

The ASEP 2020: The first fully virtual meeting in 21 years

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The ASEP 2020 was the first fully virtual event in the past 21 years due to the Covid-19 pandemic. There had been several concerns before the meeting but it was so well-organized that those concerns turned out to be unnecessary. I would like to appreciate the Education Bureau of Kaohsiung City Government and the host school, Chung-Shan Industrial and Commercial High School for their big effort. I would express my special thanks to Professor Yi-Wei Huang, Dr. Claire Pan, Dr. Jay Lee, and Ms. Alice Chen from Shu-Te University, our new partner that attended the ASEP for the first time for their full support for my students who attended the first virtual international exchange program.

Quite a mixture of cultural backgrounds

My students this year consisted of 12 members from different colleges of Ritsumeikan University, 5 domestic and 7 international students, two from Taiwan, two from Korea, one from China, the US and the UK respectively. They organized 3 groups to be partnered with students from I-Shou and Kansai University, with National San Yat-Sen University and with our new partner, Shu-Te University. The three students from our old partner, I-Shou University, were international students partnered with my students from Taiwan. This means that the groups were all with quite a mixture of cultural backgrounds and they worked across various boundaries.

What was challenging in ASEP 2020

According to the post-class survey, my students faced different challenges. The biggest challenge was setting a meeting schedule convenient for all the members. Each group consisted of 10 members and it was certainly difficult to find time when everyone was available. When someone could not attend the meeting, they shared later their meeting

minutes so that everyone was on the same page and no one was left behind. They also faced quite often network failures and technical problems, and they helped each other to solve the problems. They also faced different barriers of language, culture, communication, and so on. I could have provided them with more icebreaking opportunities to help them know each other before focusing on their projects. Some of them found it difficult to keep motivated themselves and the other members to their joint project. However, they worked hard sometimes at mid-night and accomplished their projects. When recording their presentation, the time limit of 8 minutes was a big challenge for them because there were 10 members in each group and they had a lot of ideas, information and discussion they wanted to present.

What they have learned

The post-class survey also suggests that my students have learned precious things through the online collaboration across national, linguistic and cultural boundaries. The most frequently answered was that they learned teamwork skills and time management skills. They also feel that they have expanded their perspectives not only about their project topics but also about Taiwan. They learned the importance of open-mindedness, interactive communication, active discussion, enthusiasm and consideration for others. Some of them found differences in communication styles, academic skills, cultural values, and so on and they learned from those differences as well.

Conclusion

Fully remote collaboration provided students with a precious platform to work together, learn from each other and build a good collaborative relationship. Although they faced a lot of challenges under the difficult circumstances of the pandemic, they tried really hard to listen to, understand, help and respect each other and learned how they could collaboratively solve problems.