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Reciprocal learning in teacher education and school education between Canada and China – Chinese and Canadian teacher candidates in face-to-face dialogues: Situating teaching in cultural practices

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Cultural Exchange REB Final Report Summary 2019

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Reciprocal learning in teacher education and school education between Canada and China – Chinese and Canadian teacher candidates in face-to-face dialogues: Situating teaching in cultural practices

New teachers are likely to help shape the curricula of future elementary and high school students. If given opportunities in their own education to consider the importance of globalization and internationalization, then they are more likely to incorporate content, ideas, and skill sets that contextualize and actively explore how and why their teaching practices will be shaped in certain ways. In this research study, we brought together Canadian and Chinese teacher candidates to discuss in person their thoughts and feelings about teaching. Face-to-face conversations allowed for very personable exchanges.

Dr. Shijing Xu is a Canada Research Chair, and alongside her research team, the overall goal of the Partnership Grant Project supported by Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) is to compare and contrast Canadian and Chinese education in such a way that the cultural narratives of each provide frameworks for understanding and appreciating educational similarities and differences. The summarized objectives of this research are (1) to build knowledge and understanding from a cross-cultural perspective, (2) to support new approaches to research on a complex important topic (K-12 education) that relates to societal challenges of improving education in the context of globalization, and of addressing the needs of a culturally diverse school population, and (3) to mobilize knowledge towards professional, policy-maker and public audiences with the aim of social and economic benefit within the global environment. The overall goal centers on reciprocal learning in teacher education and school education between Canada and China. This smaller study was also shaped by Dr. Holloway's interest in multiliteracies theory, and her SSHRC Insight grant funded research entitled "Multiliteracies for adolescents and adults: Teaching and learning literacy in the 21st century."

The research questions for this face-to-face cultural exchange between teacher candidates research study were as follows: (1) In what ways do cultural backgrounds shape distinct or similar views on pedagogy? (2) How did the Chinese and Canadian students feel after having these face-to-face conversations and making personal/professional connections to educators from another part of the world? (3) What insights they may gain into specific forms of pedagogy and classroom norms that they may not have previously considered?

This study utilized Narrative Inquiry to shape the research. Central to this methodology is the question of whose voices get represented and in what ways? Given the purpose of this study is to investigate face-to-face personal stories and interactions between teacher candidates from two distinct cultures, narrative inquiry seems to be the most appropriate methodology to better listen to and understand the participants' perspectives.

During the Canadian academic fall semester of 2016-17, and 2017-18, we designed two face-to-face 2-hour sessions of cultural exchanges between Canadian and Chinese teacher candidates. Each of these sessions in both years was one week apart to allow teacher candidates to have time to reflect upon the experience. The Chinese students were in Canada for three months visiting the University of Windsor as a part of the Reciprocal Learning Program.

Canadian teacher candidates were in the third semester of their two-year Bachelor of Education program. The sessions were designed in a semi-structured way. Teacher candidates entered the room and were directed toward pre-assigned seating in Chinese/Canadian partnerships facing one another across tables. At each table, printed instructions gave students a series of prompt questions (closely mirroring questions we would ask in the follow up interviews). In total, 50 students participated in the research study.

The research is now concluded, and from this data collected, future presentations and publications will be forthcoming.