

Cultivating Global Citizens: Navigating an International School-University Partnership

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Tags

Cross-Cultural Issues; Education Abroad; International Student Services; Internationalization and Global Learning; Partnerships; Primary and Secondary Education; Program Design; Technology; University/Higher Education

Setting

The case is set at a private international high school in Taiwan that follows the American education model, where the administration is actively pursuing international partnerships to enhance educational outcomes and foster global citizenship among students. The Deputy Director of the school, a United Nations Global Schools Advocate who has been in the role for five years, oversees all international collaborations, working closely with instructors to integrate internationalization into the curriculum and facilitate robust student mobility opportunities. The school has implemented training programs for students and faculty to enhance intercultural awareness and understanding while incorporating diverse teaching materials that reflect varied viewpoints. Additionally, the school encourages positive interactions through collaborative online projects with students abroad, fostering an inclusive environment that values diversity and supports cross-cultural understanding.

Each year, the school organizes several in-person study trips to its international partner universities. During these visits, students participate in customized learning programs while administrative staff explore opportunities for joint research, shared curriculum development, and progressively higher-intensity partnership arrangements with their university counterparts (often engendering greater levels of commitment, resource sharing, and engagement between the institutions). The school also maintains a program in which their students are at liberty to pursue credit-bearing early college courses alongside their high school classes. By forging stronger school-university partnerships, it is posited that students will be better equipped with the skills necessary to excel in their higher education pursuits and in an increasingly competitive global labor market.

Case

In July, a delegation from the school, including approximately 30 Taiwanese students and 2 staff, embarked upon an initial visit to a new American partner, a large public university in the western United States. Despite the best efforts of the school's Deputy Director and colleagues from the university, unforeseen challenges arose among students due to language and cultural differences that hindered effective communication during this summer program. Many East-Asian students traditionally exhibit a more passive approach to classroom participation than their American counterparts. These differences are often attributed to cultural norms that emphasize respect for authority and deference to educators. This cultural backdrop limited open dialogue and active engagement in collaborative settings. Compounding these issues were varying levels of English proficiency among Taiwanese students, leading to misunderstandings and reluctance to participate fully in open unstructured discussions with their international peers.

In response to these challenges, colleagues from the university quickly implemented strategies to encourage communication. Faculty members facilitated informal one-on-one sessions with students in casual settings outside of regular scheduled program hours. These flexible sessions encouraged open dialogue and provided practical tools for students to navigate cultural differences and express themselves more confidently. The informal approach fostered a low-stress learning environment without the pressure of formal assessments. Additionally, peer mentoring was implemented, pairing American students with Taiwanese students. This contributed to an engaging and supportive environment for cultural immersion, allowing both groups to learn from one another while enhancing their communication skills. These swift adjustments helped create an atmosphere where students felt more comfortable engaging in discussions and sharing their perspectives. As a result, the Taiwanese students demonstrated increased participation and collaboration during the learning experiences that followed.

The outcomes of the study trip, on the whole, were deemed mutually beneficial for the school and university concerned. It was thus decided in August to pursue a dual enrollment model, allowing for high school students in Taiwan to asynchronously participate in an online university program taught by faculty from the United States. While the program offered the opportunity to earn college credits and complete advanced coursework, it also introduced new complications related to online learning. After returning to Taiwan, students were initially excited about this avenue for continued engagement with professors they had interacted with in the United States. However, by October, many students had expressed personal struggles with time management in the asynchronous format of the program. The transition to an online mode of instruction had created feelings of isolation, as students reminisced about the face-to-face interactions that had previously facilitated their learning experiences during the summer program in the US.

In order to address the challenges faced by students, a solution was developed that would allow university courses to be taught locally in Taiwan from January. By delivering the university program in-person, students would benefit from face-to-face instruction, enhancing engagement and facilitating more effective communication. This localized approach is seen as particularly appropriate given the challenges associated with distance learning in the East Asian context, where there has historically been less support for online education. Cultural attitudes often favor the traditional face-to-face education model whilst concerns regarding government accreditation result in skepticism towards asynchronous instruction among students and their parents. Additionally, many students in this demographic face barriers such as inadequate digital infrastructure and varying levels of technological proficiency, hindering effective engagement in online courses. By offering in-person classes taught by qualified international faculty, the program not only addresses these concerns but also provides a familiar and supportive learning environment that aligns with cultural expectations.

Discussion Questions

As you consider this case, discuss:

- In providing learning opportunities for the students and exploring partnership expansion, what did the school and university staff in this case do well? Is there anything that you would recommend they do differently in the future?
- What are the potential benefits and drawbacks of implementing a dual enrollment model for high school students, and how can schools ensure that this model meets both academic and cultural needs?
- What strategies can be implemented to better prepare students for the cultural differences they may encounter when participating in international programs, and how can these strategies be tailored to fit the East Asian context?
- What types of support systems (e.g., mentoring, tutoring) could be established to assist students who may struggle with the demands of advanced coursework in a dual enrollment program?
- In what ways could an international high school and a university in another country benefit from a partnership? Other than dual enrollment, what activities might they partner on?
- How should success be measured in the context of international partnerships, particularly regarding student engagement, academic performance, and intercultural competence?