Comment · Share

Figure 5: A screenshot of a status update on the Facebook community page of Steve Gardner, a blues musician who is a frequent guest speaker at Aoyama Gakuin University and a number of other colleges and universities.

Other follow up “tasks” may be student/ learner-initiated. They might include volunteer work or internships at the organization that the GS represents, or--if the speaker is some sort of performer--watching the person in his/ her natural element (see Figure 6).



Figure 6: A promotional blurb about an upcoming concert by the Aoyama Gakuin University guest speaker, Steve Gardner, which was passed on to students so that they would have the option of following up on it.

Thanking the GS and offering constructive criticism

Guest speakers are valuable resources who deserve to be treated with great respect and cultivated so that each visit builds on what was presented during previous visits. Especially if there is the intention of bringing back a GS in subsequent semesters or academic years, it is important for them to be provided with information about how a lecture or presentation can be made even more accessible, interesting, and comprehensible to students. This is particularly important if the GS is not a teacher herself. Foreign guest speakers in Japan may incorrectly interpret a lack of response from students as a sign that they were not being understood or appreciated, when the students may actually have been enjoying the presentation immensely, but are culturally inclined to exhibit a respectfully silent public attitude. Teachers do need to prepare the students, however, for the GS by making sure that they have questions to ask during the Q & A and by showing how they can demonstrate active listening to the speaker through facial expressions and appropriate body language.

Suggestions for guest speakers--**From Organizations**

- Tokyo English Life Line (Director: Vickie Skorji):
<http://www.telljp.com/>
- Doctors Without Borders/ Médecins Sans Frontières:
<http://www.msf.or.jp/>
- Doctors of the World / Médecins du Monde (Assistant Director: Marjorie Meyssignac): <http://www.mdm.or.jp/>
- UNHCR / The UN Refugee Agency (email: JPNTO@unhcr.org and ask for a "speaker request form")
- Second Harvest Japan (Executive Director: Charles McJilton):
<http://2hj.org/>

Suggestions for guest speakers--**Individuals**

- Linda Ohama (Canadian Film Maker): <http://www.lindaohama.com/>
- Steve Gardner (Blues Musician):
<http://www.stevegardner.info/en/home/index.html>
- Rene Duignan (Economist for the EU and independent film maker -- "Saving 10,000"): <http://www.saving10000.com/>