

Universities and Elementary Schools Co-develop Programs to Revitalize Rural Communities

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In order to ensure the sustainable development of education, culture, and the economy in Taiwan's rural areas, the K-12 Education Administration of the Ministry of Education entrusted National Sun Yat-sen University with leading the Project on the Internationalization and Revitalization of Rural Elementary Schools in Taiwan, which began in the 2019 academic year. The project is currently being implemented in seven rural elementary schools and combines the efforts of ten universities. It aims to help revitalize the rural economy, introduce the concept of regional revitalization based on imagination of the future, and integrate and internationalize unique rural elementary school programs. The project is expected to not only improve the quality of teaching in rural areas, but also gradually form more opportunities for regional revitalization.

According to the K-12 Education Administration, the project is a joint effort between university and elementary school teachers and students. Because the seven rural elementary schools have a unique 3-day/2-night curriculum, university teams designed a sightseeing itinerary for the

surrounding communities that fits local school schedules. The teams have also assisted in marketing local products and scenic locations in hopes that word-of-mouth and community outreach via social media will subsequently bring innovative momentum to these rural economies.

For instance, Hsin Kwang Elementary School, located in the remote Jianshih Township of Hsinchu County, runs a unique program integrating the culture of the indigenous Atayal people. As Jianshih is an Atayal community, the school's teachers use the theme of Atayal life in the 5th and 6th grade curricula in the local Hsin Kwang and Cinsbu areas, integrating math, nature, and social studies with organic farming, forest observation, and Atayal art and culture. The program has provided opportunities for many to learn directly in the community's unique natural environment, and through hands-on experiences, textbook knowledge is taught alongside ancestral wisdom. Students are inspired to imagine their lives 20 years from now and how issues such as preservation of natural ecology will matter in the future, stimulating their interest in learning.

A team from Fu Jen Catholic University supports the regional revitalization of Hsin Kwang by designing an interactive puzzle game which combines the elementary school's unique program with indigenous tourism and Atayal mythology. The game content incorporates various local scenic spots and natural environments, allowing international students and parents to learn more about the Hsin Kwang community and Atayal culture. The team also creates an online tour through LINE, which not only increases player interactivity, but also provides information about the scenic spots in the puzzles and answers questions encountered along the way. In the future, it will also be possible to register for the school's special programs online, making it more convenient for international tourists to visit the Hsin Kwang community.

The K-12 Education Administration also states that this joint project aims to make the curricula of elementary schools in remote areas more interesting and inclusive of the unique characteristics of their communities. It is hoped that more international students will be

interested in participating in these programs in the future and that university teams can work with local residents to set up social enterprises, help transform local industries, and increase economic competitiveness so that they can develop sustainably, forming internationalized cultural hubs.