



Learning through an international partnership

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14(?) years ago

- ▶ A story drawing on the Business School's partnership with South China Normal University (SCNU) in Guangzhou.
- ▶ We arrived, chatted, met students, were introduced to local sights and culture. We learned.
 - ▶ The role of parents in decision making
 - ▶ A very different exam system for entry to University
 - ▶ Students seemed very quiet
 - ▶ We started to realise that we had unquestioned priors in our teaching and learning frameworks

Step 1 – 2+2

- ▶ Agreed a 2+2 – 2years in SCNU before moving to Abdn
 - ▶ Needed “decent” year 2 results and English
 - ▶ Awarded a degree from Aberdeen
 - ▶ We would visit SCNU twice a year to engage with the students
- ▶ The students who came to Aberdeen
 - ▶ Had a “special” mentor / tutor, keeping more of an eye
 - ▶ They did ok, adjustment to Abdn and our teaching style seemed tough
 - ▶ Around 20 students per year
- ▶ We also had academic visitors from SCNU

Step 2 – “2”+2

- ▶ The next stage was a “2”+2 where
 - ▶ Higher entry requirement
 - ▶ BS staff travelled to SCNU & taught 1/3rd of Y1 & Y2 courses
 - ▶ We aimed to facilitate learning in an Aberdeen way
 - ▶ Shorter classes, though
 - ▶ We devised a “buddy system” of working alongside an SCNU lecturer on each of our courses Students received an award from both SCNU and Aberdeen
 - ▶ Grown to 80 students in year 1 with around 40-45 both able and deciding to come to Aberdeen
 - ▶ Also teach years 3 & 4 at SCNU to those who don't come

The “buddy” system

- ▶ Originally suggested by SCNU as part of their staff development
- ▶ We wanted it to be seen as equals – hence the “buddy” idea
 - ▶ **Students** - had someone to ask questions to in Chinese
 - ▶ They had less reticence to ask questions to the buddy
 - ▶ **Abdn staff** - someone who stopped us from making cultural /organisational mistake (learned when we got it wrong....)
 - ▶ Much more feedback (eg “talking too fast”) than otherwise
 - ▶ The buddy could “translate” or interpret both ways
 - ▶ **Buddy** - A positive cultural & learning experience for them too
- ▶ It built friendships too

Teaching reflections

- ▶ Teaching in Guangzhou
 - ▶ Attendance is very high!
 - ▶ They are used to full, long days (but with a two hour lunch break)
 - ▶ Finding what made the students laugh took a while....
 - ▶ Before & after the main delivery week, provide online sessions & the buddy would do some face-to-face work
 - ▶ I teach accounting and finance
 - ▶ Takes a while to help them understand that the concepts and words matter at least as much as the numbers
 - ▶ Numbers are derived from frameworks with priors

Reflective conclusions

- ▶ Fortunate to form lasting relationships with people who have stayed in key roles throughout the 14 years.
 - ▶ Development of trust & the ability to say tough things
 - ▶ We listened to **their** understanding of their organisational/ govt changes & sought to find win-wins
- ▶ Students who had met UoA staff, experienced UoA-style teaching seemed to acclimatise better to UK study
 - ▶ Also helped them realise why the English level was so important
- ▶ The alumni in Guangzhou are very proud of their achievement & their relationship with us

An Abdn – SCNU Alumni meet-up



Broader reflections

- ▶ Initial 2 years of the new “2”+2 took some courage
- ▶ Some things are not testable by statistics
 - ▶ Using stories & cases, a good way to learn from successes & mistakes
- ▶ Cultures do not stay the same
 - ▶ Government and organisational priorities also change
 - ▶ Chinese government policy changes were a driver
 - ▶ Migration can widen mindsets and reduce “othering”
- ▶ We state we are an explicitly international university
 - ▶ Changing us as well as changing those who learn from us.
 - ▶ We embrace elements of their cultures as they embrace ours