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Canadian Teacher Candidates' Narratives of Their Cross-Cultural Experiences in China

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Canadian Teacher Candidates' Narratives of Their Cross-Cultural Experiences in China

By

Minghua Wang

A Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies
through the Faculty of Education
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree of Master of Education
at the University of Windsor

Windsor, Ontario, Canada

2015

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December 17, 2015

Declaration of Originality

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Abstract

This is a narrative study, exploring the perspectives of Canadian teacher candidates' cross-cultural learning experiences in China as a result of their involvement in the Reciprocal Learning Program between the University of Windsor in Canada and Southwest University in China. The study builds on my two years of participation as a graduate assistant in the Reciprocal Learning Program, which is part of the SSHRC Partnership Grant Project between Canada and China. This study focuses on five participants' personal and professional understanding of cross-cultural knowledge. Based on Connelly and Clandinin's (1988) narrative inquiry, this study finds some changes from the participants' cross-cultural perspectives. The findings provide insights for developing pre-service teacher education. In addition, the cross-cultural experiences enhanced teacher candidates' motivation to advance their educational careers and will broaden their future students' horizons with a global perspective relevant to the increasingly diverse society in Canada.

Keywords: teacher candidates, reciprocal learning, cross-culture, and narrative inquiry.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Background of the Study

“A journey awaits you. It is one filled with possibility and meaning. It will call you to come to know who you are and where you are going” (Karen Whelan, *Traveler on a Journey*, 1999, p. 20).

My journey began in September 2013 when I came to the University of Windsor in Canada from China to start my graduate studies. As an international student, and being abroad for the first time, I had many assumptions and much curiosity about living and studying in Canada. At that time, I often encouraged myself to see and try as many new things as possible to enrich my experiences to make my overseas study journey meaningful. In order to keep this “original ambition,” in addition to my challenging graduate studies, I applied for a graduate assistantship (GA) in the Faculty of Education, hoping to enhance my studying and working experience on campus. I was very glad and excited to be selected as a graduate assistant for Dr. Shijing Xu’s research program, entitled the *Reciprocal Learning Program*, which is a joint program between the University of Windsor and Southwest University in China. This program, initiated by Dr. Shijing Xu in 2010, is composed of a yearly exchange of teacher candidates between the two universities. In 2013, when I joined the program as one of the graduate assistants, it was a part of Xu and Connelly’s (2013) SSHRC Partnership Grant, entitled *Reciprocal Learning in Teacher Education and School Education between Canada and China*. At first, I did not think about how much I could benefit from the program in terms of my research or studies. I only had the idea that I had to complete my GA tasks. Generally, my job

was to assist Dr. Shijing Xu select Canadian student participants from the pre-service teacher education program at the University of Windsor and then facilitate an exchange trip to China for them. From the first moment I took the position, I was perfectly matched to this program because of my international travel and study experiences between Canada and China. However, during the first couple of months in my new position, I behaved like the “beads on a Chinese abacus,” as the Chinese saying goes. This metaphor describes a person who lacks initiative and creativity, just like the beads on an abacus will not move unless they are pushed. In other words, I was struggling with my tasks as a GA. More often than not, I followed Dr. Xu’s instructions and the program’s schedule, which had been developed by Dr. Xu, faculty members, and graduate assistants from previous years. Sometimes I felt very frustrated and upset about being a passive person in my first campus job. I talked to Dr. Xu, explaining that I did not want to be a “bead on an abacus;” instead, I wanted to participate actively in her program. Luckily, she gave me the best guidance and continued support. For example, she helped me to modify every e-mail message sent to the teacher candidates in our group as my English was not good enough yet. She taught me to observe and then take notes in group planning meetings with our program participants. That is, she showed me that I should divide my notebook into half; one column for note taking; the other for updating comments. This method trained me to have “sharp eyes” for observing and improved my note-taking ability. From time to time, Dr. Xu talked informally with me to discuss some interesting things that had happened in the planning meetings or in our group activities, which inspired me to think about topics that could be related to my research interests. Gradually, as I got to know the history and background of the program, I realized I could build my observation notes and narratives into my thesis research.

My knowledge about this program has improved continually: since 2010, Dr. Xu has run the Reciprocal Learning Program with a group of teacher candidates recruited yearly from the University of Windsor pre-service program as a cohort to take an exchange trip to Chongqing, China. Individual interviews are conducted to select qualified teacher candidates to participate in this program. The teacher candidates are provided with opportunities at the University of Windsor to participate in field trips, which encourage them to interact with Chinese visiting teacher candidates from Southwest University. Weekly planning meetings are held to prepare participants fully for their own exchange trip to China; e.g., preparation of Chinese visa application and the booking of flights, and some basic Chinese lessons are offered at the planning meetings. In addition, they prepared workshops on Canadian education and culture, and rehearsed their presentations in small groups. These activities help the teacher candidates from the University of Windsor to become fully engaged in the program, which maximizes their exposure to the cross-cultural environment.

Since I started helping to coordinate the program, I have had more opportunities to talk to the Canadian teacher candidates, to make sure those who had chosen to participate in this program were suitable for the trip. The more we communicated, the better I got to know them from many aspects such as their initial passion for becoming teachers; their general impressions of China, and the differences and similarities between Chinese and Canadian cultures and school systems; their expectations and ideas about their upcoming trip; and their personal schooling and travel experiences. Along the way, Dr. Xu often talked with me about how to communicate effectively with Canadian teacher candidates, which helped me develop good relationships with the participants.

The program participants also shared with me their challenges with respect to their studies and practicums in their pre-service teacher education program, which reminded me of my studies at a Chinese normal university (a university that aimed to train school teachers). In China, I was a teacher candidate with English as my teaching subject. In my four-year teacher education program, courses such as linguistics, English literacy, and literature were required for English majors. In addition, English teaching strategies and pedagogy were addressed in my elective courses. Furthermore, the culture and history of Western countries were additional required courses. By constantly recalling my school experiences to share with Canadian teacher candidates, I came to understand that, although we were from different cultures, we still had similar desires for acquiring knowledge from different countries to make ourselves qualified for a diverse future teaching environment.

By the end of the first semester of my graduate assistantship, I became very interested in what I had done and learned from the program. I came to understand Dr. Xu's explanation to me at the beginning of my employment about the significance of the program; that is, "misunderstanding and unknowing continue to exist between these two cultures. What we can do is try to build the bridge to connect cultures by improving the school education and teacher education from the cross-cultural perspectives, which in turn, benefits the students with multicultural backgrounds in Canada" (S. J. Xu., personal communication, October, 2013). Later, when preparing the trip with the participants, I came to admire them for having amazing and enriching cross-cultural experiences between Canada and China. I admired the participants in the program got first-hand resources and educational experiences from two countries. To this end, I eagerly sought opportunities to be involved in the Reciprocal Learning Program as a graduate

assistant and also as a graduate student who could conduct my studies in China with a focus on the Canadian teacher candidates.

Doing such a research project seemed difficult in Canada, particularly for me as a novice graduate student without any research experience. In January 2014, I was further involved in the SSHRC Partnership Grant Project to work on the project's Research Ethics Board (REB) application with Dr. Xu and other graduate assistants. During this process, I came to understand the relevant rules and the ethics standards to enhance my research ability.

The overall goal of this SSHRC Partnership Grant Project (Xu & Connelly, 2013) gave me the idea to study the cross-cultural understanding of teacher candidates, which 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” (p. 7). As a result of working on the REB application files, I developed a greater understanding of research ethics, the objectives of the Reciprocal Learning Program and the significance of “providing an exceptional undergraduate educational experience with international engagement to Canadian teacher candidates” (Xu, 2011, as cited in Xu & Connelly, Teacher Education Reciprocal Learning Program REB application, 2014). To this end, I decided to use my first-hand participant observation and experience in the program for my Master's thesis studies with a focus on the personal and professional growth of the Canadian teacher candidates in terms of their enhanced cross-cultural understanding and knowledge.

With a travelling stipend from the program, I made my first visit with a group of 13 Canadian teacher candidates to Southwest University in Chongqing, China during May and June 2014. A one-month experience living and visiting with Canadian teacher candidates at Southwest University and in the Chongqing local schools provided me with valuable insights into the

participants' cross-cultural outlooks and experiences. Also, I was motivated to observe and conduct interviews with some participants as preliminary research for my graduate studies.

Since 2014, in collaboration with the Mitacs Globalink Research Award Canada, Dr. Xu, working with Vice President Shijian Chen from Southwest University and the Dean of Teacher Education Yibing Liu, expanded the program from a one-month exchange trip to a three-month international teaching practicum and research following the Mitacs Globalink Research award requirements. Hence, the University of Windsor teacher candidates and graduate students who participated in the program in the 2014-2015 academic year took a three-month exchange trip to Southwest University and its related local schools from March to June 2015. Dr. Xu and Dr. Bayley selected preliminary applicants to the program through face-to-face interviews and worked with other University of Windsor faculty members (as the host co-supervisors) and professors from Southwest University (as home supervisors) to assist the teacher candidates who applied for the Mitacs Globalink Research award. Of the 25 applicants, 13 pre-service and four graduate students were successful and make the three-month exchange trip.

I obtained my REB approval within the REB protocol of the SSHRC Partnership Grant Project. With the preliminary work I had done for the SSHRC Partnership Grant Project with previous year's group completed, I continued my Master's thesis research with a new group focusing on the Canadian teacher candidates' cross-cultural outlooks and understanding during their three-month visit and international practicum in China.

Purpose of the Study

This study aims to "broaden teacher candidates' horizons for a society of increasing diversity in this interdependent global world" (Xu, 2011, as cited in Xu & Connelly, Teacher

Education Reciprocal Learning Program REB Application, 2014). The primary purpose of the study is to make a narrative inquiry into the Canadian teacher candidates' cross-cultural understanding as a result of their participation in the Reciprocal Learning Program. My aim is to gain some insights into their cross-cultural understanding and experiences so as to make the international exchange trip meaningful to their personal and professional cross-cultural growth.

I believe my findings will contribute to the overall objectives of the larger SSHRC Partnership Grant Project and be valuable for Canadian teacher candidates interested in increasing their cross-cultural experiences and awareness. The findings could also prove beneficial to perspective teacher candidates wanting a similar experience in the future and for enriching pre-service teacher education programs, "as the Canadian society is more and more culturally diverse in this global world" (S. J. Xu., personal communication, October, 2014).

Research Questions

1. How are cross-cultural experiences important to teacher candidates in Canada?
2. What are the implications of cross-cultural experiences to the participants' personal and professional development?
3. How can the cross-cultural understandings of Canadian teacher candidates benefit pre-service teacher education programs?

Significance of the Study

One significant outcome of this study is to show the Reciprocal Learning Program which allows participating teacher candidates to "become more culturally sensitive and more reflective of their own cultural traditions and educational practices" (Howe & Xu, 2013, p. 38). As Xu

(2011) believes that “most of teacher candidates have not experienced in such a dramatic fashion of moving from one country to another with new language and customs” (p. 264), this program between Canada and China is an effective platform to “broaden Canadian student teachers’ horizons when they were taken out of the Eurocentric context of teaching and learning with their eyes opened to the Chinese educational system” (Howe & Xu, 2013, p. 38). In addition, it is important to inquire about the Canadian teacher candidates’ personal beliefs about their cross-cultural experiences in this study. It is significant that their narrative stories and cross-cultural experiences provide possibilities for them to enhance their personal and professional growth, and that this will result in feedback to Canadian pre-service teacher education development from a cross-cultural and multicultural perspective. Clandinin and Connelly (1995) noted that “teachers’ knowledge is that body of convictions and meanings, conscious or unconscious, that have arisen from experience and that are expressed in a person’s practices” (p. 7). It is important for this study to provide recommendations for the participants who became newly-qualified teachers. For example, participants might be open to accept international teaching opportunities for their first teaching job. With this experience in hand, they could broaden their future students’ horizons with a global perspective relevant to an increasingly diverse society in Canada.

Outline of the Study

Chapter 1, the introduction, presented my motivation for conducting this study. Chapter 2, the literature review, describes recent studies related to multicultural education in Canada, study abroad programs for teacher candidates, and the significance of cross-cultural experiences, as well as studies on the emerging international practicum for Canadian teacher candidates. In Chapter 3, narrative inquiry is illustrated as the methodology. In addition, I explain how I used

the research methods to structure interviews with participants, as well as how I recruited participants to collect their narrative stories. Chapters 4 and 5 feature the core narrative stories from my five Canadian teacher candidates. Stories from Chapter 4 were shared by two participants who had been to China in 2014 for a one-month visit. Chapter 5 tells the narratives of three participants who had been to China for three months and were recipients of a Mitacs Globalink Research award. Chapter 6 is the discussion, which focuses on analyzing participants' reflections and narratives as they relate to some educational research issues. The significance of the cross-cultural exchange trip to the teacher candidates is shown in the conclusion. The limitations of this study and next steps to further its inquiry are also discussed there.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Introduction to This Chapter

As this study is contextualized in the Reciprocal Learning Program between the University of Windsor and Southwest University in China, a review of the literature related to this program's development and derivation will be first examined in this chapter. Second, the development of the concept of cross-culture and the cross-cultural enrichment of pre-service teacher education will be discussed. Third, recent studies on international exchange programs for teacher candidates and the significance of study abroad programs to the improvement of multicultural education will be examined to show the importance of cross-cultural experiences to teacher candidates' personal and professional development. Finally, some studies highlighting the valuable role of cross-cultural awareness and experiences in boosting the development of multicultural teacher education in Canada will be examined.

The Reciprocal Learning Program

“Reciprocal learning is the guiding term” (p. 1) for the Reciprocal Learning Program, which plays an important role in the large Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada Partnership Grant Project between Canada and China (Connelly & Xu, 2015). According to Connelly and Xu's (2015) definition, reciprocal learning suggests “two or more parties involved in learning from one another with mutual appreciation, understanding and respect” (p. 1), which is different from the traditional compare-and-contrast of educational settings. When reciprocal learning is in the “context of Canadian and Chinese education, it symbolizes equality

in educational relations between the two societies” (Connelly & Xu, 2015, p. 2). Specifically, reciprocal learning in this study is to “build bridges between East and West through the cross-cultural narratives” (Howe & Xu, 2013, p. 33). In a changing global world with increasing diversity, Xu believes that “teachers play important roles in creating successful futures for both individuals and society” (Howe & Xu, 2013, p. 33). It also has been demonstrated by Trilling and Fadel (2009) that “diverse work teams, scattered around the globe and connected by technology, are becoming the norm for 21st century work; diverse schools and communities are also becoming more common worldwide” (p. 116). In order to prepare students with “rich educational experiences that will enable them to become active citizens in a democratic society” (Noddings, 2005, p. 5), it is important to challenge teachers with a global mindset. This will allow them to prepare inclusive lessons for their students with diverse cultural backgrounds. “It is necessary for teacher education programs to understand how teacher candidates view the world around them to be able to best prepare them to teach with this global teaching perspective” (McGaha & Lindr, 2014, p. 305). To this end, the Reciprocal Learning Program follows the idea that teacher candidates participating in multicultural education curricula will “cultivate open, curious and creative minds... [which] will, in turn, cultivate open, curious, and creative young minds among the generation to come” (Xu & Connelly, 2010, as cited in Xu, 2011, p. 277); as “teachers are role models for new generations and hence are builders of our future” (Xu, 2011, p. 277).

However, it was not easy to approach the idea of reciprocal learning in education between Canada and China in the beginning. In fact, previous studies have pointed out that most of the research in this area has been done in the West investigating international student experiences. Those students usually came from developing countries to study and visit Western

countries. Some studies have thereby been narrowly focused, and have reflected only one side of the study-abroad learning experience. Recently, some research has studied Western students studying in non-Western countries. For example, Mizuno's research (1998) followed a group of American students in Japan. Mizuno (1998) looked at the impact of foreign study on American students in Japan, paying particular attention to the role of foreign cultural exposure prior study abroad at the university level. It also examined the impact of studying abroad on American university students, paying attention to their "cross-cultural experiences in domestic and international settings" (as cited in Lindis et al., 2003, p. 298).

Xu's narrative studies with a focus on newcomer Chinese education in Toronto (Connelly & Xu, 2015; Xu, 2006) argue that "newcomer Chinese brought values and ways of thinking that were educationally useful and important in the Canadian setting" (Connelly & Xu, 2015, p. 2). In addition to Dr. Xu's teaching and research experiences as a member of the Faculty of Education in Canadian and Chinese universities, these studies contributed to the idea of creating an exchange program for teacher candidates between Canada and China. Therefore, the Reciprocal Learning Program has emerged at this pivotal moment; it can also be partly categorized as a study-abroad program for university students in Canada. This study attempts to inquire about Canadian teacher candidates from the University of Windsor studying at Southwest University in China and visiting local Chinese schools. The goal of studying abroad, as stated by Lindisa, J. Bennett, and M. Bennett (2003) is that "the experience [is] to have an impact on students' knowledge base, both on their major area of study and from an international and intercultural dimension" (p. 297). In the program, the Canadian teacher candidates are provided opportunities to study and visit China to experience a different cultural setting and school system, which is in accordance with the Reciprocal Learning Program's goal to "meet the needs for

reciprocal learning between Canada and China” (Xu and Connelly, SSHRC Partnership Grant proposal, 2013; as cited in Xu & Connelly, 2014: Teacher Education Reciprocal Learning Program REB Application, 2014).

Cross-Cultural Experiences

According to the *Cross-Cultural Experience Requirement*, a cross-cultural experience is “a planned and evaluated learning experience that places students in an environment where learning is accomplished through active interaction with a different culture” (Cross-Cultural Experience Requirement, Hanover College). As a Chinese saying goes, it is better to travel ten thousand miles than to read ten thousand books. Cross-cultural experiences and understandings can be gained more effectively by travelling inter-culturally to immerse oneself in the diverse cultural environment; this can take place as the “rapidly changing cultural mosaic of Canadian society enables people to travel and intermix cross-culturally” (Xu, 2011, p. 264).

However, Sleeter’s study (2008) showed that “a majority of pre-service teachers are White, middle class, and monolingual speakers of English with little or no exposure to the diverse backgrounds and cultural knowledge of non-White students” (Sharma, Phillion, & Malewski, 2011, p. 10). Similarly, Xu stated that “what teachers should do to prepare their students for a changing society of increasing diversity in this changing global world seemed to be too distant for them to concern” (Howe & Xu, 2013, p. 38). In most cases, “pre-service teachers do not examine or challenge their own knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, and perspectives toward themselves and diverse cultural groups” (as cited in Sharma et al., 2011, p.10).

However, “growing diasporic populations require teachers to think globally and critically” (Howe & Xu, 2013, p. 35). In recent years, student exchange programs have gained

tremendous importance in terms of training teacher candidates (Delmartino & Beernaert, 1998; Lee, 2009; Unlu, 2015). Through the Reciprocal Learning Program, Canadian teacher candidates from the University of Windsor are placed in a purely Chinese social and cultural environment that is totally different than the Canadian context. Through the cross-cultural visit, the Canadian teacher candidates will cross different ethnic, racial and cultural borders. This is intended to help teacher candidates develop a cross-cultural competence that enables them to interact effectively with their future students in diverse classrooms (McAllister & Irvine, 2000).

Therefore, it is safe to say that “the belief of teacher qualifications and proficiency as a profession, being one of the important elements of the education process, has found itself on the international agenda” (Unlu, 2015, p. 224). In other words, it is important to value and promote opportunities for cross-cultural experiences in pre-service teacher education programs. In order to meet needs of multicultural education, it is necessary to enhance cross-cultural understanding in pre-service teacher education programs. This will improve the teacher candidates’ personal and professional multicultural competence in accordance with multicultural educational beliefs. It is significant to prepare the teacher candidates “to function under changing multicultural conditions and competition have become important aspects in the teacher training process” (Unlu, 2015, p. 224).

Multicultural Education in Canada

When reviewing the literature related to multicultural education in Canada, there are a large number of studies about either school education or teacher education programs across the country; this shows that people are paying increasing attention to multicultural education. It confirms that multicultural education is highly valued in Canada. Numerous studies and statistics

show that Canada has a long history of being a diverse society, with immigrants from across the globe. In 1971, Canada officially became a multicultural society when the government began to recognize the value and dignity of Canadians of all races and ethnic groups, all languages and all religions (Multicultural society, Government of Canada, 2009). Multiculturalism exists in Canada when “people accept and encourage many cultures to thrive in a society” (Multicultural society, Government of Canada, 2009). In practice, since “multiculturalism has been adopted in 1971 in Canada, the multicultural education has been emphasized both in Canadian school education and teacher education program” (Howe & Xu, 2013, p. 40).

According to the multicultural education standards adopted by the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (1977), “a significant percentage of today’s teachers took a required teacher education course in multicultural education when they were in teacher’s college” (Banks, 1993, para. 8). It is considered important for teacher candidates to develop multicultural competencies, such as the ability to question their thoughts, attitudes and perceptions, and to identify various cultural backgrounds (Keengwe, 2010). In order to advance multicultural education development, it is necessary to provide teacher candidates with opportunities to travel overseas to gain personal and professional cross-cultural experiences and to get a first-hand understanding. This can be extremely valuable in developing multiculturalism in both school education and teacher education programs. The Reciprocal Learning Program can offer rich cross-cultural experiences that expose Canadian teacher candidates to diverse classrooms in the Chinese context.

The implications of multiculturalism in Canada are evident in the classroom. However, it has been widely argued that “one of the problems with the multicultural discourse in Canada is that it downplays inequity and often disguises that fact that racism is currently an everyday

reality for many Canadians” (as cited in Mujawarnariya & Mahrouse, 2004, p. 3). “The critiques of multiculturalism have entered into the field of education and have provoked academic debates on various approaches to schooling that best meet the needs of the changing student population” (Mujawarnariya & Mahrouse, 2004, p. 4). Overviews of the multicultural education in Canada show that the official acknowledgment of the needs of students from diverse backgrounds can indeed be traced back to the federal policy on multiculturalism, promoting a different but equal approach to be adopted in schools (Carrington & Bonnett, 1997; Henry et al. 2000; Kehoe, 1994; Lund, 1998; Mujawarnariya & Mahrouse, 2004). As to its application, it is necessary for teacher education programs to “understand how students view the world around them to be able to best prepare them to teach with this global teaching perspective” (McGaha & Lindr, 2014, p. 305). A number of studies show that teacher education programs in Canada pay increasing attention to multicultural courses or diverse cultural curricula. It is through the diverse multicultural curricula in teacher education programs that “teacher candidates can then begin to explore the processes of knowledge production that sustain the power of certain groups over others” (Mujawarnariva & Mahrouse, 2004, p. 4). To this end, it is essential that teachers are able to teach effectively with a global perspective in a world characterized by interconnections and interdependence (McGaha & Linder, 2014). This is in accordance with the belief held by Mujawarnariva and Mahrouse (2004) that “it is only when teacher candidates become aware of such issues of multicultural power that we can expect our education system to become equitable” (p. 5).

Teacher Education Study-Abroad Programs

Cross-cultural experiences may be beneficial to the future teaching careers of the teacher candidates. In addition, those experiences may influence the teacher education

development. In the end, “pre-service teacher candidates will in turn cultivate open, curious, and creative young minds among the generations to come” (Xu & Connelly, 2010; as cited in Xu, 2011, p. 277). Connelly and Clandinin (1988) stated that “we understand how educators may revolutionize their practices through reflection on their own experiences and new ideas, and how they can transform new ideas into power curriculum programs through this reflective process” (p. 253). In order to be effective with diverse students under the context of globalization, it is crucial to encourage and support teacher candidates to have cross-cultural experiences and minds, while first recognizing and understanding their own world views (Bennett, 1993). This may cater to teacher education development; that is, illustrate the significant contribution of multicultural and inclusive ideas to teacher candidates’ academic and professional development in a multicultural society.

Meanwhile, Byram and Feng (2006) state that “with fast-developing phenomenon of studying abroad, travel becomes part of the lives of many young people of university age, and of the majority of those living in developed and wealthy countries” (p. 1). This makes cross-cultural experience easier to acquire for Canadians in particular. Canadian universities are increasing the number of study-abroad opportunities for students. This increase is based on the perception of beneficial academic, personal and career outcomes coming from the study-abroad programs (Shougee, 1999). While most literature related to cross-cultural experience generally deals with the experience of longer stays abroad, the “growing popularity of programs that involves shorter stays has been ignored by the researcher” (Jackson, 2006, p. 134). Admittedly, “year-around cross cultural visiting and experience may provide further evidence of gains in terms of cognitive and affective development and intercultural skills” (Byram & Feng, 2006, p. 4). However, the gains in short stays could be further enhanced with appropriate cross-cultural

communication and pedagogical interventions. Byram and Feng (2006) believe that “cross-cultural visiting is more likely to change people significantly, and give them an educational experience of other countries which will be more intense and enriching” (p. 1).

The impact of study-abroad programs shows a deeper understanding of the role of diverse cultures and the different languages of teaching and learning. After studying abroad, teacher candidates were more willing to work in diverse classrooms. That is to say, after experience in two countries (Canada and China) with two distinctive educational systems through the Reciprocal Learning Program, Canadian teacher candidates may advance their pedagogy by reflecting on their cross-cultural experiences in China. A few studies have noted that studying abroad fosters greater confidence, open-mindedness and an ability to see the local and global in context, and evokes self-critique and critical reflection (Cushner & Mahon, 2009). Therefore, it is safe to believe that cross-cultural experience is essential and important to teacher candidates within the context of globalization.

The Significance of International Practicums to Teacher Candidates

International teaching experiences have also been found to increase tolerance and respect for others, and to contribute to personal development (Hull, 1974; Maynes, Allison, & Julien-Schultz, 2012; Mwebi & Brigham, 2009). The experiences “strive to provide opportunities for deeper understanding of and reflection on the world, and create global-mindedness among the teacher candidates” (Maynes et al., 2012, p. 72). Teacher candidates need to be aware of the cultural component of what they do (as cited in Maynes et al., 2012), “particularly in contexts different from their ‘home’ university or ‘home’ teaching environment” (Maynes et al., 2012, p. 72).

Teaching practicum in a developing country such as China is different from the practicum in Canada. Grove (1980) described this difference (Maynes et al., 2012) as “trying to create a feeling, an identity with the total world community and a desire for diversity in personal relationships” (p. 72). Many international teaching experiences set a goal that teacher candidates’ understandings will change or increase through exposure to other cultures (Korsgaard, 1971; Maynes et al., 2012). To this end, teacher candidates will be better prepared to work in multicultural classrooms after an international teaching experience (Maynes et al., 2012; R. Baker & Giachhino, 2000).

Cross-cultural experience allows teacher candidates to learn deeply about a culture through immersion in an international practicum that includes significant, direct personal interaction within the culture (Brislin & Cushner, 1996; Maynes et al., 2012). Researchers have identified this outcome as a result of international teacher candidates’ experiences abroad. “Goals such as expanding world horizons, increased world-mindedness, and better classroom teaching upon returning home are common outcomes of such programs” (as cited in Maynes, 2012, p. 72). The teaching cohort in most countries is made up of a majority of candidates from the dominant culture. They “bring with them a series of school practices embedded in their own cultural beliefs and their own experiences as students” (as cited in Maynes, 2012, p. 72). The international practicum offered by the Reciprocal Learning Program is an opportunity to increase exposure to a different and diverse teaching environment. It will better prepare Canadian teacher candidates to acquire strengths from both systems that they can, in turn, use in their future multicultural classrooms in Canada.

Chapter 3

Methodology

Introduction to This Chapter

As an international student from China, I have a tradition of family values through which I recognize that I belong to an “academic family.” An academic family refers to a group that involves graduate students and their shared supervisor. Those students who are supervised by the same professor will become “academic brothers or sisters.” Bearing this in mind, I got to know Ju, Xuan and Nesreen. They were all Ph.D. students supervised by Dr. Xu. They often involved me in their email correspondence and meetings to talk about their recent studies and research development. By listening to them, I became hooked in their narrative studies. After Dr. Xu and one of my academic sisters, Xuan, shared their doctoral dissertation and Master’s dissertation with me, I became interested in the word “narratives.” During my graduate studies, I was so attracted by their writings centred upon their participants’ shared narratives and stories. I had never thought that making meaning of one’s experience and stories as a way of doing research. In addition, as one of the graduate assistants in the program, I had many opportunities to work with Dr. Xu, other faculty members and my peers. I developed a note-taking habit for program events and activities. I became interested in listening to stories and experiences of others. New ideas and thoughts on my own research often arose when working in the program. Therefore, narrative inquiry as a methodology (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990) came to be my choice for this study.

In this chapter, I will define narrative inquiry, present a rationale for choosing this methodology, and outline the procedures used to complete this investigation.

What is Narrative Inquiry

Clandinin, Pusher and Orr (2007) clarified that “marking the territory of narrative inquiry first, since narrative inquiry is not simply another in a cadre of qualitative research strategies” (p. 7) is critical. This implies that “the growth of narrative inquiry amidst the growth of qualitative inquiry has given rise to abstract boundaries” (as cited in Xu & Connelly, 2010, p. 359). To distinguish between qualitative research and narrative inquiry, Clandinin et al. provided clear boundaries between them:

Qualitative researchers analyze data using words, often collecting or constructing stories about those they are studying. But there are territorial markings that distinguish narrative researchers... What narrative researchers hold in common is the study of stories, narratives or descriptions of a series of events. (Clandinin et al., 2007, p. 4)

Regarding the definition, Xu and Connelly point out that *narrative inquiry*, as developed in Connelly and Clandinin’s work (1990, p. 2), is “a rapidly developing social sciences and humanities research methodology” (Xu & Connelly, 2010, p. 349). “In essence, narrative inquiry involves the reconstruction of a person’s experience in relationship both to the other and to a social milieu” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 125). Narrative inquiry begins when experience as expressed as “lived and told stories” (Clandinin et al., 2007, p. 4). Narrative inquiry is not only telling stories. It is “a way of thinking about life” (Xu & Connelly, 2009, p. 221; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, 2005). Xu and Connelly have already clarified the differences between narrative inquiry and storytelling in their studies (2010). They point out that “story is not so much a structured answer to a question, or a way of accounting for actions and events, as it is a gateway, a portal, for narrative inquiry into meaning and significance” (p. 356). Also, narrative inquiry is “a conception of the phenomenal world in which experience is mediated by story” (Xu & Connelly, 2009, p. 221). However, in narrative

studies, Xu (2015) believes that “there have been discussions about the tension between the need to be fully involved in the experience studied while still keeping relational distance” (p. 136).

In order to better understand the “lived and told stories” (as cited in Clandinin, 2007, p. 4) in narrative inquiry, I tried to study and understand the experiences of this study. Xu (2015) discusses the research boundaries and consideration in cross-cultural narrative inquiry and states that “researchers cannot truly understand the lives explored unless they become fully involved in the experience studied” (as cited in Xu, 2015, p. 136). Connelly and Clandinin (1988) pointed out that “people make sense of learning in relation to their own experiences, both past and present their beliefs about education, their present needs within a particular situation, and their hopes for the future” (p. 243). In other words, with a narrative inquiry approach, it was possible to explore the Canadian teacher candidates’ narratives about their past and growing educational background. Besides, it was meaningful to connect with them to examine their cross-cultural experiences in the current situation. Also, their stories might reflect their future pursuits. In the movement toward a narrative inquiry approach to teacher candidates’ cross-cultural experience, it was necessary to start with learning to “think narratively” (Xu & Connelly, 2009, p. 223; Connelly & Clandinin, 2005). Changing one’s way of thinking is essential to approach narrative inquiry because “thinking narratively is first and foremost an imaginative act of the mind for researchers” (Xu & Connelly, 2010, p. 357).

In this study, although the participants were from the same pre-service teacher education program, they all had their own diverse schooling and parenting backgrounds. It has been stated that “every learning situation is influenced by prior experiences” (Shougee, 1999, p. 35). All the participants held different understandings and ambitions when they joined the program. They also had individual unique experiences while they were in China. Connelly and

Clandinin's (1998) "personal curriculum" (p. 25) illustrates how prior experiences relate to present learning situations. They say that "narrative" is the "study of how humans make meaning of experience by endlessly telling and retelling stories about themselves that both refigure the past and create purpose in the future" (p. 25). Using narrative inquiry as my methodology to observe and conduct interviews with participants, I got to know the participants' stories as they reflected upon the significance of their cross-cultural experiences.

Research Procedure

Since September 2013, I have been a team member of the Reciprocal Learning Planning Team, made up of Dr. Xu, graduate assistants, and faculty members who are involved in the program. Since 2014, our planning team has involved Dr. Jonathan Bayley to recruit a new group of applicants from the pre-service program and graduate students. We have developed many reciprocal learning activities to promote the program among teacher candidates in the Faculty of Education. For example, we designed program posters, distributed information flyers to advertise the program during the orientation period (with voluntary help from program alumni), we organized introductory workshops for teacher candidates, (encouraging them to join), and interviewed program applicants to select participants to go to China. The planning team facilitated well to ensure the program could get the best participants. The program coordinator and faculty reviewed student Mitacs Globalink Research applicants. The supervisors and the graduate assistants from both the University of Windsor and Southwest University made significant efforts to ensure the new group could make the three-month visit happen at Southwest University.

Before departure, weekly meetings were planned by Dr. Xu and Dr. Bayley so that the Canadian Bachelor of Education students could meet and prepare for their trip to China. Over the planning meetings, we organized the participants to discuss many educational issues with Canadian features and conducted team spirit-building activities for participants to get used to living and studying as a group in China. The group preparation kept the participants actively involved in the program once a week. The planning meetings included learning basic Chinese phrases, a video introduction to Chinese food and cultures, and the preparation of mini workshops on various topics to introduce Canada and Canadian educational issues to the students and professors at Southwest University. Close to the departure date, participants brainstormed gift ideas, and prepared the gifts for the trip. As a team, we also shared skills on packing luggage for this extended visit.

Similar to the airline slogan that the journey begins in flight with route-inspired dishes, I believe our cross-cultural experiences started with boarding the flight. We chose to have route-inspired dishes such as authentic Chinese food on our flight to Beijing. During our stay, we enjoyed a tour of Beijing first to get a first and general impression of China and some representative Chinese cultures; then we travelled to and studied at Southwest University in Chongqing, which is a 2.5-hour flight away from Beijing.

The visiting Canadian teacher candidates received strong support from the professors and students at Southwest University who were involved in the program. Their hospitality was as enthusiastic as the flavour in their local Sichuan food, well-known for being ‘hot and spicy,’ as Sichuan cuisine is famous for oily, numbing peppers, chilies, and all kinds of peppers and garlic. The Southwest University team organized many reciprocal learning activities to enrich the teacher candidates’ living and studying experiences in China, including arranging for them to

visit and observe elementary and secondary schools to get to know the basic education system in China; offering lectures to illustrate the educational issues and development in China; also, offering many lessons and Chinese cultural salons in areas such as Chinese calligraphy and painting, Chinese Kung Fu lessons, a demonstration of traditional Chinese music instruments, and a tea ceremony to show Chinese history and the different authentic cultures.

Participants

In this study, I will present narratives and field notes of five participants on their cross-cultural visiting experiences in China. Throughout my two-year participation in the program, I accompanied and followed up with two groups of Canadian teacher candidates to Southwest University. I believe that all the preparation work and the enriched trip itself bonded the Canadian teacher candidates and me tightly.

My first visit to Southwest University with the group was in May and June 2014. In March-June 2015, with a research award from Mitacs, I made my second visit to Chongqing with a different group. Both groups of participants have been called a “big family” with “brothers and sisters.” Some participants joined the Reciprocal Learning alumni group to share cross-cultural educational experiences, and volunteer with the new group of teacher candidates within the program.

In my study, two participants are from the 2014 group, two from the 2015 group, and one made the visit to China twice through the program. In total, five participants shared their cross-cultural visiting experiences and stories. A friendly and trusting relationship was established as we had experienced and shared the trip as the group. At the beginning, I had a hard time selecting participants from the program for my study, as there were 16 Canadian teacher

candidates in the program in 2014; also there were 13 teacher candidates and four graduate students in the 2015 group. I followed Dr. Xu's advice on choosing to follow five participants in particular while keeping in mind the big picture and all the field work of the program when I continued my graduate assistant work as well as taking field notes.

Research Methods

Being involved in Xu and Connelly's (2013) SSHRC Partnership Grant Project, I have learned about the research ethics standards. I have reviewed the research methods in the larger SSHRC project, which include observation, individual interviews, and focus group interviews, adopted by Xu and Connelly (2013) to implement a "narrative way of thinking" (Xu & Connelly 2009, Connelly & Clandinin, 2005) for testing frameworks to understand and appreciate educational similarities and differences between Canada and China (Xu & Connelly, 2014, Teacher Education Reciprocal Learning Program REB application, 2014). For the research methods in my study, I adopted similar research methods to those used in the SSHRC Partnership Grant Project; namely, participant observation, field notes, and individual interviews.

Participant observation

According to Xu and Connelly (2013), observation is "one of the research methods used to discover how Canadian student participants react and respond during their class/school visits in China [due to the fact] that the educational system is different from Canada" (Xu & Connelly, 2014, Teacher Education Reciprocal Learning Program REB application, 2014). As a GA for the Reciprocal Learning Program, I accompanied the two groups of University of Windsor teacher candidates, including my study participants, on their trip to China. Therefore, one of my research methods was the participant observation.

Participant observation is defined as one type of data collection methods, which is often used in the qualitative studies. Berg (2007) stated that participant observation aims to gain a close and intimate familiarity with a group of individuals through an intensive involvement with people. My participant observation includes how participants reacted and responded during their stay in China, such as during their visits and teaching demonstrations in the elementary and secondary schools in Chongqing, and during their participation in reciprocal learning cultural activities prepared by Southwest University. As a result of my involvement in the program, I developed close working relationship with these two groups and with my five participants in particular.

Fieldnotes

I initially learned from Dr. Xu to develop the habit of recording events and activities for the Reciprocal Learning Program. After focusing on my interest in the cross-cultural understanding and development of Canadian teacher candidates, I followed Dr. Xu's advice to observe and take field notes of our planning meetings and some informal communications before the trip. I began taking my field notes using a "report" style, not a story with interesting plots. She suggested that I note the time, location, or even someone's facial expression, gestures or any kind of episodes that occurred in every event. "The field notes are not a transcription from the recorder; instead, they should be like a video, showing details from the camera" (S. J. Xu, personal communication, November, 2013). With constant review of my notes, my "reports" gradually transitioned into field notes. In this way, the field notes could be valuable and help me "think narratively" (S. J. Xu, personal communication, November, 2013). In this study, field notes were analyzed to construct narratives from the participants. This would best show how people make meaning of experience by telling and retelling stories about themselves that refigure

the past and create purpose in the future (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988). As this study is part of the Reciprocal Learning Program, I was able to build my thesis work on what I had been doing for the program. Therefore, I took advantage of the field notes I wrote for the program to develop a narrative way of thinking about experiences and stories in this thesis.

Individual interviews

In-depth interviews were employed as another research method to collect field notes as discussed by Clandinin and Connelly (2000). Built on the interview guidance for the program, I revised some interview questions based on participants' individual situations and interactions with me. The purpose of individual interviews was to understand the participants' narratives, thoughts and reflections on their trip to China, as well as reflections of their cross-cultural learning experience in China and how it influenced their personal and professional cross-cultural development. Individual interviews with open-ended questions were conducted before or/and after the trip.

After obtaining their consent, I used semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions to interview my five participants. I conducted interviews in Canada and in China where the participants felt comfortable and were available, such as the program's office at the University of Windsor, Skype voice-calling for long-distance interviews or in our residence room at Southwest University. Each interview lasted around 40 minutes and was conducted in English. During the interview, I first proposed some questions and had casual conversations in order to trigger the participants' memories of their experience in Chongqing. Then I asked them to share their narratives with me, including their narratives on the significance of this trip. When I could not do in-person interviews, I used social media such as Skype and WeChat to connect

with participants. All the responses from my participants were respected and valued. After the interviews, the transcripts were sent back to the participants for revision and member-checking.

I am lucky and honoured to have the dual roles of researcher and participant in the program. As my research is situated in the Reciprocal Learning Program, it allows me to approach my participants by building on the well-developed relationship through their participation in this program. Under its umbrella, I am never worried about approaching the participants for my study. During my research phase, I could always observe their most natural reflections. When interviewing my participants, however, I am struggled with different backgrounds of cross-cultural understandings. For example, coming from a different cultural background myself, I realized I had to spend a lot of time with my participants, asking them to explain in detail various cultural or social terms and expressions during the interviews. Also, I found my participants were hesitant to share their comments with me regarding their experiences. Before answering my questions, they usually started with “no offence to you” or “I hope you don’t mind.” The relationship between us is rooted in the research tradition that “many researchers are often placed in a socially privileged position in relation to their non-white research participants” (Juntrasook, 2015, p. 7). Being a Chinese, I interviewed a group of Canadian teacher candidates. I did not experience any prejudiced feedback from my participants. On the contrary, we were “reciprocally learning” from each other: they told me about current educational issues in Ontario, and I shared my schooling and Chinese cultural understandings with them.

Chapters 4 and 5 of this thesis contain core stories from the participants in this study. I would like to reveal their real living and visiting experiences in China, which will provide

readers with an overview of cross-cultural living in China, and allow them to formulate their own ideas and impressions.

Chapter 4

Thirty-Two Days in China

Introduction to This Chapter

In this chapter, Feng and Sherry shared stories and experiences regarding their cross-cultural communications through participation in the Reciprocal Learning Program. As participants involved in the program, Feng, Sherry and 14 Canadian teacher candidates stayed in China from May 4th to June 5th 2014 for 32 days. During the stay, they booked a four-day group tour of Beijing at the beginning of their trip, and participated in many activities and events at Southwest University, such as observing college courses, offering workshops, participating in Chinese cultural lessons and visiting the local primary and secondary schools.

Feng's Stories

“I am Chinese!”

Often a person's name can suggest a cultural background or heritage. For example, the full name Feng Sun might be related to a Chinese background. Feng was born in China. When he was nine years old, he immigrated with his parents to Canada. He and his parents had been living in the Toronto area for over 13 years. He returns to China every few years, particularly the northeast part of China, to see his extended family. Feng had his kindergarten to Grade 3 schooling in China; then did Grade 4 to university in Toronto, Canada. He graduated from the University of Toronto with a double major in Mathematics and English. Then he moved to Windsor in 2013, studying and living by himself to get his Bachelor of Education degree with

two teachable subjects (Mathematics and English) in the I/S division of the Faculty of Education at the University of Windsor.

The first time I met Feng Sun was at the program orientation in early September 2013. While he was looking at the program recruitment poster, he was kind enough to help me set up and decorate the classroom with program banners and brochures. Since I had a sense of familiarity when looking at his Asian features, I asked him whether he was from Asia as well. He responded, “I am a Chinese; well, a Canadian-Chinese” in English; then he started to speak Mandarin to introduce himself. “My name is Sun, Feng. I prefer keeping my Chinese name which has meaning for me. I adopted an additional name, Fen, as that is easier for people in Canada to use or pronounce.” To prove his “full ability” in Chinese, he read our bilingual program in Chinese to show that he recognized Chinese characters (Field notes, September 2013).

“Free trip back to China?”

Considering Feng’s Chinese background, Dr. Xu had concerns at the beginning that he might use this as a fun trip or that a cross-cultural visit might not have any impact on him since he knew about China, including many aspects such as language, culture, school setting and education system. However, he attended every single planning meeting and helped within the group. Before our departure, Dr. Xu held a planning meeting once a week to help the group prepare for their visit. Tasks included guiding the student participants to apply for their Chinese visas; teaching basic Chinese; and brainstorming workshop ideas and preparing presentations. Those tasks sound like they would be easy; in fact, they were quite challenging for me the first time as the GA. However, Feng helped me in the planning meetings. When we were teaching Chinese, he was quite cooperative and serious about learning and repeating every single Chinese word with the rest of group. Regarding the Chinese visa application, he used his experience to

pay attention to all the details. He was helpful with the Chinese visa application due to my careless and miscalculation of the answer to “how many days will you stay in China?” on the application form. Feng spoke up: “it is 32 days to stay in China, not a month! One month is only 30 days. You have to ask everyone to put 32 days in order to make sure we can stay enough days legally; otherwise, the group would be in trouble”. (Field notes, November 2013)

I asked Feng why he joined this program instead of another to go to a different country. At the time, I believe the Mandarin lessons we taught or the preparation work we had done over the planning meetings might bore for him since he was fluent in the language. After our planning meeting, he explained:

“I am familiar with China; but I have never been to the southern part of China. I am from Changchun, northeast part of China. I only went back to Changchun to see my families; my grandparents, cousins, relatives, three times so far. I went to Beijing for travelling when I was very little. I would like to see how the university education differs from Canada. I am also interested in learning about the different customs that may exist in the south.” (Field notes, October 2013)

When we were in China, I found another reason why he chose to come to Southwest University when I read his first journal of the portfolio that was submitted to the program. He wrote:

“I heard that the southern parts are hot and humid so I thought that there would be more food that aims to cool down the body; however the main food over there is spicy and hot. I want to experience their logic that by sweating more, it regulates the body temperature better instead of cooling the body.” (Feng’s Portfolio, p. 2, June 2014)

During his stay in China, Feng showed his language talents in Chinese and English when he voluntarily helped everyone who had a language barrier within the group. I frequently asked Feng to join every translation session for our entire group. I never thought he would value his translation experience. He wrote his narratives in the portfolio:

“When we first arrived in China, I felt comfortable and blended easily into the environment, due to my heritage. I understood the Chinese language and although I have forgotten some of the phrases or expressions, communicating with the people around me was easy. The language barrier created a great inconvenience for the group and made everyday activities difficult. The need for a translator had been shown to be so important in everyday activity. It was an interesting experience as I did not expect to become one of the translators during the trip. I was asked by my fellow teacher candidates to translate for them to order food or to communicate with others. I saw the confused and troubled looks on their faces when they couldn’t understand what the people were trying to say to them. Besides, as one of the translators of the group, I had to split from the group from time to time to attend to some translations. One of the times was to attend Dr. Ezeife’s (another guide teacher in the group) presentation on his mathematical findings. Dr. Ezeife was invited by the professors and students from the math department to show his mathematics findings from his past projects and experiments.” (Feng’s Portfolio, p. 16, June 2014)

“I am a special guest from afar!”

Before heading to Southwest University, the group was treated to a tour of Beijing from May 6th to 9th, 2014. The tour has many benefits. It allows the group to adjust to the jetlag of 12 hours difference, to get to know each other, to create closeness and unity, and to have a first

impression of Chinese culture. Although it is tiring to tour major attractions in Beijing (e.g., Tiananmen Square, the Summer Palace, the Forbidden City, and the Great Wall) with jetlag, we got first-hand experience of Chinese culture and history. Although Feng emigrated from China to Canada, I was surprised to see some of his unexpected responses. He commented that he experienced differences such as lifestyle, the way meals were served, and the different interpersonal relationships since the first day in China:

“Although the drivers are aggressive and do not follow the lanes, there are not as many collisions as there are in Canada. I found it surprising that the drivers can communicate efficiently using only their horns. They do watch for the pedestrians and have excellent parking skills (some come close to about a few centimeters). Despite this fact, there are hardly any traffic accidents, people being hit or run over, or hit and runs. The drivers can not only drive fast enough from one location to the other, they can expertly avoid the other cars while making sure they are not driving on the sidewalks.” (Feng’s Portfolio, p. 4, June 2014)

“Another major difference is the way meal is served. In the Western culture, when we ordered meals in Canada, we each other order our individual dishes and meal combos. This creates a sense of individuality and self-reliance. However, in China, during the tour, the traditional meals are served family style. The dishes are shared among all the guests at the round table. The guests would eat from the same dishes and talk to each other during the meals. This in turn creates a sense of unity. “Go Dutch” is not common in China. People like to be friendly-aggressive to pay the bills in order to show kindness and hospitality. So the differences originate mostly from the Western ideal of independence and the Eastern ideal of community.” (Feng’s Portfolio, p. 5, June 2014)

When we started visiting in Chongqing, we were warmly received by our Chinese buddies and professors. The next day in Southwest University was the official welcoming ceremony by the university president, professors and students. They were wonderfully hospitable and warm. They made us feel like honoured guests and regarded us with respect. However, Feng as a Chinese/Canadian student did not expect to be received as warmly as the Canadian students. He was surprised and pleased that he could also be treated as a special guest while he was at Southwest University. He said:

“I remembered the first night when we landed in Chongqing, starting from the airport; we received a warm welcome from some of our buddies from Southwest University. The buddies not only provided us with lodging the luggage with coach bus transportation, they also brought local fruits as gifts for us to enjoy. When we later on arrived at Gui Hotel at the Southwest University, we were again greeted by a wave of warmth from their guide teachers and the rest of the buddies. They helped us carry our luggage to our rooms and set up Wi-Fi. They also were very considerate with preparing some fruits, milk, and Chinese pastries at each room. Their hospitality made the tiresome flight seem so distant and their nice gesture cooled our mind from the blazing heat.” (Conservation with Feng, May 2014)

Later on, he added a journal entry in his portfolio about his understanding of a special guest from afar:

“After a short break, the Southwest University prepared seats for us to attend a wonderful music concert on the first night that we arrived. The only problem with the arrangement was that the seats were reserved last minute because our host team was unsure whether our group could arrive at the concert on time without any flight delay or the jammed local

traffic. So there weren't enough seats for us and our SWU student buddies. In Canada, if you were invited to attend a concert, this thing would not happen. This created a dilemma amongst our group. I know it is the Chinese custom to treat the guests, especially guests from a distance, with honor and respect; therefore the SWU buddies stood or shared seats while we each got our own. However, this made us uncomfortable. We did not regard ourselves to be different from the SWU students, as Canadians, we want to be treated the same as them. Yet, we don't know who we need to talk to solve this problem; also as the newcomers in the university, we did not know whether we should share seats or stand, or follow the custom and remain seated in our own seats." (Portfolio, p. 5, June 2014)

"I was scared to face my teachers in China"

Feng attended school in China before he came to Canada. After he started his schooling in Canada, he never had the chance to go back to school in China. He had many impressions of what a school looks like in China. After a planning meeting before the trip, he had the following to say of his Chinese school experience:

"Minghua, you finished your 12 years education and graduated from a university in China. Have you ever had the sense of scariness from your teachers when you were at school? I took courses until Grade 3 before I came to Canada. When I was in China, I learned pinyin [Chinese pronunciation rules] and most of the characters. I memorized all the mathematics calculation rules. I wanted to be a good student at school to follow my teachers' instructions, and handed in my homework on time. However, I was a little bit scared to face my teachers in school for no reason." (Field notes, November 2013)

On May 12th 2014, Monday, our group visited a primary school close to Southwest University. Since this was our first time visiting a local school as the group of teacher candidates

from the University of Windsor, we were looking forward to this visit. We dressed up professionally to look like teachers in the early morning of that day. We gathered at our residence's lobby and walked with our SWU buddies to go there. Chongqing is known for "up and down" geographic landscape. Local people call Chongqing "A Mountain City." I preferred to name it "a city with numerous stairs." Wearing high heels and a nice suit, the 10-minute climb to the school seemed to be quite challenging for the Canadians. Plus, it also took longer for a group to walk on the street. By the time we arrived at the school, the students had already started their first class. That is to say, we missed their National Flag Raising Ceremony that happens every Monday morning. We did not want to miss other sessions in a regular school day. After a short introduction by the principal, some lead teachers showed us around the campus, giving us an opportunity to visit specific classes. It was by chance that we observed an English class. We did not want to interrupt their regular class. We crowded in the back door to see how an English teacher in Grade 3 conducted the lesson. The English teacher was very energetic about teaching the class the word "beautiful" in English. She was dancing among the students, repeating "beautiful" in different ways, letting students to practice saying the word in English, and encouraging the students to use "beautiful" to describe objects in the classroom. Our group could not stop taking photos and videotaping her class at that time. (Field notes, May 2014)

After the first day of the school visit, Dr. Xu held a debriefing meeting among the group, asking everyone to share the visiting experience. Feng favoured that "beautiful" English teaching class. He commented:

"I found this experience was completely different from the Canadian elementary school. In China, the students were not only attentive and actively participating in classroom activities; they were so respectful to each other and teachers. From my own practicum

experience in Windsor, it was a task to get all the students on task and listen to instructions. The students were disruptive and they did not care about the consequences. They lacked a sense of discipline as there is a missing gap between the parents' attitudes towards students' success and the school's expectations. There needs to be a way to re-establish such as a bridge so that the students realize how important education is to their future." (Debriefing field notes, May 2014)

Feng continued his description of this classroom observation in his portfolio:

"The English class we observed is quite different than what I expected. The teacher did not use textbooks to make the students memorize lines or words. She used gestures and student involvement to get to them to remember the meaning of the word "beautiful". The students actively participated through volunteering and repeating the actions and words in the classroom. The teacher created an educational environment that was safe and fun for the students; probably that is one of the best ways to teach a foreign language to the students in China." (Portfolio, p. 8, June 2014)

After a year back from China, Feng still had profound memories of that "beautiful" English class in the primary school in Chongqing. During an interview after his return to Canada, he was asked to describe what most impressed him during his stay in China. Feng suggested that we should call that class "the best English class of 2014." He said:

"I remember there was one teacher we met over that "beautiful" class. She had so much energy and passion, and every student was smiling. They were laughing, and they were involved. I see a lot of teachers in Windsor just don't have that kind of energy. They hid it, lost it, or never had it to begin with; because the students fed of that [sic]. It is lucky to have that class over here in Canada." (Interview with Feng, January 2015)

School education in China has been changing and being updated. I believe that what Feng observed in local schools was a brand new experience for him although he had gone to schools in China. He described his observation as:

“In my original philosophy, I focus more on the friendly version of the teachers. I wanted to create a friendly environment for my future students. My main goal is to create a nice environment for the students so they can learn while having fun and relax. They should not fear to learn but enjoy and come to school. What I learned in China is to focus more on the disciplinary issue instead of the content, speed, or environment of the classroom. The students should be involved in the learning process since the goal is not to create a nice environment for the teachers but to create an educational environment for the students. I think that it needs the additional Chinese philosophy in my own as the old teachings would be useful in the modern time because it allows the students to learn from the ancient times and the modern philosophy.” (Feng’s Portfolio, p. 18, June 2014)

During the interview with Feng, he continued explaining his teaching philosophy:

“When I was in China for school, I had the sense of the teacher’s authority; the teachers used to be very strict in many aspects. Since I came to Canada, I never had the chance to go back to see what are the changes for the schools in China. Through this program, I got opportunities to visit the local schools in Chongqing. What I loved is the friendliness of the teachers in China, which is totally different than before. They not only want to teach the students, they were as eager as the students to create a learning environment that was enjoyable by all. The group mentality at the beginning of the school day and the fact that students are divided into groups responsible for each other made discipline extremely easy. If this system was implemented into the Canadian system, then the time spent on

disciplinary actions will be reduced. There are major differences I found in the Canadian and the Chinese education systems as well as the teaching style. Through the differences we could create a better education style that could better accommodate the students with different backgrounds and embody the modern technologies.” (Interview with Feng, January 2015)

Sherry’s Cross-Cultural Experiences

“Five-hundred years ago, we were one family!”

It might be hard to imagine making friends at first sight. However, this happened when I met Sherry. When I first learned her name as Sherry Wong from the program orientation, I was impressed by her name, specifically, her family name: Wong. Based on my personal knowledge of names, Sherry might also have a Chinese background. However, her Western-looking face for me was hardly related to her perceived background. As a newcomer in Windsor, my curiosity motivated me to pursue this further. Still, I did not know whether it was appropriate to ask about a person’s family background at the first meeting. In fact, Sherry was very nice about answering my question: her dad was Chinese; her mom was from Italy. She looked like her mom, but her brother looked like her dad. In the end, it turned out that my “rudeness” did not make things worse; instead, we began to know each other by discussing our names. I told her my family name is “Wang,” which is a Mandarin spelling and pronunciation. In Cantonese, “Wang” can be spelled as “Wong,” the same as hers. There is a saying in China about sharing a family name; that is, people who have the same family name are supposed to come from one family at least 500 years ago. Sherry showed me her great interest in China and Chinese culture. Afterwards, we

saw each other often in school and communicated over the planning meetings. Every time she saw me, Sherry mentioned inviting me to her house to meet her parents.

The first time I met Sherry's parents was on the departure day. Sherry was very nice to ask her parents to offer me a ride to Toronto airport. Sherry picked me up at home. Then she drove back to her house to gather everyone else to go to Toronto. On the way to her home, she gave me a cosmetic cloth bag with carry-on toiletries as my travelling gift. She told me that she was not sure whether we were seated in the same section on the plane; she hoped what she had prepared for me was useful for my 13-hour flight to Beijing. I was so thankful for her consideration and her ride to the Toronto airport. (Field notes, May 2014)

Sherry explained:

“The ride to Toronto was not an extra thing for my parents, since my grandma and some other family have been living in Toronto for years. My parents used to live in Toronto as well. We had a house in Toronto before; but it was so expensive to afford a house in Toronto. When my dad found a job in Windsor, they decided to move here for an easy life. I went to the University of Toronto to get a music degree. I was very familiar with that area. Although my family lived in Windsor, we would drive to Toronto for family visits very often. I bet it is a Chinese tradition.” (Conversation with Sherry, May 2014)

When we arrived at Sherry's home, I saw her parents were loading luggage on the van. The first words her father said to me were “ni hao” in very standard Mandarin, which I didn't expect. I was surprised and got ready to switch to Chinese to respond him; however, I was told that “ni hao” (which means “hello” in English) was the only words he could say in Mandarin. Since we still had some time before heading to the airport, Mr. and Mrs. Wong showed me

around their house. It was a really nice house with a big backyard. Mrs. Wong was also hospitable enough to show me some pictures on the wall of Sherry and her brother. At the same time, Mr. Wong wrote down his name in Chinese characters and talked to me:

“I heard from Sherry that your family name is also “Wong.” We were supposed to belong to the same family in the ancient times.” (Conversation with Mr. Wong, May 2014)

By the time I saw his written Chinese name, I realized that Sherry and I made a mistake. Actually, their family name “Wong” is the word “Huang” in Mandarin, not “Wang”. In Cantonese, both “Huang” and “Wang” are spelled “Wong.” In the end, we realized that “500 years ago, we were *not* a family.” As we had to rush to the airport after a short house tour, I did not have enough time to ask for details. However, they invited me to visit after we came back from China. (Field notes, May 2014)

“More similarities than differences between Canada and China”

On the first night at Southwest University, our group was invited to a concert at the Faculty of Music. The concert might have more meaning for others in our group than for me. I sat next to Sherry. Since I have very limited knowledge of music of any kind, all I could do was to help Sherry translate the program into English. Other than that, I enjoyed watching the performers’ dresses on a nice stage with colourful spotlights. Sherry commented at appropriate times during the concert:

“The vocal technique was great. Some of the pronunciation for the French and Italian songs could have been better. The acoustics in the auditorium were exceptional. Many performers wore extravagant gowns. However, Sherry was surprised to know a great deal of differences between the way Western audiences and Chinese audiences behave.

“In the West, people are silent during a performance of classical music. However, at this

performance, people were talking constantly throughout, which made the whole affair seem rather more informal. Children were permitted to walk around the auditorium and were noisy without any interference from parents.” It is common for the Chinese music students to rent clothes and costumes for all kinds of performances here. Sherry wondered where a student would keep such a large gown within such a small living space, or how a student could even afford such a gown in China. “In Western universities, people dress more conservatively for recitals. The idea is that simpler clothes do not distract as much from the musical performance. I think there are pros and cons to the way the Westerners and Chinese dress for performances.” Overall, Sherry enjoyed looking at everyone’s gowns because they were so beautiful and artistic in and of themselves. However, it felt more like a fashion show at times than a concert.” (Field notes, May 2014).

Sherry received her bachelor of music degree in composition with a minor in French. It was a smart choice for me to sit next to her during the concert to learn more about music from her. Sherry started practicing piano when she was young. She went to an arts high school in Windsor before going to university. She also had been teaching piano, voice, and music theory privately for various music schools. I believe her music background drove her to find some similarities and differences in music education in particular while she was in China. An interview was scheduled in January 2015 with Sherry after we got back from China. We were supposed to do an in-person interview. However, it was a snowy day, we used Skype instead. Sherry spoke of her experiences visiting various schools and observing excellent music instruction:

“I remember when we visited a primary school in downtown Chongqing. I had been given an opportunity to observe some music classes according to my teachable subject. The music teacher, she was an excellent teacher. She presented three different traditional Chinese instruments and played all of them. She also showed videos of how musicians demonstrated the instruments. She gave the kids a sense of culture and history of the music instruments. I wish we could take some of that knowledge of different cultures and traditions into our arts class here in Canada.” (Interview with Sherry, Jan 2015)

With respect to other classes that she observed when we in Chongqing, Sherry discussed her impressions of an art class in a primary school near Southwest University:

“It was an art class where students were carving their own signature stamps out of soapstone. The art teacher (I was told the art teacher is a teacher candidate from the Southwest University) used the projector to show close-up images of in-progress and completed stamps. All the students were following that teacher’s instruction to carve their name on the soapstone. I also noticed that there were pictures students had done of some masterpieces on the walls. I can appreciate that by simply copying such great works, students may learn about the techniques pioneered and invented by great artists. However, they were not creating their own original works and thus, not doing art. I am thinking when we talk about the creativity; it probably depends on what is the definition of creativity, and how you apply creativity within different settings. There are different types of creativity. In education, it’s important to teach kind of creative skills. That is to think creatively, and to solve with different creative approaches. To be honest, I found that some kids have that trouble here in Canada as well. I teach

music, there is no right or wrong in music. In that case, a lot of Canadian kids don't know what to do, because they're used to having a class in math or science whether there is a right or wrong answer pretty much. When they enter a more open creative class, even in Canada, some kids don't know what to do. Both of the systems, Eastern and Western, could do more to encourage creative thinking in children. (Interview with Sherry, Jan 2015)

“A part of my personal heritage”

After we returned, Sherry and I had been looking for a day that I could visit her home. On July 09, 2014, I was invited to visit her home “officially.” Her father was not home. Mrs. Wong and Sherry showed me around the house. It was a nice two-floor house with a large backyard. In their backyard, the clean swimming pool was located on one side; a vegetable and fruit garden was on the other side. Sherry told me that her father did all the gardening. He even bought some pipes and equipment to set up an automatic watering system for his garden. Mr. Wong learned planting and gardening from Chinese farming books. They also showed me around indoors. The decoration also could be called Eastern: various kinds of Chinese knots hung up on the walls. There was a big carpet with a Chinese peony pattern and characters in the living room.

After the house tour, Mrs. Wong was very excited to show their house secret to me: it is a tiny frog sculpture with an ancient Chinese coin in its mouth. Mrs. Wong took it from the window frame. She said “the frog sculpture has to face outside, as this direction can bring good fortune to the family based on the Yin Yang principle.” She wanted me to verify this saying and wanted to know whether this sculpture was popular in China. I told her that this was my first time hearing this belief; however, I did believe that a frog sculpture with a coin in its mouth

means good fortune, since I saw this kind of sculpture everywhere in China, such as in the restaurants or in some business companies. (Field notes, July 2014)

While Sherry was showing me her family's collections and pictures, she spoke more about her family:

“My grandfather on my father's side came to Canada in the 1930s from a rural place in Canton province. I personally had no idea about how poor China was at that time. I only knew a bit from my grandma's description. My grandfather came to Canada for being hired to do a cooking job for the Rail Canada company. My grandfather focused on working until he was almost 30 years old. Then, he took a “blind date” matched with my grandma. They came back to Canada in the 1950s after his short visit. They started owning a small Chinese (Dim Sum) restaurant in the China town in Toronto. They raised many kids. My grandparents tried their best to feed the kids and support them to receive education. Then my dad got the chance to go to college to have a good education. My dad learned some working skills and a hard-working spirit from my grandpa as well. I know Chinese keep a good reputation for hard work for generations no matter where you are. It is the Chinese tradition.” (Interview with Sherry, July 2014)

When Sherry was showing some Chinese calligraphy she got from Chongqing, China, she kept saying:

“When we were in Southwest University, I really liked the classes we attended on the ancient art of Chinese “shui mo” (water and ink) painting. I learned the proper way to hold the brush and practiced some brush stroke techniques. I saw it in Toronto, but I never got the chance to practice it. The Chinese painting and calligraphy works are very expensive selling in Chinatown. I also learned a little bit of calligraphy about writing

words. I practiced writing my Chinese name. Then I like the name my grandma gave to me - Huang, Mei Li (Meili is a phrase in Chinese, meaning “beautiful”). I am thinking about asking my dad to frame some pieces of work for me.” (Interview with Sherry, July 2014)

I knew Sherry wanted to have a Gu Zheng or Pi Pa very much. However, the big music instrument is quite difficult to carry on a long-distance international flight from China to Canada. So I reminded her to try to find these Chinese musical instruments in the China town in Toronto. She said:

“One of my favorite lessons was the music demonstration course of traditional Chinese instruments at the Southwest University. I saw college students practising the Gu Zheng and Di Zi, so I got to have a demonstration and had a chance to try them out. What was new to me was the Pi Pa. It is a pity that I cannot afford to ship the nice musical instruments from China to Canada. My dad plays guitar. We have the plectrum at home. If I have the Gu Zheng and Pi Pa at home, I could wear the plectrum to practise them. I am very excited to learn more about Chinese traditional music and bring back this knowledge to Canadian classrooms.” (Interview with Sherry, July 2014)

When Chinese teacher candidates from Southwest University were in Windsor for three months in 2014, Dr. Xu proposed contacting the program alumni to plan activities to provide a better living experience or opportunity for the visiting students to experience Canadian culture and lifestyle. Thanks to program alumni and professors, the Chinese students were invited to their homes to experience a Canadian Thanksgiving holiday. I was very lucky to be invited by Sherry to stay at her cottage with other two Chinese students: one was Lu, who was Sherry’s buddy; another was Annie, who was majoring in music. Thanks to Sherry and her family’s warm

hospitality, we experienced how a Canadian family celebrates Thanksgiving. The three of us joined the Wong's for family activities such as hiking, watching movies, and cooking. Mr. Wong showed us his collections from China including a hat with the Beijing Olympics logo on it. Mrs. Wong showed her cooking talents in Chinese stir-fries and Italian food. (Field notes, October 2014)

Sherry took full responsibility for arranging the trip, and became very active in retelling her living experience in China. She said:

It was a wonderful experience getting to know the students from Southwest University. It has been an absolute pleasure to visit China and to learn so much from her Chinese colleagues. "My dad has been back to China many times for visiting. My family has been to Italy for a family visit when I was in high school. I always hoped I could get a chance to visit China as well. The trip gave a special personal significance to me, coming from a Chinese background on my father's side." It marks the completion of visiting both countries of her cultural heritage: Italy and China. "I could not be prouder to be half Chinese and I look forward to carrying on the cultural traditions that I have now learned about and experienced in depth on this fulfilling journey." (Field notes, October 2014)

Chapter 5

“It Is Hard to Say Goodbye” – After a Three-Month Stay in China

Introduction to This Chapter

In this chapter, I will first retell Denny’s stories as he visited China twice through the program. As one of the University of Windsor teacher candidates, Denny went to China in 2014 for his first visit. After coming back, he continued his graduate studies in education. Denny applied for and won a Mitacs Globalink Research award, and brought his research as a graduate student to Southwest University to get to know more about China in 2015. In addition, the cross-cultural experiences and narratives of two other Canadian teacher candidates—Ana and Janet—about their first-time three-month stay in China will be presented.

In August 2014, when I still was unpacking from my last China trip, Dr. Xu had already taken the lead in planning and discussing with program alumni the new trip for teacher candidates who would start in September. In partnership with the Mitacs Globalink Research award, participants in the program are able to have the opportunity to stay in China for three months in 2015. Starting with the program orientation, our planning team (Dr. Jonathan Bayley, Dr. Shijing Xu, Ju Huang and I) started to recruit a new group of applicants from the pre-service program and graduate program, then started preparing a new visiting group in October 2014. It was the first year for program participants to apply for the Mitacs Globalink Research award, Dr. Xu contributed her sabbatical time, working with Dr. Bayley to help each applicant on his or her individual research proposal because our objective was for each student to win an award. Close to Christmas, 13 Canadian teacher candidates and four graduate students were approved funding for a 12-week cross-cultural visit and study experience in China from March to June 2015.

Denny's Stories of His Two Visits

“Before and after”

I did not know Denny well before I read his application as one of the teacher candidates submitted to the program. Usually at the beginning of the fall semester, our planning team would ask candidates who were interested in joining the program to leave their email addresses with us. After the orientation, we would attach the program handbook to an application form, and email this to the students. The questions on the application form inquire into the applicants' educational backgrounds and why they want to visit China. To the question, “what are you interested in most about the China you are going to visit and its culture?” Denny answered:

“I am very interested in learning more about the Chinese Communist Party. My parents left the country of Czech Republic that began being dominated by communists, like much of Europe. China is a rare country which is still run by a communist government. I would like to see and understand how the government plays a role in the lives of its people.” (Denny's Reciprocal Learning Program application form, September 2013)

Compared to the other applicants' answers focused on experiencing a different culture or getting to know the history of China, I was surprised to see Denny's interest in China from a political aspect. Honestly, I did not intend to discuss further with Denny at that time. After the first visit to China, Dr. Xu guided me to do interviews with some student participants. Denny shared his stories and experiences regarding his visit to China, and also his motivation for visiting China again for three months. Dr. Xu and I proposed to follow up with Denny about his answer to the idea of communist countries on his application and his assumptions about

communist regimes. During the interview, we wanted to know what impression he had of a communist country after he stayed in China for a month. Denny said:

“There was something that I did think of. I have never been to Asia before. I have been to Europe many times, and lived in Europe. I know there are so many different lifestyles in different places in the world. Asia is more different to me. To be honest, I didn’t think China would be so welcoming, so hospitable and so friendly. They will actually be so open to you, while I was imagining that it would be a more reserved culture and to some points, I did see a lot of rules. For example, the students living there; the students need to be their dorm before 11 p.m., things like this way. Sometimes, I did see and understand this reserved cultural influence on Chinese personalities here. There are some students waiting for their turn to do something. Look at other students doing it. That doesn’t always work for everybody. But besides that, I didn’t expect that when we went to the bar, that’s when I actually saw China. When we went to the night beer store, which was the real China, what I really enjoyed there. They were expressing themselves. Everyone is approachable. Even though there is “gang” there we were sitting with [“gang” here refers to the guys who do not wear shirts in a local street food restaurant], even though it is not like what we have here, that really shows the part of China. I am thinking, when we were in China, we have been taught in a positive way about the communists, how people are treated equally, but when we got here, people thought it was like a terrible [sic]. I don’t think “communist” is the right word for it. I think you are brought up to think, I am going to go to school and work hard on my studies in order to help the community. I think people over in China also express individuality. But when my parents were raised in a

communist region, they felt they had a hold on you.” (Interview with Denny, January 2015)

“Dual roles, double experiences”

Denny continued his studies after graduating from the pre-service teacher education program. As one of the program alumni and a graduate student, Denny was involved in making a contribution to the group. For example, Denny joined the program interview committee to meet the new student applicants. At the same time, he planned to visit China with his Mitacs research award to do his graduate research. In addition, he wanted to get a deeper understanding of China and Chinese culture.

Before his second departure, Dr. Xu and I interviewed Denny in the research office. We wondered what motivated Denny to continue his participation in the program to start his graduate studies. He explained:

“During the school visit in China, I observed a science class and was concerned for student safety because of tools some of the students were using. I was able to communicate with the principal through an interpreter, another unique experience, and learn about their unique safety methods. In one of the schools I had the opportunity to deliver a short speech about the physical education lesson that I observed. I discussed the inquiry-based approach the teacher used during the class. Throughout the school visits I was able to experience a variety of discussions, debates and presentations due to the opportunity and motivation that Dr. Xu provided. Dr. Xu was consistently helping and guiding me to a successful experience.” (Interview with Denny, January 2015)

In addition to the program among teacher candidates, Dr. Xu facilitated another part of reciprocal learning in school education between Canada and China. When the University of Windsor teacher candidates were in China, Dr. Xu coordinated some sister school Skype meetings between local schools in Windsor and Chongqing. She often tries to provide opportunities to involve teacher candidates in educational research-related meetings.

During the interview, Denny continued to talk about his motivation to begin his graduate study in Windsor:

“Not only did the school visits provide me with unique opportunities but I also had the chance to participate in a Skype conference with Dr. Geri Salinitri and Dr. Michael Connelly who are both very prestigious in their respective fields. The Chinese head of the program along with many masters and doctoral students were also in attendance. I was able to learn more about the different aspects of the developing Reciprocal Learning Program while experiencing a formal program meeting for the first time. Dr. Xu also gave me the opportunity to introduce myself to the audience. I was able to participate in discussion and take valuable notes about the growth of the program. For me, I think it was being able to participate in those activities, in those I have never experienced before, those dialogues after we were at schools. We have discussions with all the teachers, the vice-presidents, the principals; the question and answer sessions with Chinese teachers; I enjoy talking with the university professors as well. It was really unique. I think it is really cool. I’ve never experienced another education system before, so when I was in China that really opened my eyes, and there is no concrete system that things can be done differently. Having the chance to talk, I was beginning to see different research. I want to move on and keep going.” (Interview with Denny, January 2015)

As one of the routine events for Canadian participants, they are asked to divide into groups of three or four to prepare various topics for workshops before going to China. The topics cover some Canadian educational issues or aspects of Canadian culture such as the multicultural history in Canada, Canadian sports or the history of Canadian music, based on their educational interests. The student participants in the program were separated into different groups, preparing one or two topics for workshops together. The workshops would be presented to students at Southwest University. The goal of the workshops is to give teacher candidates from the Canadian and Chinese universities opportunities for interaction and discussion regarding different educational styles and diverse cultures. Denny was involved in three topic groups presenting about Canadian sports, daily physical activity and science teaching in Canada during his first visit to Southwest University. During his second pre-departure preparation, he still showed his energy and passion.

We asked Denny during the interview whether his second visit to China was a repeat experience. Denny explained:

“I was very happy that the Chinese Southwest University students were so accommodating and willing to participate in activities with us. I had the opportunity to speak with many of the education students about the importance of daily physical activity and implementing it in every classroom. We gave a short presentation about the different unique aspects of the sports while allowing for some audience participation. The Chinese teacher candidates were very interested in learning about the unique activities we provided for them to use in their own classrooms. Throughout the science presentation, we focused our attention on the importance of inquiry-based learning. This was relatively a new concept for the students so we spent a lot of time

describing the idea and the different ways it can be implemented within the classroom. During our visits to the local secondary school I was able to present the daily physical activity and science workshops to them as well. I was very grateful that I was able to speak freely and formally to the students, staff, vice-president, and principal. The high school students were able to perform the task by attempting it themselves and solving the problems on their own while the teacher acted as a guide during the learning. The workshops were truly a reciprocal learning experience for all the presenters and student audiences. We were able to exchange teaching and educational pedagogy while expressing both of our unique cultures. I believe that I learned a lot and there was a lot we can take from it. (Interview with Denny, January 2015)

Throughout Denny's experience in the program, he gained a vast amount of knowledge about China, education, and formal or professional etiquette. He added in the interview:

“Throughout the many school visits we experienced, we had the opportunity to partake in many informational meetings. After the school tour, introduction to school pedagogy and history, and classroom observation, we were able to dialogue with the teachers and principals of how the day went. People are more likely to propose that teachers need to pay individual attention to every single child. In China, when we visit schools, often times it is the group work, the teacher puts into the whole group and the whole class. I found that some of the individual students could get lost if you are not keeping up. It's doing like, we have many students are doing this work that they are keeping up. I'm saying that students are starting to understand that as a teacher, you are there to help them. Now they are trying to understand they can use you more, and then they would become more independent.” (Interview with Denny, January 2015)

The reasons of visiting China twice, Denny continued during our interview:

“I had the unique opportunity to travel to China with the Reciprocal Learning Program last year. I had a fantastic experience and learned a lot about the country and the culture. I now know that the people of China are very curious, welcoming, and hospitable. Our hosts were extremely generous and made sure we were safe and well took care of every day. The Chinese people are very humble and respect their history and culture very much. It is very admirable to witness the amount of respect they have for their country and each other. I also learned the importance of sharing meals and experiencing a good meal together with friends and family. I hope to experience that more with this visit to China. For the experiences from last year, I like the workshops we did. The pre-service students can have the interaction with us, which is very important. As for the schools themselves, it is good to be unique. I think having the discussions with teachers and the principal could be very unique.” (Interview with Denny, January 2015)

Denny’s research for his graduate studies is about second language acquisition. He showed his research interest towards teacher education and language teaching in China for his second visit. He spoke about pursuing his Master’s degree during the interview:

“Right away the main difference is that when you come out from the high school, you are ready to be a teacher; you have a four-year teaching degree, rather than a bachelor degree. You are going to teach. I find it very encouraging that the Chinese teachers teach their specific subject that they are an expert in even during elementary schooling. I really find this to be successful because the students get taught by a master in the field and there is very minimal bias toward other subjects. I don’t know the structure

of the courses; I don't know where they are getting knowledge from. For example, if you want to become the science teacher, you are going to take some science courses, for that blend. I think that is beneficial. After my previous experience in China, I would like to continue to pursue the importance that the Chinese education puts on learning the English language. I am also very interested to become more immersed into the Chinese environment and its culture. (Interview with Denny, January 2015)

Dr. Xu and I really hope to hear some feedback from Denny to improve the new group's visiting experience. Denny added:

"I was consistently treated with respect and honour from our hosts and the Chinese people. Due to my fantastic experience I would really like to continue to study and work closely with Dr. Xu and the Reciprocal Learning Program. I would like to use the knowledge that I have gained throughout my year at the Faculty of Education, practicum placements, and China and begin a Master's degree. I would like to continue to be involved with this excellent program and the fantastic people that are involved with it. We are now travelling to China for three months so I hope to explore the language much more. I would like to use the language more in restaurants and simple exchanges with people." (Interview with Denny, January 2015)

Janet's Stories:

"Why not give it a try!"

Janet was known for her tall, model-shaped figure in our visiting group to China. She joined the program one month after the orientation. My impression was that she was very quiet. I believed that she might have a difficult time living in Chongqing for three months. However, we

became closer since the visit as we lived across the hallway from each other in the residence building at Southwest University. I realized that I had a wrong impression of her. Often after school, we hung out for meals or did some workouts on the track close to our residence building.

One evening, we were jogging. I mentioned to her my previous worries due to her “coolness” in Canada and also to the fact that China was a foreign country for her with many uncertainties. She explained:

“Before I came to China, I was so stressed with everything I needed to do in Canada. I really did not know about China. I figured or stereotyped that there are not too many tall people. Other than that, I just believed that it is completely different than I experienced before.” (Conversation with Janet, March 2015)

Since we lived on the same floor, I really enjoyed talking to Janet (my neighbour) in our spare time. I got to know more about Janet. I knew her concerns about living in China; however, I was glad to hear that she enjoyed this opportunity to study in Chongqing. Janet said:

“I was lucky enough to participate in an exchange in my third year of university to England, and it was one of the best decisions I’ve made. Therefore, when I found another opportunity to travel abroad and learn about a new culture I was excited for the opportunity. Last year, I took the same science courses with the student buddies from the Southwest University. I got to know some of the Chinese exchange students. I expect to learn a lot more first-hand knowledge about the Chinese way of life and their culture and traditions. I talked to them, and I realized that this would be a good opportunity to visit China. Therefore, I made up my mind to travel to China as one of my favorite ways to travel is when you are able to step out of the tourist shoes and truly immerse yourself in the local culture and I believe the Reciprocal Learning Program provides this opportunity.

Since I am looking to become a science teacher in the future, I may try to provide equal opportunities to all students. If I become a teacher in the Windsor area being more culturally sensitive as well as culturally aware of the diverse background of the students will increase my effectiveness. It will help me to possibly understand their beliefs and any other special needs they may require from me as a teacher. Also learning to communicate through language barriers is always an asset, no matter what the language is.” (Interview with Janet, April 2015)

“The Chinese-style relationship”

Just like the Olympics, Southwest University holds a sport meet once a year in spring. The meet covers a track and field competition between faculties. As a group, we joined the international student team from the Faculty of International Relations for the opening ceremony. As an extra, Janet registered for the 400-metre sprint after the ceremony. After her competition, I walked her back to our residence building, Janet commented:

“I can only speak from my view. I didn't know any of the students on the track field. However, they were so nice to me, and encouraged me during the competition. I remember that everyone looking at me on the street here, I am kind of freaking out at the beginning, because in Canada, I always went to school with people from different backgrounds. However, I think right now, it is different living in China. I should say I am now in China.” (Interview with Janet, March 2015)

Except for the sport meet, Janet participated in some unique activities for her and her science colleagues in Chongqing. For example, Janet was placed in a senior high school for her school observation and teaching practicum; also, she and another teacher candidate were invited to prepare a demonstration of a science lesson for the school board. How is her experience of

demonstrating a science lesson for the public in China? During the interview, Janet described it as:

“It is the close relationship between teachers and students. That is so different than in Canada. I still find it is surprising how close they are no matter whether in the university or the local schools. I was talking to one of the graduate students. She was telling me how in some cases, it could be bad to have these close relationships. There are more boundaries between teachers and students. However, in Canada we don't get to know our students as teachers. It is more difficult to get to know them. I think you also have to be more careful about it in Canada. For example, maybe you have a school reunion after graduated. In Canada, you only stay in touch with your close friends, but not even really with your teachers. Sometimes, the year after you graduated, you go back and visit some teachers, but you do that with your two or three friends, go back and see them. But after a year or two, you don't usually go back. I believe this may relate to how the school system is.” (Interview with Janet, June 2015)

With respect to the close relationship between the teachers and the students in schools, Janet kept talking about the interpersonal connections and relationships in China during the interview:

“In China, people have a very close interpersonal relationship. In the school I observed, the relations among the students or the teacher-student connections are closer as I think, in China, the teachers rotate between the classes instead of the students rotating for the class. Also, I do want to come back to China to experience more of the culture and to see more differentiation. I got to know the Chinese tradition of caring about others. This time, I didn't buy a lot gifts for myself, however I bought something for my family. I did learn

how to make the knot. One of my buddies, she bought me the strings. I can make a bunch of those for my family. I bought some chopsticks and everyone can get the Chinese knot that I made. For my family, I also got them jade bowls from Beijing, and I got my brother a paper cutting from Chengdu. I will come back to China for sure. I don't know yet, probably a couple of years later. I don't know my plans, if these plans work.” (Interview with Janet, June 2015)

“We cannot move the class to Canada”

On the flight back, I sat next to Janet. A couple of days before we left China, everyone in the group was quite busy and fully booked with meeting our professors, buddies, teachers, students, and the friends we made in Chongqing. When our departure approached, it became hard for us to say good-bye to our second home. By the time we were on the flight, we could not believe that our three-month stay in China was over. We could not stop recalling our memories of when we were observing the local schools, living and studying at Southwest University. Janet said:

“I should have learned Chinese sentences before I went to China, honestly. One thing I did well is to bring souvenirs from Canada to the Chinese students. But I had no idea that the class size is 45 to 50 students, so I didn't have enough things to bring. It would have been helpful to know the quantities of things to bring. It is so different in Canada. I think maybe just, cultural experience. I started to miss all the classes that I did at the beginning, and the interaction with buddies within the community. It was a greater understanding of the culture and costumes here. For people, I should say that they just to come here to experience.” (Interview with Janet, June 2015)

After being served our first meal on the plane, we recovered from the fatigue of lining up at the airport and boarding the plane. I started to talk casually with Janet. I told her I was becoming homesick already, however, the good thing was that Janet would be home after a seven-hour flight. I asked what her favourite or worst thing was in Chongqing to finish our casual conversation, Janet replied:

“I don't like the high school in China. I was placed in the senior high school. It was so different. They focused on the exam, and it was all lecture-based. While in Canada, it is lecture-based too, but there are more activities, and, like, group work. We try to get students out of their seats. Besides, the observation in the high schools for my first practicum was so long. In Canada, we just observed a couple of days to get to know the class. For the school day, I have to be in school for the entire day. I don't need to teach everything. I just teach my subjects, but you will teach multiple times in one day. In China, I was always observing the chemistry and physics classes. For the knowledge level, I think it is higher in China. For example, they were doing something in the chemistry class. But I think I did it in Grade 11 and Grade 12. But this is the Grade 10 class. They seem to be a little bit higher, and the teachers do more demonstration rather than students doing labs. Also, I cannot believe what I heard from my students who lived on campus. They have to take the evening class.” (Interview with Janet, June 2015)

Janet compared the two science teaching styles between Canada and China. In China, following teaching practicum traditions that focus on classroom observation for teacher candidates, Janet did not have many opportunities for teaching every day during her practicum in the local schools. She commented:

“I hope next time, if possible, we want to have more teaching opportunities. For the Grade 10 class, I only got a chance to present a workshop about Canadian cultures. I got the chance to talk to my associate teacher. However, I didn't really have the chance to teach a science course during my first practicum. But when we went to another high school for a day of observation, I got the chance to teach over there. I taught a Grade 11 biology class. They were teaching Grade 11 evolutions, which I covered, and we covered that in Grade 11, too. That was similar content for me to prepare and to teach.” (Interview with Janet, June 2015)

Janet got an opportunity to cooperate with a colleague from the University of Windsor group to demonstrate a science class. The demonstration class was open to all the science teachers from the district school board in Chongqing. Janet was most proud of her public science lesson. She described:

“We cannot move that class to Canada. I think in Canada, there is a large population of immigrants who come from different places. If I really become a teacher, and then being on the other side of it, being in a country where you don't speak the language, you don't understand their cultures. It gives you a new perspective on things. I had never had a demonstration class experience before, which is a kind of modelling of the class. I was very nervous for my science public course at the primary school. All the teachers watched me. I tried to block them out, maybe like 30 teachers and the board members. I tried to focus on the students only. On that day, students wore their school uniforms and red scarfs. I was not concentrating on their faces when I was teaching. But it was interesting to see that our lesson, the teachers teach the same lesson. I conducted the same content lesson as their Chinese science teacher, but in two different languages. For the

teaching style, we have one model as the Canadian teaching model, and the Chinese teacher has a different model, and the Chinese model was simpler. I think in some cases, it works better. But our model had better representation of all the parts of the science teaching system. It was interesting and hard not to compare. We don't compare which one is better. We just learned from each other, hoping to find a good way to let the students understand better. I don't know which one is better. But I think it is good to combine.”

(Interview with Janet, June 2015)

Ana's Cross-cultural Reflections

“Feeling lost in a classroom”

During the first couple weeks at Southwest University, the Canadian teacher candidates took some university courses at the Faculty of Teacher Education, which provided them with an idea of the pre-service teacher education program in China. Due to language concerns, most of us chose to observe and audit some non-academic elective courses such as visual arts design, blackboard writing and simple painting. Those courses with a focus on comprehensive teaching skills are designed to enhance the future teaching ability of teacher candidates from all teachable majors. I accompanied the group to these classes most times, hoping to make them comfortable in a foreign educational environment. The visual arts class was the first class we observed as a group. We were seated in the back row of the classroom, not expecting to have direct interaction with the professor due to language barriers. (Field notes, March 2015)

Ana described her experiences of auditing the university courses in her portfolio submitted to the program. She even described the classroom settings in detail in her portfolio:

“The classroom was set up in a way in which it was difficult for all to see the front of the room easily, with six long tables and stools around them. Thankfully, Minghua was there and able to translate some key points for us, so we could participate to some degree. Still, I was lost in the class most of the time. The professor obviously had an in-depth knowledge of art theory and history, since her presentation slides were full of many pictures and she did not require any notes to lecture. This class was very teacher-directed and lecture-based, with some participation from the students and humor to break it up. However, many students, including us, were not paying attention, “staring at their books” (most likely on their cellphones) and having conversations. The professor overcame this by directing general questions to the class and asking them to answer aloud, or calling on specific students’ names to review the previous information. During this class, we seemed to have made the largest impression. Instead of simply observing, the teacher encouraged us as a group of foreign students to participate, which altered the environment. For instance, Ayah was called upon twice to speak about certain works, such as Impressionism and Pointillism; the class and professor applauded each time. She also asked us to come up to the front of the class and arrange ourselves according to our clothes; this demonstrated dark to light and shades to pure colors. Even at the beginning, I believe that she formally introduced us, since the class stood up, sounded a greeting, and applauded while looking at our group members. (Ana’s Portfolio, p. 3, March 2015)

This visual arts class had about three sessions in total, which was around three hours. I became tired from translating key words for the group. Most of time, I could not find the proper words to translate what the teacher was saying. By the end of the class, we were not listening to

the professor, and started to look for something not related to our studies. Ana spotted an interesting thing when she was doing the classroom observation. Ana answered:

“The most interesting thing I observed was the gender division—only boys. There were about seven of them that sat at the back table closest to the door. After sitting in classes in which everything was in Mandarin, it made me realize just how confused and easily left behind students in Canada may feel when English is not their native language or mother tongue. (Interview with Ana, March 2015)

Later, Ana described her experiences regarding this visual arts class in her portfolio shared with the program:

“This experience will definitely alter my own teaching practices, and how I treat people who are obviously new to the country. After being greeted to China so graciously and being assisted by others to do anything I may have thought simple tasks before, I know that I will definitely help people back home in Canada when I see they are having difficulties. My time in China so far has revealed to me the validity of the statement to which my grandmother always subscribed: “I have often relied on the kindness of strangers.” (Ana’s Portfolio, p. 5, June 2015)

“Am I very Chinese?!”

A week after the group came back from China on June 19th 2015; Ana came to the program’s office at the University of Windsor. When we were at Southwest University, Ana and I lived on the different floors of our residence building. Often, I did not get a chance to communicate when both of us were available. Since Ana had been offered a teaching job from a private high school in China and would be going back to China to teach for another two years, I decided to interview her before she left.

On the day she came to the office, Ana still had some jetlag and she told me that she had to wake up in the early morning to meet her students at school. She said:

“Before coming to here, I went to my school where I did my last practicum in Windsor. They knew we got back from China. My associate teacher invited me over today to visit their school and they asked me to share my travelling experiences with the students, which was amazing. I brought some candies to them as well. I bought these candies in China.” (Interview with Ana, June 2015)

When Ana met me, she also gave me some candies. Those candies are a well-known Chinese brand named “Da Bai Tu”, which means “big rabbit” in English. They are quite authentic and famous milk-flavoured candies produced in Shanghai—a typical Chinese specialty product. (Field notes, June 2015)

Ana hoped to use these Chinese candies to help her recall her memories about China. She continued sharing her trip with me during the interview:

“It was just a completely different experience for me. I cannot believe we are now in Canada. I was very interested in this program at very early beginning, because I already knew how to do the research from my undergraduate. I thought this exchange trip with doing the Mitacs research was quite fit for me. Now, since I am heading back to China to teach over there, I am so grateful for this program; even if I was not coming back to China for teaching, I think that this was very important for developing me as a person. I got to know the Maple Tree institution from the job fair in January after I joined this program. I applied for the Maple Tree and finished all the paperwork before our trip to China. I have never thought I could get in. So when we were in China, the time I knew I got the offer, I was so excited. I learned a lot in China as we were in a big supportive

group, although I had culture shock. Also, I got to develop my skills in teaching especially. In Canada, we have so many immigrants from across the world. People speak other languages at home. As a teacher, it is better to know the students, and to speak in different ways.” (Interview with Ana, June 2015)

When we were talking about her culture shock in China, I did not expect her to ask:

“Am I very Chinese now?” I am not saying myself as a Chinese is a negative thing, just because I was such a good planner at the beginning before I went to China. So it was very hard for me to do things, until the last month, I got it, the Chinese way—the “last minute” thing. I learned flexibility for sure in China, and I took this back to Canada. My friends in Canada were mad at me, because I won’t schedule anything with them until the last minute. I told them this is Chinese style, that I am serious if I ask my friends out at the last minute, which means that we are going to do that thing for sure. Not like in Canada, people over-promise things, and never do it. My friends, they are not getting used to the last minute thing in Canada. Some of my friends have complained about me for sure.”

(Interview with Ana, June 2015)

Later, when I asked what her overall experience in China was, she added:

“I am considering the language barrier is the biggest side over there for me as a foreigner. I understand that the most important thing is how much language matters. For example, like, you cannot succeed in any society without writing or speaking in the right language. I have to rely on strangers on the street all the time for help. But in China, it was very easy because many people are willing to help. Most of them are friendly and are very kind to have interaction with foreigners. Chinese like to do social things. How people interact with me; like everyone wants to take photos with you. I did not expect that. I

didn't expect that they would treat me like a celebrity. Some students in my practicum school told me that I look like a movie star, Adele!” (Interview with Ana, June 2015)

Except for the language barriers, Ana started stating her feelings about her cultural experience during the interview:

“Regarding the culture shock, I found another interesting thing is that the way that Chinese people say compliments is different. In Canada sometimes, I realized that some immigrants here don't want to talk. I thought it was just the language barrier. However, I got to understand that, apart from the language barrier, it is still a part of Chinese culture. I learned that China has the culture where the Chinese people want to be perfect and then show it off. I bet this is part of culture and tradition. The Chinese want to be qualified and good enough to show to everyone. But sometimes, it is so hard. I believe that the investigation is to make mistakes, and to know the mistakes and help you get there. I even told my friends in Canada this. The Chinese like to be the experts. So if they don't practice in their free time, they will never perform in public. They don't want to show their pride even on the KTV; and even though it is for fun.” (Interview with Ana, June 2015)

The more teaching practice she got, the more job preparation she could gain for her teaching position in China. She commented:

“The teaching in the high school was very tightly scheduled. From the high school where I did my practicum, students are occupied with their class schedule, but they will visit other class during the break between classes. Also, it was funny to watch their DPAs (daily physical activities). I got used to seeing that everything has been done the same—same schedule for the class, fixed schedule for the daily physical activities, same lunch

time, same nap time. Since I am back in Canada, I do miss the nap time. During the practicum in Chongqing, I was getting an hour to eat lunch, and then have a nap. I am a slow eater, which is good for me. However, in Canada, I only get 40 minutes for lunch time. Also they can get hot meals in school. I like the idea of this in China that students can buy their own food, using their student card. I haven't seen that until university. Also, it is cheaper for the meals than outside of campus." (Interview with Ana, June 2015)

Also, Ana did not like some parts of the Chinese schooling. Sometimes, she felt sorry for the students for studying very hard. She continued saying:

"However, one thing I didn't like is my students' schedule. They are high school students, but they only have six hours to sleep every day. They begin school at 7: 00 or 7: 30 in the morning; also they have homework after evening school. For my own teaching, I did give a workshop over there. It was more culture and language teaching than my teachable subject, knowledge teaching. I just spoke to the students during the break. I was unable to teach in that high school at the beginning. One time, my associate teacher had to go to a driving class. So I was given an opportunity to give a lesson. I prepared a lot, and I showed them some Canadian culture and some Canadian songs, dances. Their English level was higher than I expected. Probably as I already knew that class, my first teaching went smoothly with my students' cooperation. Besides, I appreciated teaching at the primary school for my second practicum, and the teachers there were amazing and very supportive. My associate teacher in the primary school gave me lots of feedback right away after class, and even in the classroom, she helped me out with some Chinese. They were so willing to cooperate with you. You tell the students to stand up, they do that right away. It was awkward at first to see them stand up and bow to me before class though.

They are very cheerful, and very supportive. Another thing I didn't expect to see is the closeness between the students and the teachers. It was surprising to see their friendly relationship. I agree that the students may not like the subject, but they paid attention to it because they liked the teacher. It is important to build these kinds of relationships. It was so much more open there. You are not worrying about a lawsuit. Also, people care about privacy. Teachers can leave the room, and the teachers are responsible for their students' safety, while in Canada, you have to be there constantly. You cannot leave the room without them being supervised by someone else. (Interview with Ana, June 2015)

“Going back to teach in China!”

Three out of 13 program alumni graduates applied for teaching jobs in China; and they were accepted while they were there. After a short break and preparation back in Canada, Ana would return to Chongqing and teach the Canadian curriculum in a high school. When I asked her about going back to China so soon, Ana said:

“I am very excited to come back to China to teach at an international high school. I will teach English literature course, but four courses for each semester. I am not sure about the type. I am hoping it is English literature for four different classrooms. I just read the contract. I got to know their expectations to teach. As a teacher in that school, I have to combine Chinese traditional strict methods with the Canadian curriculum, which I think would be very challenging for me. One thing missing is that there is no character development in the courses, which is different in Canada. I also have the pressure to make the students from that school very competitive.” (Interview with Ana, June 2015)

Ana added later on:

“Now I am learning more Chinese to prepare myself to live in China alone without the group’s company. I just learned the song *Two Tigers*. A student in China from the Grade 8 class where I observed, she is teaching me in Chinese over WeChat. I also learned some Chinese from *Mulan* and *Kung Fu Panda*. I also started to learn some of the politics in China and I am very interested in updating my knowledge of the laws in China such as the rules on carrying alcohol walking on the street in China or the policy for smoking in public.” (Interview with Ana, June 2015)

It was not an easy decision for Ana to move to China and teach in a high school for two years. Ana discussed her expectations for her first teaching job overseas, and also some worries:

“You can tell the differences between the Chinese ideal of individualism. Family comes first rather than others. In Canada, it is more socialist. So like in Canada, it doesn't matter who you know really as long as you have the skills, then you will get the job or get the privilege. But in China, like, if you have an uncle who knows some friends in the university, or you can get the answers, and memorize them and pass the exam. It is more about justice in China. Probably it will change. I know it is so different than the old times of China. More people in China are getting well-educated. For me, teaching in the high school in China, their education system is more like Canada, but 20 years ago. In Canada, we used to have the lecture-based style. What students do is memorization, and then the test. I have concerns about how I will prepare my lesson plans and conduct my class.

Actually, I was having a discussion with my associate teacher in Windsor. She said that she wished that Canada would spend some time on the traditional style, so kids should be required to memorize things and do homework, and have a report card. Lots of people are disappointed in Canada’s education system. Teaching a Canadian curriculum in a

Chinese high school means that much to challenge us. I am not to compare but be in the middle of two educational systems to provide a balanced education to my students.”

(Interview with Ana, June 2015)

For novice teachers, there are some challenges. Ana is very positive about preparing for her teaching career in China. Ana liked an English lesson that she observed when we were at Southwest University. She even borrowed some ideas from that English professor to prepare her lesson plans. She said:

“My favourite lesson was an English course prepared for the teacher candidates at the Southwest University. I really liked their English language teaching. I borrowed the idea of English teaching to prepare my lesson plans for my students. The instructor I observed was so experienced. She divided the class into groups of four or five at the beginning of the year, and she told them in advance that the students needed to present before each class, like one group. She designed the homework, and the next day, they talked more about the content together. Before the class, she will have a 15 -minute presentation session done by the students. She asked the students to speak aloud, and got the answers to recall the information. She used different formats, like writing on the chalkboard or physically doing the demonstration. I think the English pronunciation practice and writing helped her students a lot actually. I also learned to make a Chinese standard lesson plan from her. In her class, she prepared you for the English lesson plan. We got the time to get to know the curriculum. She taught step by step how to do the lesson plan, which is good. It was not overwhelming. I think I am lucky enough to get to know all this teaching experience in China. It is so important for us. It is a valued experience.”

(Interview with Ana, June 2015)

After the interview, Ana and I had dinner at the Green Bean restaurant near campus, about 10 minutes away. “It is so good that I can order for you. It is so different than in China where you had to translate and explain for us,” Ana said. She talked to me when ordering. After trying many salad dressings and different pastas, she started to show some of the pictures and videos she took in China. “I really miss those moments. If China has enough cheese, that would be perfect to stay for a long time. I am already considering being a permanent resident in China.”

(Field notes, June 2015)

Chapter 6

Discussion

Introduction to This Chapter

In this chapter, I will discuss the themes arising from my five participants' shared stories in Chapters 4 and 5. These participants came from two visiting groups. Feng and Sherry only stayed in China to observe schools and to join cultural activities for four weeks; Janet and Ana were in China for three months and did their educational research and teaching practicum as extra activities; and Denny went to China twice with two groups. In my study, I will not compare differences or similarities between the one-month visiting group and three-month visiting group in this section. Instead, I will present the shared cross-cultural beliefs and reflections from their cross-cultural learning experiences in China.

First, I will explain how my study shows the significance of joining the Reciprocal Learning Program to the participants' cross-cultural awareness and understanding. Second, I will present reflections on the teacher candidates' personal and professional gains as a result of their involvement in such a program; in particular, these gains reflect the participants' experience of both Eastern and Western educational contexts through the program. Third, I will include some changes that the teacher candidates experienced after their visit to China. Their changing outlooks after their trip reveal some of the trip's impacts on their personal thoughts and professional career development. Finally, I will discuss some recommendations from the participants' perspective regarding the development of pre-service teacher education programs in Canada, and at the University of Windsor in particular.

The Reciprocal Learning Opportunity Is Valuable

Connelly and Xu (2015) state that the Reciprocal Learning Program takes place in the context of educational systems in Canada and China, and this means that “the Chinese have things to learn educationally from the Canadians and, reciprocally, that the Canadians have things to learn educationally from the Chinese” (p. 2). I asked all the participants the same question about the reciprocal meaning for them. All participants agreed that the trip was valuable and will be a monumental experience that they will remember throughout their lives. I cannot verify exactly how many of their memories from this trip will impact their future lives. At least for me with dual roles as a researcher and also a participant in the program, I will cherish and use my Chinese experiences to further my education research and keep the close relationship with my participants. Xu (2015) described the situation as “the researchers falling love with the participants” (p. 136).

It is obvious that the participants in this study showed their increasing understanding of the concept of cross-cultural experiences. However, regarding their use of the terminology cross-cultural experiences, they were more likely to say experiencing cultural differences, culture shock, and unique social and educational settings to describe their perceptions from their visit to China. The cross-cultural experience was offered to allow them to learn more about culture through exposure to direct personal interaction in a different cultural environment. In this study, most of the participants had never been to China; however, some of them had studied abroad or travelled in Europe. Countries such as England, Italy and France, which the participants had visited before their Chinese trip, share cultural backgrounds with Canada, or the participants had emigrated from countries he or she later visited and so could anticipate expected language barriers and culture shock.

Through the program, my participants were able to study and visit China where they encountered unexpected and unforeseen culture shock and experiences. Most of them had limited prior knowledge and experiences of China. Some of them had basic information describing China as a vast country with the largest population in the world. Some of them might be interested in learning that the various types of geographic landscapes, multiple regional cultures and traditions make China and the Chinese unique, differing from the West in many aspects. However, in most cases, participants held ideas about the China they were going to visit, such as Janet stated that, “I really did not know lots about China. Other than that, I just believe that it is completely different than what I experienced before”. Byram and Feng (2006) state that “cross-cultural visiting is more likely to change people significantly, and give them an educational experience of other countries which will be more intense and enriching” (p. 1). In addition, in Chapter 5, Ana’s story about how she gradually adopted the Chinese way of life and brought it back to Canada, made her realize how Chinese culture had influenced her “I am not saying myself as a Chinese is a negative thing, it was very hard for me to do things in Chinese way – the “last minute” thing. I took this back to Canada. My friends in Canada were mad at me, because I won’t schedule anything with them until the last minute”. When Canadian teacher candidates were contextualized in a Chinese cultural and social setting in this study, the cross-cultural experiences influenced them to deal with their work with different strategies and efficiency. Byram and Feng (2006) suggest that “the gains in short stays could also be further enhanced with appropriate cross-cultural communication and pedagogical interventions” (p. 4). I found myself “crossing boundaries culturally” (Xu, 2015, p.137) when listening to their stories and observing their interactions with the locals.

Implications for the Canadian Teacher Candidates

It has been argued that cross-cultural effects develop when visits abroad are longer. How to show the impact of a maximum three-month trip on the participants in this study became my first concern when I began conducting this research. Before I started my research, I assumed that the participants' responses about cross-cultural impacts would relate to their daily life experiences such as cuisine styles, language issues or just that it was an interesting international trip. However, no matter whether the stay was for one month or three, the cross-cultural experiences proved to impact the teacher candidates significantly.

As stated by Xu (2011) that “most of teacher candidates have not experienced in such a dramatic fashion of moving from one country to another with new language and customs” (p. 264), it was significant for the participants to join the Reciprocal Learning Program between Canada and China “to broaden horizons when teacher candidates were taken out of the Eurocentric context of teaching and learning with their eyes opened to the Chinese educational system” (Howe & Xu, 2013, p. 38). Considering the implications of the cross-cultural experiences to the participants' personal and professional development, all the participating teacher candidates in this study admitted that they have achieved the benefits of the international living and visiting experience; such as Sherry stated in Chapter 4 after observing a music class in a primary school: the music teacher first demonstrated three traditional Chinese instruments to the class. The music teacher also showed videos of how musicians played the instruments. Then, the teacher gave the children a sense of culture and history of those three musical instruments. Sherry commented in Chapter 4 that “I wish we could take some of that knowledge of different cultures and traditions into our arts class here in Canada” (p. 46).

In addition, the participants showed their great interest in learning a new language and willingness to accept differences. A study by Unlu (2015) noted that “learning a foreign language, being open to innovations and differences, being open to different job opportunities, gaining a sense of succeeding, and changes in future plans” (p. 236) are the achieved gains and benefits from a study abroad program, which is about a student exchange program with a focus on “students from Erzincan University's Faculty of Education who participated in the Erasmus Program. The Canadian teacher candidates involved in the Reciprocal Learning Program also showed similar gains and benefits through their cross-cultural studying and living experiences in China, such as interest in learning Chinese, flexibility with change, and their career plan. In addition to their gains, some participants struggled to communicate with language barriers, and the influence brought on by the cultural shocks. As Unlu (2015) stated, “staying in a country composed of a completely different cultural heritage allowed participants the opportunity to acquire a wide variety of knowledge and skills” (p. 240). The program provided Canadian teacher candidates with opportunities for cross-cultural experiences and for observing a different educational system to see what a multi-cultural structure is. In addition, the Canadian teacher candidates in this study talked about their abilities to conduct research, their academic gains through participation in the school activities, and how they were able to “benefit from the host university’s academic facilities” (Unlu, 2015, p. 238). Based on the participants’ shared stories, the following themes emerged about the Reciprocal Learning Program’s impact on participants’ cross-cultural acquisition and understandings.

Language barriers

When I designed this study, the impact of language barriers on the participants was not expected to become a priority concern. This was because I believed that the trip was well

organized by the international collaboration between the two universities. In addition, I believe that now China is open and more modernized than expected. However, a scene from a Chinese movie called *American Dreams in China* (2013) demonstrates the issue. The scene is of an American girl playing ping-pong with a Chinese college student. At one point, they are chatting while playing ping-pong. The girl is asking the Chinese student in English, “What do you think of the USA?” The Chinese student answers in English very fluently and smoothly, “you don’t understand our Chinese culture. Comparatively speaking, we have a better understanding of the USA than yours. However, Americans even believe that we have to play ping pong before we get to know the business.”

Before leaving for China, the program participants were fully notified and prepared for their trip through weekly planning meetings. In addition, all the activities and schedules in China were well-planned, taking language into consideration. Reflected on my participants in this study, the impact of language barriers on teacher candidates refers to how the Canadian teacher candidates would think about their future students for whom English is not their mother tongue.

The inconvenience and misunderstanding created by language barriers caused the participants to think about how to conduct an inclusive class to satisfy their future students’ special needs. The participants were placed in local schools to observe Chinese teaching practicums. Also, they were invited to audit the regular college courses taught in Chinese to experience the inconvenience and confusion when surrounded by a Chinese teaching and learning environment. In this situation, the Canadian teacher candidates really had the chance to “put themselves into another’s shoes,” which had a direct impact on their understanding of language matters from their professional teaching perspective. Ana clarified in her story that “I understand the most important thing is how much language matters.” (Chapter 5, p. 71). It is a

strong argument that “students who are not taught in their mother tongue often perform worse in tests and can learn to copy and recite texts from blackboards without being able to understand them properly” (Anonymous, Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com/docview/366471839?accountid=14789>, Marketwire, Nov 26, 2009). Janet also stated in Chapter 5 that her experience with language barriers will greatly affect how she conducts her classrooms in future. “I may try to provide equal opportunities to all students. Seeing as Windsor is in the top four cities for new immigrants to settle in, if I become a teacher in the Windsor area being more culturally sensitive as well as culturally aware of the diverse background of the students will increase my effectiveness” (Chapter 5, p. 62). The program with inconvenience and misunderstanding in language will motive Canadian teacher candidates to modify their global teaching beliefs and instructions in order to meet their future students’ special needs. As Janet said, “language barriers experience may require from me as a teacher to think differently; learning to communicate through language barriers is always an asset, no matter what the language is” (p. 62) in Chapter 5.

Blending two educational systems

It is obvious that classroom observation in China and teaching practicum contribute to teacher candidates’ personal and professional development. For the Canadian teacher candidates in the program, their increasing tolerance and respect for the Chinese culture and social environment contributed to their personal and professional improvement. At the beginning, observation and teaching practice in the local schools were their most important concerns about what they would do in China because the teaching practicum in a developing country such as China is different from a pre-service practicum in Canadian context. For example, Feng stated that his favourite class he observed in a primary school in Chapter 4 that “the English teacher

had so much energy and passion, and every student was smiling. They were laughing, and they were involved” (p. 41), which is a different experience than what he had when he was a primary school student in China. Xu (2013) believes that “both Canada and China educational systems have much to teach the other; that it is not a matter of one system being better than the other: there is a need for reciprocal learning” (Xu and Connelly, SSHRC Partnership Grant proposal, 2013; as cited in Xu & Connelly, Teacher Education Reciprocal Learning Program REB Application, 2014). In other words, through observation, the participants learned that they would like to create an education style that could better accommodate students and embody modern technologies. “Qu chang bu duan,” means overcoming one's weaknesses by acquiring the other's strong points. I believe this saying can be another interpretation for blending the two educational systems. However, we should not duplicate or revise the teaching styles in the two countries. Instead, as Janet mentioned in Chapter 5, “it was interesting to see our lesson as the teachers teach the same lesson. We have one model as the Canadian teaching model, and the Chinese teacher has a different model. It was interesting and hard not to compare. We don't compare which one is better. We just learned from each other, hoping to find a good way to let the students understand better. I think it is good to combine” (p. 67). To this end, the program included teaching moments in China to provide an opportunity to increase exposure to a different but diverse teaching environment that would better encourage and prepare teacher candidates to acquire strengths from both systems.

Revising teaching philosophy

It has been argued that in Canada teachers reuse their lesson plans or repeat their teaching methods from the past instead of revising their teaching beliefs. Back to the teachers' preparation, Sharma, Phillion and Malewski (2011) believe that in Canada, “a majority of pre-

service teachers are White, middle class, and monolingual speakers of English with little or no exposure to the diverse backgrounds and cultural knowledge of non-White students” (p. 10). Xu (2013) stated “what teachers should do to prepare their students for a changing society of increasing diversity in this changing global world seemed to be too distant for them to concern” (Howe & Xu, 2013, p. 38). With the gap between the cross-cultural expectations of teacher candidates and the current real situation in the educational system, it is necessary to build the Reciprocal Learning Program between countries. Feng shared his changing teaching philosophy throughout his one-month visit in China by stating “what I learned in China is to focus more on the disciplinary issue instead of the content, speed, or environment of the classroom. I think that it needs the addition of the Chinese philosophy to my own as the old teachings would be useful in modern times because it allows the students to learn from the ancient times and the modern philosophy” (Chapter 4, p. 41). As the teacher candidates who participated in this study all became newly qualified teachers after graduating from the Faculty of Education, the Reciprocal Learning Program as an exchange educational program is expected to reach its goal of providing Canadian teacher candidates with opportunities to modify their teaching philosophy. Through this study abroad, the cross-cultural experiences they acquired influenced their teaching philosophy, in which they will employ their 21st century style teaching methods and resources to meet their students’ diverse needs.

Recommendations for Pre-Service Teacher Education

Canada is comprised of a multicultural society with immigrants from the globe. According to Statistics Canada, Asia was Canada’s largest source of immigrants during the past five years. Among those immigrants whose mother tongue was other than Canada’s two official

languages, Chinese languages were most common (Statistics Canada, 2014). In addition, the immigrants who tend to come to Canada are relatively young. Immigrant children aged 14 and under who came in the last five years accounted for 19.2% of the newcomer population, and another 14.5% were between the ages of 15 and 24 (Statistics Canada, 2014). Therefore, schools in Canada have students from different cultural backgrounds, which require the teachers to be prepared for students with diverse backgrounds. As this study is built on the program with a focus on the Canadian teacher candidates, it shows the importance of cross-cultural experiences for Canadians. Also, one of the research questions in this study was to find suggestions for pre-service program development based on the participants' experiences in China.

From the perspective of developing teacher education, university students who enroll in a pre-service program should have more opportunities and time to develop multicultural beliefs through travel experiences, and the personal strength to risks new things. It is important for teacher candidates to develop multicultural competencies, such as the ability to question their own thoughts and identify various kinds of cultural backgrounds.

In addition, the participants in this study experienced the pre-service teacher education program at Southwest University, which features and is renowned for its teacher candidates' training and teacher education development across China. Based on their observations, the participants shared some of their suggestions for developing the curriculum for teacher education at the University of Windsor. Suggestions included adding training on teaching skills, providing more time to improve lesson plans.

The stories shared by my participants made a valuable contribution to my research questions in this study. In return, I hope my findings will be useful for others.

Conclusion

This study uses narrative inquiry as its approach, discussing the narratives of Canadian teacher candidates' cross-cultural learning experiences in China through the Reciprocal Learning Program between the University of Windsor and Southwest University in China. My research has shown the significance of cross-cultural experiences to the participants in the program, for example providing teacher candidates with growth in their personal and professional development. Before conducting the research, I had many stereotypes and assumptions about these groups of Canadian teacher candidates, some of whom I believed wanted to use this opportunity for their own international trip. However, witnessing their hard-working preparation before departure and participating in activities with them, I saw their great interest in and commitment to this program and to learning about China, my home country. Also, I am proud to have been a member of this group who had this experience. Not only did I admire the participants' courage to live in a foreign country where they did not know the local language at all; also I cherished the time I spent with them and learned reciprocally from them. In fact, I learned from my participants over and above their contribution to my study. I believe this is another impact of *reciprocal learning*. Often, I was encouraged by my participants to keep going with my research.

Many thanks go to my supervisor, Dr. Shijing Xu, for providing me with a great research opportunity and platform. I have been following Dr. Xu's interview guidelines to modify the interview questions for this study. Under the wings of the Reciprocal Learning Program, I revised some of the interview questions based on my participants' individual interactions and reflections through their participation in this program. However, coming from China with a different cultural background, I was very anxious about interviewing participants in

English. It was less frightening for me to read and observe when we were in China; however, being a non-native English speaker made me less confident with asking effective questions and gaining proper responses. At the beginning, I concentrated on posing questions and hoping to get all the answers from my participants. Sometimes, I missed and did not follow up on some non-related interesting points that emerged during the interviews. With guidance and encouragement from Dr. Xu, I gained more confidence with doing the after-trip interviews. Therefore, most parts of these questions were answered by the participants based on the experiences they acquired from the program. Indeed, this visit provided more insights and opportunities for the participants' personal and professional growth; such as the Chinese learning and speaking skills, an increasing global mindset, an openness to different job opportunities, a sense of success, and acceptance of changes in their future plans. In addition, with my full involvement in both visiting groups, I witnessed and experienced the interpersonal tensions among the participants, and their living adaptations and struggles in Chongqing. Luckily, the Canadian teacher candidates as a team-spirited group with all the support and care built into the program finished the visit, which implies that the growth of cross-cultural experiences plays an important role in enriching their development.

In addition, I reflected on my own cross-cultural understanding in interactions with participants. For example, coming from a different cultural background, I realized I had to spend time with my participants, asking them to explain various cultural or social terms and expressions during the interviews. However, during the interview, I did not have the critical eye to follow up their first response. When I was writing this thesis, I realized I need to discuss some questions further with my participants to clarify.

For this study, I originally planned to find out the participants' reflections on the different teaching pedagogy in the two countries. However, as the participants were teacher candidates who had just graduated from the Faculty of Education, they had minimal teaching experience in Canada. Also, they had few opportunities to do international teaching practicums in China. Some of the participants have been developing their early teaching careers and are experiencing their first professional growth. Some program participants accepted job offers from schools in China, Vietnam, and England. Some of them got interviewed by schools in Canada. Therefore; for my future study, I plan to follow up my participants examining the impact of joining the Reciprocal Learning Program on their professional development as newly qualified teachers.

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