Introduction

Broadening Teacher Candidates' Horizons: An Introduction to the Teacher Education Reciprocal Learning Program

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The *Teacher Education Reciprocal Learning Program* (RLP) is a collaborative initiative between the University of Windsor (UW), Canada, Southwest University (SWU), China, in partnership with Greater Essex County District School Board and Chinese schools associated with SWU. The program, founded in 2010 through SWU Teacher Education fund and UW Strategic Priority Fund with in-kind contributions from Greater Essex County District School Board, is designed to provide an exceptional experience with international engagement, to broaden teacher candidates' horizons for a society of increasing diversity, to foster international collaboration among faculty members who are interested in cross-cultural studies and multicultural education, and to enhance the international reputation of the University of Windsor (Xu, 2011a). The RLP is one of the foundational programs which provide research contexts and settings for the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) Partnership Grant Project entitled "Reciprocal Learning in Teacher Education and School Education between Canada and China" (Xu & Connelly, 2013-2020).

The collaborative nature of the RLP and its guiding concept of *reciprocal learning* are designed as positive responses to global conditions. The world is increasingly interdependent and relations between the West and the East are active and vital. Reciprocal learning is a concept designed to foster mutual adaptation and reciprocity in education as cultures come together. Immigrant countries like Canada have a history and future in which cultural, educational adaptation, and reciprocity are inevitable (Connelly & Xu, 2008; Xu, 2006, 2011b; Xu & Connelly, 2011; Xu, Connelly, He, & Phillion, 2007).

In response to the influx of newcomer students in Ontario schools, the Ontario Ministry of Education (2007) issued a series of policy and guiding documents aimed at "a shared responsibility" of teachers and administrators who work together with parents "to ensure that all

of Ontario's students are ready to take their place in a cohesive and productive society" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008, p. 2). Our studies show that people from mainstream society tend to hold a Eurocentric view of immigration and multiculturalism that implies that it is the newcomers who should adapt and integrate (Connelly & Xu, 2008; Xu, 2006, 2011b, 2017; Xu & Connelly, 2011; Xu et al., 2007). While it is true that newcomers and visible minorities need help and support to adapt and integrate, they are also reshaping the host society and making significant contributions to the making of a new society economically, socially, and culturally. Thus, there are reciprocal learning needs for both the newcomers and host societies (Connelly & Xu, 2008; Xu, 2006, 2017; Xu & Connelly, 2011; Xu et al., 2007). The purpose of the RLP is not only to prepare pre-service teachers for the challenges in meeting the needs of linguistically- and culturally-diverse learners with broadened horizons, but also to engage them in international and intercultural reciprocal learning with mutual respect and appreciation among cultures so as to become both culturally responsive and globally minded teachers for the increasingly diverse society and the constantly changing international world (Connelly & Xu, 2008; Howe & Xu, 2013; Xu, 2011c, 2019; Xu, Chen and Huang, 2015; Xu & Connelly, 2011). As elaborated on by Xu et al. (2015), Southwest University is one of the top six Chinese universities that have had a long history of strong teacher education programs funded by the China State Council to provide free teacher education programs. The Chinese initiative is aimed at cultivating a strong atmosphere of respect for teachers and teaching and its main goals were (a) to make teaching the most respected career in Chinese society, (b) to train large numbers of excellent teachers, and (c) to encourage more excellent youths to become lifelong educators (Ministry of Education, China, 2007). Meanwhile, the SWU administration is aimed at a long-term goal of 10% of SWU students with study abroad experience, according to SWU Vice President Shijian Chen who has played an essential role in the development of the collaborative RLP between UW and SWU. SWU currently supports study abroad programs with over 130 universities in more than 30 countries and regions around the world (Personal communication, SWU Administrator, 2018). The main purpose of these study abroad programs at SWU, like that of the RLP, is to educate internationally-oriented, globally-minded university graduates.

Thus, while the motivations for reciprocal learning in Canada and China have different origins and take place in quite different contexts with different purposes and objectives, the basic philosophical view of reciprocal learning is applicable to both (Xu, 2019). Through the RLP, a cohort of 3rd and 4th year students selected from more than 20 pre-service teacher education programs¹ across Southwest, China, come to the University of Windsor to audit courses in the pre-service teacher education program at the Faculty of Education and observe K-12 classes in local Windsor schools every fall. In reciprocity, a cohort of teacher candidates from the University of Windsor are recruited each new school year to participate in the RLP and make the reciprocal learning trip to China in the spring. There have been nine rounds of pre-service teacher exchanges

¹ Chinese universities that offer pre-service teacher education programs are known as Normal Universities with concurrent teacher education programs across the university in different disciplines. Southwest University, merged from Southwest Normal University and Southwest University of Agricultural Science, has become a comprehensive university but has kept its good tradition of teacher education.

between the two universities since 2010. We are entering the 10th round of the exchange in the 2019-2020 school year.

The Reciprocal Learning Program has been developed into a three-month international internship for UW teacher candidates since the 2014/2015 academic year by following the *Mitacs Globalink Research Award* criteria (see <https://www.mitacs.ca/en/programs/globalink> for details). Committed to its core vision of supporting research-based innovation by working closely with its partners in industry, academia, and government, Mitacs provides Globalink Research Awards to senior undergraduate students, graduate students, and postdoctoral fellows in Canada to conduct 12–24-week research projects at universities overseas (Mitacs, 2019). Mitacs Globalink brings top international students to Canada and sends Canada's best students abroad to foster international innovation networks (Mitacs, 2016). Hence, UW teacher candidates have been mentored to apply for the Mitacs Globalink International Research Award each fall since 2014 through the infrastructure of the SSHRC Partnership Grant Project (Xu & Connelly, 2013-2020). RLP team members from UW and SWU serve as UW Mitacs interns' home or host supervisors or co-supervisors during their first semester proposal writing at UW and three-month Mitacs internship in China at the end of the second semester. The Chinese schools associated with the Canada-China reciprocal learning partnership have become Mitacs internship placement schools for UW teacher candidates who succeed in their application for the Mitacs Globalink Research Awards (\$6,000 each applicant since 2018) to participate in research-oriented international internships abroad. Their research, guided by narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Connelly & Clandinin, 1988; Craig, Zou, & Poimbeauf, 2014; Xu & Connelly, 2010a, 2010b), is contextualized under the "reciprocal learning as collaborative partnership" framework developed by Xu and Connelly through the 7-year SSHRC Partnership Grant Project (Connelly & Xu, in press; Xu & Connelly, 2015). The Mitacs award has served as a source of funding to sustain the RLP over the last five years when UW teacher candidates have undertaken a rigorous application process to obtain the award to cover their three-month reciprocal learning trip to China. The infrastructure of the SSHRC Partnership Grant Project and the Mitacs Globalink Research Award have transformed and enhanced the RLP from a pre-service teacher education enrichment program into both a teacher development program and a research-oriented international internship which have made the participants both learners and researchers.

In the academic year of 2017-2018, 10 UW teacher candidates succeeded in their Mitacs award applications and completed a three-month international internship in China as a cohort in spring 2018. Yuhang Deng, as my Master's student and graduate research assistant, joined the UW 2018 spring cohort during their three-month study trip in China. Ten research reports generated by this cohort as a result were presented at the Faculty of Education during the academic year of 2018-2019. Dr. Ken Montgomery and Dr. Geri Salinitri spoke highly of their work and provided insightful comments and suggestions for the following reports presented at a research panel chaired by Dr. Zuochen Zhang and myself at the UWill Discover Undergraduate Student Conference at the University of Windsor in March 2019. The papers presented were:

1. "The Utilization of Creative Elements within an ESL Classroom" by Kayla Bacon
2. "A comparison of Canadian and Chinese Historical Narrative Formation" by Christopher Cuffaro
3. "China's Cultural and Social Influences on English Language Learning in Public Chinese Education" by Terry Dang
4. "The Role of The Arts in Chinese Middle Schools" by Samantha Di Fazio
5. "Technology in the Classroom" by Gilbert Gilbert
6. "Classroom Differences: What Works Best" by Marium Khan
7. "English Writing in Chinese High School English Classes" by Sanah Malik
8. "How Middle School Curriculum in Chongqing Portrays Chinese Socialism" by Peter Miller
9. "Academic Supports in Middle and High Schools" by Kaleb Lo Stropkovics
10. "Influence of Canadian Pre-service Teachers' Chinese Language Learning on Their Cross-Cultural Learning: A Narrative Inquiry" by Yuhan Deng

Out of these 10 reports, three papers have been selected for publication in this special issue of the *Journal of Teaching and Learning*. In his research project, "How Middle School Curriculum in Chongqing Portrays Chinese Socialism," Peter Miller explores how the political science curriculum in Chongqing, China portrays Chinese socialism. He observed the politics curriculum in Chinese middle schools and talked with political science professors and teacher candidates at SWU in order to understand how Chinese socialism is portrayed in middle school curriculum, whether China's "Core Socialist Values" campaign affects political science curriculum in Chongqing, and whether the Chinese middle school curriculum reflects any connections between the recent developmental gains in China and China's socialist system. Miller offers his unique perspective on an understanding of the complexity of China's politics curriculum with his insights into what the Canadian educators may learn from China. His research helps foster greater appreciation of educational similarities and differences between Canada and China. Kaleb Stropkovics, who studied the academic supports in middle and high schools, addresses mental health issues in the Chinese cultural context. His comparative study offers an understanding of the mental health stigma in China and explores the effective academic supports both Chinese and Canadian schools can provide for academic success and student motivation. Yuhang Deng, as a graduate research assistant who has worked with the UW 2018 RLP/Mitacs cohort since September 2017, explored the cohort's Chinese language learning and cross-cultural experiences in China. Her study, which has been completed as a Master's thesis, is valuable in helping better prepare Canadian pre-service teachers' international internship and enhancing their intercultural reciprocal learning outcomes.

The selected papers presented in this special issue to some extent demonstrate how participating teacher candidates from the University of Windsor have acquired and enhanced their professional knowledge and 21st century competencies and skills (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015) in "understanding diverse worldviews and perspectives in order to address political, ecological, social, and economic issues that are crucial to living in a contemporary, connected, interdependent, and sustainable world," with "an appreciation for the diversity of people,

perspectives, and the ability to envision and work toward a better and more sustainable future for all” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2017). I would like to acknowledge the great efforts made by each of the ten UW 2018 RLP/Mitacs Cohort members, their supervisors and co-supervisors at the University of Windsor and Southwest University, the graduate research assistants and RLP participants at both universities, and especially the school principals, teachers and students they encountered and learned from during their three-month internship in China. Special thanks go to Xu and Connelly’s SSHRC Partnership Grant Project, the Mitacs Globalink Research Award, the University of Windsor Strategic Priority Fund for the successful and sustainable development of the RLP, and especially to Dr. Kara Smith, the editor of the *Journal of Teaching and Learning* and Brandon Sabourin, the editorial assistant of the *Journal of Teaching and Learning*, who have made it possible for us to share the work through this special issue.

I hope we are able to continue with this bridge-making endeavour to connect more people across borders and boundaries to build “a multidimensional reciprocal learning bridge,” as described elsewhere, which “would prevent us from one-way inward-looking worldview and thus develop our intercultural and global competences for a sustainable world in which different and diverse cultures can learn together, work together and live together in a globally extended and expanded *we*” (Xu, 2019, p. 23).

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