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A Narrative Inquiry into Chinese Teacher Induction in West China through Cross-Cultural Teacher Development

Abstract This article is part of a narrative study of Chinese beginning teacher induction through cross-cultural teacher development, which has been developed and contextualized in the *Teacher Education Reciprocal Learning Program* between the University of Windsor (UW), Canada and Southwest University (SWU), China. This program is part of Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) Partnership Grant Project, *Reciprocal Learning in Teacher Education and School Education between Canada and China*. The partnership builds on the *Teacher Education Reciprocal Learning Program*, and the *Shanghai-Toronto-Beijing Sister School Network*. In this article, the authors conducted narrative inquiry with two of the SWU participants in the *Teacher Education Reciprocal Learning Program* to explore their experience from their cross-cultural learning in Canada to beginning teachers in West China. The findings of the research suggest the need to develop a global and cross-cultural dimension in teacher education and development in West China. It is evident that the cross-cultural experiences in Canada have influenced beginning teachers' curriculum views, relationship to students, and beliefs about teaching. Their "lived stories" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 6) also indicate that the personal, pedagogical, and social influences of cross-cultural experiences play important roles in beginning teachers' teaching careers.

Keywords narrative inquiry, Chinese teacher induction, cross-cultural teacher development

Introduction

This article reports the narratives of two Chinese beginning teachers who participated in the *Teacher Education Reciprocal Learning Program*, which was

funded first by the University of Windsor Strategic Priority Fund, and has become part of the ongoing Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) Partnership Grant research program. This narrative research explores the influences of cross-cultural experience on beginning Chinese teachers' induction process and the challenges of becoming teachers in West China in the context of globalization.

In beginning teacher candidates' learning-to-teach experiences in cross-cultural professional settings with varied contexts, many researchers have argued that cultures can be used as a resource for cross-fertilization in their professional learning (Tang & Choi, 2004; Maynes, Allison, & Julien-Schultz, 2013). Global and cross-cultural issues in teacher education and development have been widely discussed. From a global perspective, scholars have argued that there are increasing demands for internationalizing beginning teacher education programs (see Cushner, 2007; Emert, 2008; Merryfield, 2000; Apple, 2011). As Cushner and Mahon (2002) noted, it is imperative that opportunities be provided for beginning teachers to be immersed in cross-cultural contexts that enable them to become global teachers. Researchers state that beginning teachers can learn a significant amount of knowledge from cross-cultural experiences that affects them personally, professionally, and globally (Cushner, 2007; Emert, 2008; Merryfield, 2000).

The *Pre-service Teacher Education Reciprocal Learning Program* between the University of Windsor (UW), Canada and Southwest University (SWU), China, was developed by Shijing Xu at UW and Shijian Chen and his colleagues at SWU by applying the concept of "reciprocal learning" (Xu, 2006, 2011a, 2011b; Connelly & Xu, 2008) between Canada and China to the practice of teacher education. From her narrative inquiry into Chinese newcomer immigrant families, based on Connelly's long-term SSHRC funded school-based research, Xu (2006) argues for a reciprocal educational relationship between newcomer families and mainstream schools rather than a unidirectional enculturation of Chinese newcomers in Canada. She has also subsequently built a Canada-China sister school network project (2009–2012) with F. Michael Connelly to facilitate interactions and reciprocal learning not only between newcomer families and Canadian schools, but also between school teachers in Canada and China.

The *Teacher Education Reciprocal Learning Program* aims to "broaden teacher candidates' horizons for a society of increasing diversity in today's

globalized world” (Xu, 2011b). Hayhoe and Pan’s (2001) concept of “dialogue across cultures” enlightened this paper, in contrast with the effect of Huntington’s (1996) theory of “clash of civilizations.” The UW-SWU *Teacher Education Reciprocal Learning Program* provides Canadian and Chinese teacher candidates with cross-cultural and international opportunities for professional development and deep understanding of Chinese and Western educational theories and practices with mutual appreciation and reciprocal learning. Hayhoe and Phillips (1989) also noted that the different values of East and West need to be understood and appreciated. Yet, with an extensive literature search, the authors have found few study abroad programs that incorporate both West to East and East to West student exchanges, in a similar way to the *Teacher Education Reciprocal Learning Program*. Cushner (2007) pointed out that this cross-cultural experience “occurs twice—once during entry into the host culture and then again upon re-entry into the home culture” (p. 29).

To date, there is a lack of literature describing the struggle and crisis faced by teacher candidates adapting to local cultures in the early years of teaching after their cross-cultural experiences. Also, there are few programs that incorporate research regarding the longitudinal influence of cross-cultural learning experience on teachers’ induction process. Research conducted by Schlein (2007) explores the cultural and identity impact of intercultural teaching experiences and examines the potential of curricular situations to contribute to multicultural education and educational globalization. Similarly, Baxter (2012) explores the long-term impact of participation in a pre-service international practicum. Maynes et al. (2013) examine participants’ perception of the longevity of impact of Kenyan experience on their lives, their careers, and the personal and professional choices they made.

According to Feiman-Nemser (2010), induction is a process of learning to teach and socialization. This view of induction considers “the unique process of learning to work within a new cultural setting that consists of colleagues, curriculum, and the organization” (Luft et al., 2011, p. 1201). It is during this process that beginning teachers “develop norms that accommodate the pressures of the various communities” (Luft et al., 2011, p. 1201). Very little literature has identified the issues of beginning teachers in West China, where development has been slower than that of other regions in China. Teacher induction mainly focuses on induction programs in developed areas like Shanghai (Britton, Paine,

Pimm, & Raizen, 2003; Ji, Zhou, & Xia, 2011). Therefore, the research questions are:

(1) How does cross-cultural learning in Canada influence Chinese beginning teachers' early career teaching in West China?

(2) What are the factors that shape who they are as beginning teachers in West China?

Methodology

Narrative is increasingly used in educational research focused on educational experience (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Xu and Connelly (2009) introduced Connelly and Clandinin's (1990) notion of narrative inquiry to the Chinese teacher educators as the study of "the ways humans experience the world" and is also "a way of thinking about life" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 2). Xu and Connelly (2009) illustrated that, "narrative is the phenomenon of inquiry because everything, including teacher development, is a phenomenon narrated through stories" (p. 221).

According to Clandinin and Connelly (2000), narrative inquiry is "a way of understanding experience. It is a collaboration between researcher and participants, over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction with milieus" (p. 20).

In this article, a narrative epistemological stance is drawn primarily from Connelly and Clandinin (1990) and their concept of the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) is used as the theoretical framework. Teacher education is connected to teachers' lives and narrative inquiry is the ideal methodology to study lived experiences. As Craig (2011) points out, "the link between teacher education and narrative inquiry could not be stronger" (p. 20). Connelly and Clandinin (1990) said, "it is equally correct to say 'inquiry into narrative' as it is 'narrative inquiry'" (p. 2). In this study of the induction process of beginning teachers who participated in the international exchange program in 2010 and 2011, the authors make an inquiry into the educational phenomena under study while living in the midst of the teachers' induction process, interacting with them, responding to them, debriefing them, and writing about them. This is a collaborative "relational inquiry" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) in which the researchers as the inquirers think narratively about

the experience and also learn from having been in the midst of the experience.

The three-dimensional life space (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Xu & Connelly, 2009) of narrative inquiry—temporality, sociality and place—will be used as a framework to examine the situations and interactions of Chinese teachers' experiences as they unfold in their cross-cultural learning landscape. Chinese pre-service teacher candidates all returned to their home university in China after the three-month learning experiences in Canada. They have become school teachers in different provinces in China. As no experience can stand alone in time, the stories from these beginning teachers do not merely reflect experiences they have at the moment they are told, but also serve as a reflection on their teacher preparation in the past and their expectations for the future.

Those lived moments at Windsor are now part of their ongoing teacher development. In this study, particular attention is paid to the temporal dimension of their growth when listening to the participants' stories of learning to teach.

On one hand, the authors attend to the beginning teachers' attitudes, "feelings, hopes, desires, aesthetic reactions, and moral dispositions of the person" (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 480). On the other hand, the teachers' social conditions are observed, which refer to "the context including administration, policy, community, and so on" (p. 480). Those social conditions shape the events and the teachers' lives.

As stated by Xu and Connelly (2010) in their discussion of school-based narrative inquiry, when learning about human experience, the inquirer should understand that people behave or experience things differently in different situations, and that their background may change when they move from one living space to another. A beginning teacher may behave differently in the classroom, in the staffroom, in parent/teacher interviews and in graduate courses. Xu and Connelly (2009) argue that "place is a determining factor and changes a teacher's identity as she/he moves from place to place" (p. 224). In this study, the term "place" refers to different living situations or environments such as schools in Windsor, Canada, the Canadian and Chinese university campuses, and their schools in China. In this study, teaching in a key school (which means a school with good resources and an academic orientation in China) in a big city may be different from teaching in an ethnic minority school located in a low-income area.

Data Collection

Following the UW research ethics protocol, the authors have taken measures to ensure anonymity and confidentiality. Pseudonyms are used for all the participants and schools. This study focuses on Shan and Guli, two participants in the *Reciprocal Learning Program* in 2010 with Ju Huang as their guide teacher from SWU, China. Shijing Xu required in the program that “all participants keep observation notes and write a weekly reflection on their cross-cultural lived experience” (as cited in Xu, Chen, & Huang, in press). From 2011 to 2014, the authors kept in touch with all SWU participants through online QQ groups, email correspondences and casual or formal personal communications in person, as well as observing their graduate courses at SWU in 2013. Ju Huang has continued working for the *Reciprocal Learning Program* as a graduate assistant after she returned to Windsor to pursue her doctoral studies in July 2011. Data also includes analysis of documents such as policy documents, participants’ personal reflections and their coursework assignments. Shijing Xu, as the program coordinator, applied for and obtained ethical approval for research work associated with the *Reciprocal Learning Program* when the program was first developed, and has recently updated and obtained ethical approval as the SSHRC Partnership Grant Project Director to cover research related to the *Reciprocal Learning Program* and the *Sister School Network* with Connelly as the Project Co-Director. Ju Huang has been working as a graduate assistant for the program.

Findings

Shan’s Story

Shan is a biology teacher who teaches in a Chongqing secondary school in Southwest China. When he was a third year pre-service student, Shan won the first prize in the teaching competition for beginning teacher candidates at SWU. The award enabled him to be selected to participate in the *Reciprocal Learning Program* in the fall of 2010. Shan graduated in 2011 and was immediately assigned to teach biology at a high school in Chongqing, a metropolitan city in Southwest China, teaching two Grade 11 classes and a Grade 12 class as a

beginner science teacher.

Shan talked about his educational dream in a personal communication with Ju Huang when visited at Xinhua Middle School in August 2011. It was related to one of the writing classes he observed in a Grade 8 class in Windsor, Canada. The Grade 8 students were asked to write an essay with “Better” given as the topic. Shan noticed that the Canadian students were allowed to brainstorm to write about almost anything: some children wrote smaller dogs were better than large dogs; some even made comparisons between the PSP (a handheld game console produced by Sony) and the XBOX (an American handheld game console; personal communication with Shan, August 30, 2011).

Shan compared this with what he would see in a Chinese writing class and commented, “They [Chinese students] like to write about some big topics like environment protection or protecting their country... They are told how to think and what to do by their parents and teachers. Therefore, they seldom think independently” (personal communication with Shan, August 30, 2011). Shan wanted to improve students’ independent thinking and to make them learn actively, but since he was educated this way, he did not know how to change his students and cultivate their independent thinking.

Evolving Understanding of Inquiry-Based Learning

It was the second year of a new round of provincial high school curriculum reform in Chongqing. As Dai, Gerbino, and Daley (2011) pointed out one of the objectives of curriculum reform in Chinese basic education (Kindergarten to Grade 12) was “a change in pedagogy from lecturing/recitation/rote learning to inquiry and problem-based learning” (p. 140). With this goal of cultivating students’ active learning and independent thinking, Shan went to a workshop on inquiry-based learning. Based on his observation of both Chinese and Canadian classrooms, Shan agreed with the speaker of the workshop that inquiry-based learning in the Chinese classroom was “quasi inquiry-based learning.” It was not truly inquiry-based learning although it was “much better than direct teaching” (personal communication with Shan, August 30, 2011). When Ju Huang asked him the reason, he made an analogy between the inquiry method of teaching in the West and that in China.

In the West, teachers would say all answers are possible. They would not regard what

they think as the truth. As long as students participate in the inquiry and discuss the question, teachers have achieved the goal of the class. They aim to have students to discuss the possibilities for solving the problem and if it does not work, the students would figure out why it does not work. In comparison, I find the inquiry-based learning model in China is a quasi-model: It is not a genuine inquiry into a scientific question. Rather, it aims to find a correct answer to a solved problem through inquiry. (Personal communication with Shan, August 30, 2011)

According to Shan, this is not genuine inquiry-based learning since “we get the ‘correct’ answer even though the possibilities of the inquiry are various” (personal communication with Shan, August 30, 2011).

During his three years of school teaching, Shan has been exploring the inquiry methods of teaching. He communicated with colleagues at school-wide or provincial professional development training sessions and observed the model classes of inquiry-based teaching by some invited teachers at school. He said, however, “I was very puzzled as I never saw any class that could be a good model of inquiry-based pedagogy. Very few of the demonstration classes offered enlightenment to me” (personal communication with Shan, July 24, 2014).

Dilemma between Curriculum Intention and Practical Reality

After one semester, the tension between developing students’ ways of thinking and raising their test scores through drill and practice emerged. In one of his three classes, Shan’s teaching method that emphasized students’ thinking skills rather than rote memorization and drills worked well. Students enjoyed learning biology and their test scores also outperformed those of other classes. However, the situation was different in his other two classes. Students did not like his method because “they have got used to relying on the teachers to preach them canonical knowledge and explain everything clearly” (personal communication with Shan, January 3, 2012).

In the mid-term examination of the first semester, the scores of his Grade 11 class were at the bottom of the grade. In retrospect, Shan stated, “it may be true that drills would help students to raise their test scores” (personal communication with Shan, January 3, 2012). He illustrated his stress at the end of the first semester of his teaching:

Frankly speaking, I have a lot of pressure. Beginning teachers will face pressures from all sides if they cannot improve their students' exam scores. It is the situation in school nowadays. The administrators will ignore what you have done, as test scores are used to evaluate teachers' performance. (Personal communication with Shan, January 4, 2012)

In the first monthly examination in the second semester of Grade 11, the gap in average scores among his three classes was still wide; two of his classes were at the bottom while another one ranked first. Shan felt enormous pressure, individually and as part of the collective group of teachers, to help students to raise their test scores. He said, "I was not good at improving students' scores. This was not part of my initial teaching plan" (personal communication with Shan, April 3, 2012).

During Shijing Xu's visit at SWU in June 2013, the authors were able to interview Shan and other former SWU participants in the program (Xu et al., in press). Shijing Xu encouraged Shan to hold on to his dreams and to seek a balance between improving students' test scores and developing their thinking skills. Fortunately, even under such pressure, Shan did not give up his belief. He pointed out: "I observed and experienced different ways of teaching in Canada. This is the reason for my exploration and intention to make some changes. It will be meaningless if I teach just for exams" (personal communication with Shan, April 3, 2012).

He insisted on his way of teaching to "emphasize students' thinking" and assigned "the least amount of homework to students." Although some senior teachers blamed Shan's way of teaching for students' low test scores, his colleagues in the same Teaching-and-Research Group¹ believed in his abilities. With the support of his Teaching and Research Group, Shan participated in the first New Sprout (新苗, *xin miao*) teaching competition for young teachers in his school in April 2012. This was a teacher's professional development activity held at Xinhua Middle School as "a way of training beginning teachers" (Xinhua Middle School, 2012b).

In the first and final rounds of the competition, Shan won the first prize and his open classes received positive feedback from his colleagues and school administration. Reflecting on the competition, Shan wrote:

¹ Teachers in Chinese schools are allocated to small "teaching and research teams" (教研组, *jiao yan zu*) according to the subjects they teach.

When teaching about a scientific breakthrough like embryo transfer, a teacher should make his lesson interesting to students... Students had intense interests in this process since they designed the plan of embryo transfer on their own. Besides, I provided a few new challenging problems for students to solve. These problems were related to students' real life. Therefore, students got motivated when they found they could apply what they learned to a real life situation. So, they enjoyed learning in the whole class. (Personal communication with Shan, April 29, 2012)

Shan focused on teaching according to his students' interests and embedding learning in real life. When asked how he formulated his way of teaching, Shan related it to the conception of "life is education" at Xinhua Middle School, which is renowned for its efforts to consistently improve this concept. Xinhua Middle School was founded by Xingzhi Tao in the 1920s, a follower of Dewey's educational philosophy of life and education (Xinhua Middle School, 2012a). Tao, influenced by Dewey's concept of education and experience, believed that education should originate from and be applied to life and this conception became the principle and motto of the school ever since. Shan said, "Each Teaching-and-Research Group was assigned some research tasks to implement 'life education' in their practices" (personal communication with Shan, January 3, 2015). As a member of the science Teaching and Research Group, Shan wrote a paper on the implementation of life education in the science classroom. In his paper, he reflected his participatory observation experience in Canadian schools: "Education in Canada is based on and is connected with students' real lives. If students want to learn professional knowledge, they may further their study at university" (personal communication with Shan, August 23, 2013).

After three years' of teaching practice in China, Shan developed a deeper understanding of inquiry-based learning. "I think the real inquiry-based learning is about students experiencing genuine facts. In contrast, quasi-inquiry was 'exhibiting' a fact of scientific phenomena to students. In fact, students did not engage in the process of inquiry" (personal communication with Shan, July 27, 2014).

Regarding the reason of lack of genuine inquiry-based learning in practice in China, he pointed out: "We are still lacking the conditions or environment to encourage inquiry-based learning" (personal communication with Shan, July 27, 2014). Now, Shan has developed a more balanced view of the differences

between China and the West in inquiry-based learning.

Frankly speaking, inquiry-based learning in the West has somewhat of a “shepherding” style. I will not simply judge which way is better or worse. However, we can see what skills or capability they aim to cultivate in students. Although inquiry-based pedagogy is like “shepherding,” the whole situation of thinking is open. We should learn from it. In spite of the fact that there are good and not so good teachers in the West, its atmosphere of education is open and free, which is of importance. (Personal communication with Shan, July 27, 2014)

Guli's Story

Guli was born in an Inner Mongolian prefecture in Northwest China, where the population is 65% *Han* Chinese. Her parents are both Mongolian and she was sent to a *Han* school from kindergarten with *Putonghua* as the instructional language, while her older sister attended the Mongolian school. Guli speaks Mongolian at home with her family members and learned English from Grade 7. As Huang and Xu (in press) described, Guli, who participated in the *Reciprocal Learning Program* in Canada for three months, had her “Mongolian and Chinese identities” strengthened. After taking the *Reciprocal Learning Program* fieldtrip to Walpole Island in Canada, she connected her minority ethnic background to the Aboriginal situation in Canada. In Guli's reflection on the fieldtrip to Walpole Island, she wrote,

It was such a touching and educational trip... I heard a piece of good news from my mom today: Mongolian children could start to learn Mongolian from kindergarten under the new bilingual education system... I was so excited to know the efforts made by Mongolians in my hometown. I hope Mongolian culture will be kept well for long. (Personal communication with Guli, November 11, 2010)

“*Survive in the Cracks*”²

With the hope of making a contribution to Mongolian education, Guli applied to

² “Survive in the cracks” is the Chinese colloquial saying (夹缝中求生存, *jiáfēng zhōng qiú shēngcun*).

be a teacher in a Mongolian school in her hometown upon graduation from SWU in 2012. Guangming Mongolian School is a comprehensive school, covering classes from elementary to senior high school with 610 Mongolian students and 318 *Han* students (Huang & Xu, in press).

In her job interview, Guli expressed satisfaction with “finding a career where I could make contributions to Mongolian education and teach English” (personal communication with Guli, May 15, 2012). Guli left her interview, feeling excited by the fact that it was a “mixture of minority and *Han* school” and school administration “supports teachers’ professional development” (personal communication with Guli, May 15, 2012).

As a 民考汉, *min kao han*³ student, Guli described that she felt she “survives in the cracks” in a personal communication with Ju Huang and another program alumni in the homecoming meeting:

The situation of *min kao han* is embarrassing. People might think you are not a complete minority since you cannot speak and write the minority language... *Min kao han* might feel ostracized by other people. My Chinese is much better than the Mongolian teachers’. If the school administrators are all minority, I might feel that I am caught in a very embarrassing situation. (Personal communication with Guli, May 18, 2012)

Guli was also worried about acclimatizing to the school. Most of the Mongolian teachers in her school learned Mongolian from elementary school to colleges/universities in her province. Therefore, she began to learn Mongolian language when she was back from Canada. She said, “I hope I could write and read and catch up with the other Mongolian teachers” (personal communication with Guli, May 15, 2012).

Struggle to Adapt to the School

Upon graduating from SWU in 2012, Guli began to teach English to two *Han* Grade 10 classes. “Because there were not enough Mongolian students attending Mongolian schools, several years ago, the school began to recruit *Han* students to avoid having a surplus of teachers” (personal communication with Guli, July 28,

³ 民考汉, *min kao han* are minority students who take the *Gaokao*, the national college entrance exam in Chinese.

2013). She was also a head teacher of one of the *Han* classes, which had around 65 students. In contrast, class sizes were small in the Mongolian classes, with fewer than 30 students. Guli compared her Mongolian and Canadian school class situations, saying, “The small Mongolian class sizes are similar to those in Canadian schools, but the concepts of the school and the conditions are much less advanced than in a Canadian school” (personal communication with Guli, July 28, 2013).

Guli initially began her teaching with the hope of contributing to Mongolian education. However, in reality, she said, “I do not have any extra time to help or contribute to bilingual classes and Mongolian classes.” As a beginning teacher, she had pressure from planning and teaching lessons. However, as a head teacher of 65 *Han* students, discipline and classroom management occupied most of her time including nights and weekends. After a month or so, Guli told the Vice Principal in tears that she was not able to be a head teacher anymore. However, according to the school administration, Guli’s workload was “normal and nonnegotiable” and “teachers should do the workload since they receive additional remuneration” (personal communication with Guli, March 6, 2013). Guli was very disappointed: “The school administrators should consider my limited experience. No one told me how to be a head teacher” (personal communication with Guli, March 6, 2013). Guli was sick for one month at the beginning of the second semester. She complained that her school did not reduce any of her workload. She narrated, “this is not humane and I feel so depressed” (personal communication with Guli, March 6, 2013). Besides, Guli did not like the pace of working in her school. She commented, “How slowly everything gets done! In fact, efficiency in my province is much lower than other places. It is even slower in the minority school. It is too slow for me to bear it” (personal communication with Guli, July 28, 2013).

In a conversation in the end of the first year, Guli reminisced that she had enjoyed the equal and respectful relationship between teachers and students during her Canadian experience. However, she did not expect that her students would be different from what she imagined. She told Ju Huang that “my students are from poor families... most of them are impolite” (personal communication with Guli, July 8, 2013). She never encountered students from this kind of family and she “cannot put up with the impoliteness. I think good manners are the basic things that people should have already learned in their childhood” (personal

communication with Guli, July 8, 2013). Beside, more than 10 of the 65 students in her class are from single parent family. Therefore, “these students are very sensitive.” Guli said, “This situation annoyed me. I felt that I spent a lot of effort but that it did not work” (personal communication with Guli, July 8, 2013).

The contradictions between her expectations and the reality led Guli to doubt her career choice. Guli decided to seek other alternatives for her career path. She said, “I want to quit. I would rather be a substitute teacher if I could leave this school” (personal communication with Guli, July 6, 2013). Guli wrote to Shijing Xu about her struggles. Shijing Xu wrote back to Guli and pointed out the reason she placed Guli and some SWU visiting students in her “Issues in Education” class at the UW because she wanted them to realize “why and how important multicultural education issues are in China.” She advised Guli how to keep field notes in her daily teaching practice and note down the joys and struggles in her teaching and how useful these field notes would be when she was ready to return to SWU to do her graduate studies. She told Guli a long story of her former schoolmate who began his teaching career in a rural school, first recognized by a principal at a key school of his province and has now become a vice principal of a key school at national level with his years of dedication to education. Shijing Xu encouraged Guli “not to see life as a short and fast sports game... In the near future you will find the current struggles are actually blessings in disguise” (email correspondences with Guli, June 6, 2012).

Guli's Changes in Her Second Year of Teaching

In July 2013, Guli returned to SWU for graduate studies. There was no entrance exam for the graduates from the *Free Pre-Service Teacher Education Program* at SWU to pursue their Master's of Education. Guli struggled about whether to apply for the program now that she wanted to leave the teaching profession. With Ju Huang and Shijing Xu's encouragement, she went to SWU to further her studies. Being away from the hustle and bustle of everyday teaching, this professional development opportunity made her reflect on her teaching. In the second year, Guli slowly increased her awareness that her students' social and cultural backgrounds were quite distinct from her own. She gradually deepened her understanding of the students' backgrounds and their needs, so that she could respond in an appropriate way.

One of the students, who asked to leave the evening class with the excuse that his brother was sick, was late for class the next day. When Guli asked him why, he cried and told her, “You do not understand us. I want to study well and enter university after graduation; however, the chances are very rare. I would like to sit in the front of the classroom; otherwise, I cannot concentrate on study due to the influence of the other students.” Guli talked with him for three hours and realized that “students do not see a bright future beyond graduation since only a few students in the *Han* class enter university from the school” (personal communication with Guli, February 12, 2014).

Guli’s teaching ability developed and she took on the responsibility of demonstrating teaching lessons for school-based professional development. She incorporated cultural components to understanding the English text into her teaching, so that it differed from a traditional English language class that tended to focus on grammar and vocabulary. For example, she talked about the “melting pot” metaphor and diverse population in the US when teaching an English open class with a text about California in the US. After the open class, some senior teachers advised that she should have focused on the content of the English text, i.e., the language points and grammar. This was common practice for the other English language teachers in the school. Guli said, “my colleagues thought I should have just taught the content of the text since expanding students’ horizons was unnecessary... It is good for students to know something beyond the textbook although my colleagues think it is unnecessary” (personal communication with Guli, April 14, 2014). At the end of the second year of her teaching, Guli no longer wanted to quit teaching and wanted to pursue a doctoral degree in trilingual/bilingual education.

Discussion

Third year student Shan and fourth year student Guli participated in the UW and SWU *Teacher Education Reciprocal Learning Program* in 2010 as part of their four year Pre-Service Teacher Education Program at Southwest University.

Shan’s story, revealing his changing understanding of the concept of inquiry-based learning, is a story of learning to be a teacher who wishes to develop students’ independent thinking in the context of curriculum reform in China. In Guli’s narrative accounts, it is evident that she is developing her

understanding of the students who have different social and economic backgrounds. Her identity of being a Mongolian teacher in a multicultural environment was strengthened (Huang & Xu, in press). There are differences between Shan's concern for developing students' independent thinking and Guli's concern for situating herself in a multicultural school setting. Their participation in the *Reciprocal Learning Program* contributes to a shared "narrative unity," meaning threads of their lives that "construct the stories that they live both in their personal lives and in their teaching" (Connelly, Clandinin, & He, 1997, p. 671).

Pedagogical Influence from a Global Perspective

Both Shan and Guli's narratives resonate with how Connelly and Clandinin (1988) have viewed teachers as "curriculum planner" and "curriculum maker." Facing the national curriculum, Shan and Guli incorporated their own experience into teaching.

The cross-cultural experience in Canada has expanded Shan's horizon in terms of viewing curriculum and teaching from the global perspective. The quest for developing students' independent thinking existed from the beginning of Shan's teaching after his Canadian experience. Even when he met with difficulty in improving students' test scores, he did not give up his dream. He rethought inquiry-based learning in China and Western countries and applied it to his teaching. Inspired by Xinhua school's philosophy of connecting "life" with "education," Shan liked to engage in scenarios that were related to students' daily lives to introduce them to concepts in biology. He always "start[s] teaching with what students are interested in and have access to in their real lives" (personal communication with Shan, at his homecoming gathering, July 21, 2013). This illustrates well the point that Connelly quoted from Anderson-Levitt: "Curriculum gets borrowed but education also gets adapted to local circumstances" (as cited in Huang, 2014, p. 55).

The conflict between the intention of the new curriculum reform and the reality of practices in Shan's story also indicates the complexity of curriculum reform in China. Shan's story embodied balancing the practice of instruction according to what is to be examined and according to nurturing students' independent thinking and sense of inquiry. Kang, Erickson, Ryan, and Mitchell

(2011) quoted Ma's survey of Chinese teachers on their reactions to the reform and found that it was difficult for teachers to actually implement the reform. Therefore, they claimed, "More effective strategies and procedures need to be applied to further strengthen teacher training and professional development" (p. 44). Similarly, Shan has found it hard to find any good example of the application of inquiry-based teaching in his teaching context in China. Nevertheless, he has made a great effort to integrate what he learned from Canada into the school curriculum, especially in his own teaching practice.

Guli also gave examples of how she engaged her students through infusing multicultural resources into the school curriculum in a way that promotes a global connection in terms of social and cultural areas. Although it is important for teachers in a multicultural setting in China to address multicultural issues, Guli has had struggles about whether she should integrate the multicultural components into her teaching practice since they are "not so relevant to the content of the lesson" and "students do not have a good academic background" (personal communication with Guli, March 16, 2013). She felt that her learning experience in Canada made her more aware of multicultural issues in China. With the encouragement from Shijing Xu, Guli developed her research interests in bilingual and multicultural education. In the open classes and in her daily classes, she incorporated a cultural component and she held that "it is good for students to know something beyond the textbook" (personal communication with Guli, April 14, 2014).

Cross-Cultural Teacher Development

Guli's storied experiences at Guangming Mongolian School are organized around her acculturation to the Mongolian school and development of relationships with students from low-income families in the multicultural setting. This relationship shaped her knowledge of becoming a beginning teacher and provided us with the insight into how she constructed her position in a cross-cultural classroom and multicultural school. As she moved back and forth between *Han* and Mongolian cultures and through an East-West reciprocal learning journey, Guli, who spoke Mandarin Chinese better than her native tongue, was worried about adapting to the Mongolian school, where almost all of the school administration and staff "were taught in Mongolian from elementary

school to provincial college/university” (personal communication with Guli, June 2, 2012). Her worries existed from the beginning of her teaching to the end of the second year. Guli’s experiences indicate that professional support is needed to help beginning teachers move forward from their struggles in their induction period. They need help to develop their pedagogies beyond the textbooks and to enhance their cross-cultural awareness in bilingual or trilingual settings. Her idea of quitting the teaching profession may be extreme but it is not unusual. McAlpine and Crago (1995) have suggested that “induction [is] the year in which the new teacher begins to understand the professional culture into which he or she has chosen to enter” (p. 412). How did Guli’s acculturation to the culture of a Mongolian school impact her ability to acculturate to her classroom? What stands out in Guli’s story and resonates with the teacher development literature is her gradual development in adapting to the Mongolian school while keeping her educational principles, as well as her increasing ability to cope with classroom management and instruction.

Howe and Xu (2013) have proposed *transcultural teacher development*, a step further from multicultural teacher education, and have noted that it would help to “see the world in different ways by appreciating different cultures” (p. 37). Xu (2011a) emphasized, “The Chinese family stories show that communication and understanding can be achieved and enhanced through mutual learning and adaptation” (p. 224). Guli’s pre-service program, as she illustrated, did not prepare her sufficiently to be a culturally responsive teacher. During her stay in Canada, she was inspired by the concepts and practices of multicultural education and she resonated with the initiatives to keep aboriginal language and cultures. Her existential beliefs in “equal relationship” and “extending students’ horizon” (personal communication with Guli, May 15, 2014) clearly shone in all of her discussions. Therefore, as we have stated earlier in the literature review, it is imperative to improve teachers’ cross-cultural awareness, especially for those in minority-inhabited areas. Guli also added that without help in understanding students in a low socioeconomic area, beginning teachers might blame their students for not learning (personal communication with Guli, September 30, 2013).

Professional Development through Open Classes and Teaching Competition

Shan’s and Guli’s narratives of professional development activities reveal what

an important role culture has in teaching and teacher development. Ryan, Kang, Mitchell, and Erickson (2009) stated, “Chinese teachers seem to be much more open to critique, and that observation, followed by discussion or debriefing, is central to the teaching process” (p. 436). School-based structures of teachers’ professional development programs are used systematically in China to support the growth and learning of beginning teachers, i.e., beginning teachers’ open classes and teaching competition for beginning teachers. Feiman-Nemser (2010) notes that professional development opportunities “dramatically affected teachers’ on-the-job learning and their ability to use ideas and strategies introduced in teacher education” (p. 18). As Liang (2011) states, teaching competitions and open classes are regarded as the “Chinese way of training beginning teachers” and this method “provides beginning teachers with opportunities to stand out and advance their teaching careers” (p. 4).

Both Shan and Guli grew through the open classes they taught, which were carefully prepared by them and open to critique by experienced teachers and school administrators. Britton et al. (2003), who did a three-year piece of research on beginning teachers in China, Japan, France, New Zealand, and Switzerland noted, “induction can be seen as the process of entering a public culture teaching.... It socializes beginning teachers to a shared language of teaching, habits of mind and norms of practice” (p. 298). Through the preparation and presentation of such lessons, beginning teachers like Shan and Guli used the reflective stance they had developed during their Canadian experience. They did not only share their teaching strategies but also incorporated what they valued in education. They tried to take into account not just “national contexts and imperatives” (Ryan et al., 2009) but also local ones. This is explicitly illustrated in Shan’s open classes in the teaching competition. Shan enacted the principle of “life is education,” proposed by Xingzhi Tao, the founder of Xinhua School. Shan stimulated students’ learning motivation and designed his open classes based on students’ real life experience to help them to formulate inquiry. Although he did not agree to teach to prepare students for tests, he tried his best to balance teaching for tests and for cultivating students’ way of thinking.

Closing Remarks

Shan and Guli’s induction journeys indicate the need to develop “transcultural

thinking” (Howe & Xu, 2013, p. 33). Xu stated that teacher candidates participating in the *Reciprocal Learning Program* “have also become more culturally sensitive and more reflective of their own cultural traditions and educational practices” (Howe & Xu, 2013, p. 38).

Paine and Fang (2006) refer to the “hybrid model,” in which Chinese teachers construct new pedagogical and curriculum approaches based on a weaving together of new ideas from outside and inside in a way that “connects Chinese educators to foreign ones” (p. 286). Although cross-cultural immersion experiences in different countries are “an expensive and time-consuming alternative for pre-service teachers” (Maynes et al., 2013, p. 161), Shan and Guli’s stories show the enduring value of cross-cultural experience in an increasingly multicultural and globalized world. It is evident that the strong emotional reflections of participants during their Canadian experience were enhanced and enriched by more mature and committed professional practices in the local context over time.

The authors note the different outcomes of open class teaching for Shan and Guli. Shan won first prize in teaching and taught his lessons creatively. Guli, who also attempted to teach differently, has been advised to teach in the same way as other teachers in her school. The local contexts play an important role to teachers’ professional development. It is aligned with Eisner’s (1984) comments on Schwab’s contributions to curriculum: “For contexts—at least in education—there are no identical features... there can be no teacher-proof curriculum...” (p. 209). Shan and Guli’s narratives enable us to reflect on cross-cultural dimensions and the role of contexts in teacher education through people who live in the experience.

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