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Changes of Chinese exchange teacher candidates' professional beliefs in the 'reciprocal learning in teacher education and school education between Canada and China' project

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ABSTRACT

This article is based on the empirical research involving Chinese exchange teacher candidates from Southwest University in China who participated in the *Reciprocal Learning in Teacher Education and School Education between Canada and China (RLTESECC)* project and studied at the University of Windsor. These teachers conducted classroom observation in Canadian schools from 2010 to 2016. The research study explores changes in Chinese teacher candidates' beliefs about their professional life, which was promoted by the project, inspired by the Teachers' Change Model proposed by F. A. J. Korthagen and based on the concept of Reciprocal Learning as collaborative partnerships between and among cultures. A two-stage research design was guided by the Grounded Theory approach (Charmaz, 2006). The findings reveal that the reciprocal learning project created an environment, which was conducive to exchange teacher candidates' professional development and especially introduced new perspectives to teachers' understanding of their profession in four areas: 1) teaching, 2) learning, 3) researching and academic writing and 4) professional social life.

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Introduction

In this era of globalisation and internationalisation, cooperation and partnerships among countries in teacher education have been strengthened to prepare future teachers with professional qualities necessary to succeed in more complex multilingual and multicultural teaching environments. Numerous overseas learning and teaching practicum programmes have been developed by teacher education organisations and universities in order to enhance teacher candidates' international and cross-cultural understanding. With an established tradition of valuing education and respecting teachers, the Chinese government has long recognised and supported communication and collaboration in teacher education with other countries. Today many Chinese teacher candidates are provided with opportunities to engage in short-term exchanges,

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learning programmes, school visits, or teaching practicum in foreign countries. At the same time, many foreign teacher candidates are increasingly attracted by the distinctive Chinese teacher education and come to China to learn or to teach. The cooperation in teacher education between China and other countries is evolving from unilateral learning to mutual learning. The *Reciprocal learning in Teacher Education and School Education between Canada and China (RLTESECC)* features such reciprocity between the East and the West.

The teacher education exchange programme between University of Windsor (UW) in Canada and Southwest University (SWU) in China, *The Pre-service Teacher Education Reciprocal Learning Programme between SWU and UW*, was initiated in 2009. Thanks to the efforts of Dr. Shijing Xu from UW and Dr. Michael Connelly from the University of Toronto (UT), Canada, the teacher education program developed into a 7-year partnership project sponsored by The Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) and by in-kind partner contributions in 2013. This reciprocal learning project, the aforementioned *RLTESECC*, provided exchange-learning experiences for teacher candidates from both countries. Supported by the project, teacher candidates from SWU and UW could participate in 1–3 month exchange learning experiences between the two universities. Chinese exchange teacher candidates from SWU would come to UW to receive pre-service training, to observe local Canadian schools' lessons, and to participate in cultural events during the fall semesters, while UW exchange teacher candidates would have the same experiences at SWU in the spring semesters of each year. Since the first group of SWU exchange teacher candidates visited the Faculty of Education of UW in 2010, there have been more than 200 Chinese teacher candidates participating in the international exchange.

Compared to other international cooperation projects, the *RLTESECC* project emphasises the notion of reciprocal learning which encourages mutual-respect, active collaboration and constant communication (Xu & Connelly, 2017). Therefore, the teacher education exchange program in this project not only aims to broaden teacher candidates' horizons for a society that respects diversity but also intends to enhance teacher candidates' professional competencies and professional identity through reciprocal learning. In order to achieve these goals, the reciprocal learning project attaches equal importance to the exchange program and field research. Research teams are composed of university faculties and graduate assistants from both countries and are established to provide ongoing intellectual and academic support for program participants while conducting relevant research in partnership with one another. The exchange program participants are encouraged to be reflective practitioners. They are required to write personal reflections during their overseas learning and observations, hold weekly debriefing meetings with university instructors and school teachers, and compile newsletters and portfolios to record their exchange experience and professional development. Meanwhile, the research team members trace the operational processes of the exchange program, collect and file research data. This article focuses on the changes in Chinese exchange teacher candidates' professional beliefs. These changes encompass their views on the teaching profession and their professional lives after participating in the exchange program. The aims are to explore whether the reciprocal learning project encourages teacher candidates' positive changes and to provide suggestions for future cross-cultural reciprocal learning projects in teacher education. Particular attention has

been paid to the changes in teacher candidates' beliefs of their professional life relating to their competencies, identity and relationships. Possible factors affecting these changes have also been discussed from the perspective of reciprocal learning environment created by the project.

Literature review

Changes of teachers' beliefs have been researched from various perspectives and in different contexts. The term 'teachers' belief' has also been defined in a variety of ways and used interchangeably with various terms, including teachers' views, values, opinions, attitudes, perceptions, ideology and conceptual systems. Most of these terms in the literature defines the word 'belief' as teachers' roles in guiding teachers' professional judgements and practice. Many researchers hold that before teacher candidates enter teacher education programs, they held unorganised and inconsistent personal conceptions towards teaching and learning (Goodman, 1988; Barnes, 1989; Kagan, 1992) which influence teacher candidates' understanding of subject knowledge, lesson planning, class structure and teaching activities (Pajares, 1992; Bernat & Gvozdenko, 2005; Hollingsworth, 1989). One goal of current pre-service teacher education programs is to unlearn teacher candidates' misconceptions and to introduce new perspectives and practices in line with ongoing curriculum reform at a larger scale.

A great number of research studies (e.g. Pajares, 1992; Kagan, 1992; Mattheoudakis, 2007; Conner, Edenfield, Gleason, & Ersoz, 2011) have shown that the 'views' and 'experiences' provided by pre-service teacher education programs expose teacher candidates to real-life teaching environments that are likely to lead to positive change in teacher candidates' beliefs. With the development of internalisation of higher education, many teacher education programs are providing study abroad experiences for future teachers in order to help them to become culturally and globally literate. Accumulated studies (Mahan & Stachowski, 1990; Willard-Holt, 2001; Woolf, 2006; Cushner, 2007; Pence & Macgillivray, 2008; ; Knutson & Gonzalez, 2011, 2016; Shiveley & Misco, 2015) have also shown that short-term international exchange and training programs have an overall positive influence on teacher candidates' beliefs as a consequence of the real-life experiences provided by the programs. Overseas learning experiences help future teachers better understand other cultures, gain a deeper understanding of their own education, and acquire the skills and perspectives of global education (Quezada, 2004). Many researchers found that new teachers with overseas exchange learning experiences exhibited broader understanding of classroom teaching and professional development by demonstrating an enhanced ability in curriculum implementation, employment of pedagogical strategies, student assessments and professional practice reflections (Mahon & Cushner, 2002; Cushner & Brennan, 2007; Deardorff, 2009; Gilson & Martin, 2010). While some other researchers also pointed out that short-term overseas learning might reinforce biases and over generalisations due to inadequate orientation and cursory involvement (McKay & Montgomery, 1995). An effective way to promote teacher candidates' professional development in overseas learning programs is to introduce teacher candidates to constant observation and reflection in a supportive learning and teaching environment (Beijaard & de Vries, 1997; Tillema, 2000).

The research paradigms of teachers' beliefs have changed over the past decades from a behaviourist tradition of an integrative perspective which promotes research based on different theories, such as philosophical analysis, social cultural theories, personal case studies and ecological perspectives. (Fives & Gill, 2015) Research methods employed in the research on teachers' beliefs ranged from large-scale surveys to in-depth case studies, including interviews, questionnaires and analysis of teachers' self-reports and reflective diaries. Once data for a study are collected, researchers describe and categorise beliefs into different groups arising from the empirical data or following predefined categories. Some research studies look into the observation of teachers' behaviour in comparison with their teaching self-portraits (Thompson, 1992) while other researchers discuss the inconsistency of teachers' beliefs and behaviours due to obstacles in the teaching reality. (Wilson & Cooney, 2002) Researchers' observations become documented in field notes, audio or video recorded files, and analysed in terms of different categories in order to reflect changes in teachers' beliefs from other perspectives.

Autobiographical research (e. g. auto-ethnography, autobiographical narrative inquiry) is regarded as an effective way to explore teacher candidates' beliefs in their teacher education programmes (Durán, Lastra & Morales, 2013). Clandinin and Connelly's (1991, 1995, Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) and Xu and Connelly (2009), Xu (2015) narrative inquiry research investigates teachers' beliefs, emphasising 'the study of stories, narratives or descriptions of a series of events' (Clandinin, 2007, p. 4). As 'a way of thinking about life' (Xu & Connelly, 2009, p. 221), 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). The learning happens when '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.' (Connelly and Clandinin, 1988, p. 243). In other words, it happens when teacher candidates are taught to 'think narrative (ly)' (Xu & Connelly, 2009, p. 223) and connect what they observed with their past experiences and future dreams. Only then can they change their ways of thinking and make improvements in their professional learning. Researchers also need to be 'fully involved in the experience studied' in order to 'truly understand the lives explored' (as cited in Xu, 2015, p. 136). Therefore, in this research, exchange teacher candidates and researchers are invited to tell and re-tell their stories to identify the changes in exchange teacher candidates' professional beliefs, which have been influenced by the reciprocal learning experience.

The 'onion' model of teachers' change (Figure 1) proposed by Korthagen (2004) highlights the importance of the environment on teacher candidates' changes and professional development and clarifies the role of the environment on changes relating to teachers' mission, identity, beliefs, competencies and behaviours. It also outlines the strategies and five steps to promoting teacher candidates' conceptual-change: to encourage teacher candidates' reflection on concrete experiences in teaching practicum, to help teachers be aware of the role of implicit beliefs in their teaching behaviour and practice, to examine the disadvantages of their existing beliefs with teacher candidates, to offer teacher candidates alternative – scientifically sound – theories; and to help teacher candidates practice their alternative behaviours based on the theories introduced. According to Korthagen (2004), an ideal teacher education programme creates an environment that guides teacher candidates through each of the five steps. This model provides an analysis structure for teachers' changes.

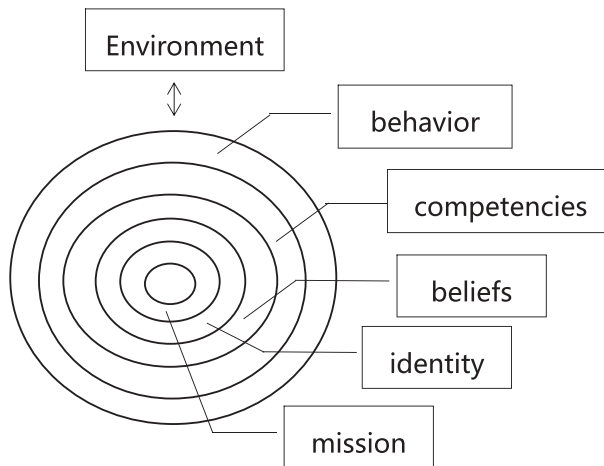


Figure 1. Korthagen's onion model of teachers change (Korthagen, 2004).

Methodology

Methods and questions

Guided by the principle of methodological triangulation (Carter, Bryant-Lukosius, Dicenso, Blythe, & Neville et al., 2014), the study was carried out in two stages and adopted a mixed-method qualitative approach. At the first stage, the researchers adopted qualitative techniques guided by Charmaz (2006), Glaser (1998) and Glaser and Strauss (1967). The researchers conducted field investigation, collecting field notes and reflective diaries of 40 Chinese program participants, in order to identify whether any change occurred to Chinese teacher candidates' beliefs and what aspects of change in teachers' belief could be relevant to their professional life. Narrative inquiry methods were adopted to ensure the rigidity of these data. The researchers referred to Korthagen's Onion Model (Korthagen, 2004) in the data analysis process and mainly focused on environment, behaviour, competencies, belief, identity and mission changes reflected in the data. Based on the findings of the first stage, the researchers then employed a semi-structured group interview involving eight exchange teacher candidates and an in-depth individual interview with five exchange teacher candidates and two guide teachers to corroborate findings of the first stage and to further explore whether the reciprocal learning project is conducive to positive changes of teacher candidates' beliefs or not. Response of exchange teacher candidates towards the environment created by the reciprocal learning project were discussed in a detailed way. This two-stage study intends to answer the following two questions:

- (1) What changes have taken place on Chinese exchange teacher candidates' beliefs relating to their professional lives?
- (2) What are the positive changes of Chinese exchange teacher candidates' beliefs on their professional lives as a result of their involvement in the reciprocal learning project?

Participants

In this study, 40 SWU exchange teacher candidates participating in the *RLTESECC* teacher candidate exchange program in 2015 and 2016 were selected as research participants. The 40 exchange teacher candidates are top students from different colleges of Southwest University who showed outstanding English proficiency, academic performance and teaching aptitude. All the participants have a subject area specialisation, their GPAs are above 4.5, and nearly half of them received national scholarship. They had received training for at least 1.5 years in concurrent teacher education programs and had demonstrated strong motivations and aptitudes to be good teachers in future.

Research process and data collection

Field notes, observation journals, reflective diaries, professional portfolios and newsletter items written by participants were collected as data at the first stage of the study. All exchange teacher candidates agreed to keep daily field notes and observation journals, which record their learning, teaching and cultural experiences in Canada, to debrief weekly with their guide teachers and research assistants, and to write reflective professional journals based on their observations and discussions. Program participants were required to create professional portfolios and group newsletters to report important events relevant to their professional development. The guide teachers and research assistants also wrote reflective diaries to record what they observed from the exchange teacher candidates during the exchange period. Therefore, ample data from seven groups of SWU exchange teachers, group leaders and researchers have been collected and filed since 2010. In 2015 and 2016, 40 SWU exchange teacher candidates produced about 1054 field notes and observation journals, 650 reflective diaries, 30 newsletters and 40 professional portfolios in Chinese or in English.

Most content from the professional portfolios and newsletters were taken from field notes, observation journals and reflective diaries. The content documented in participants' reflective diaries and field notes overlapped, but even after a selection process, more than 2.5 million words worth of data and at least 3000 photos, were collected.

Guided by Korthagen's model, data gathered at the first stage were coded to focus on the observed or self-aware changes of exchange teacher candidates' professional behaviours, competencies and professional beliefs, which were influenced by the environmental changes and even developed into changes in identity and mission. The data coding, involving three researchers and four research assistants, went through three stages: initial coding, focused coding and axial coding, which gradually clarified changes in their professional beliefs. During initial coding, researchers studied words, phrases and sentences in original data, and retold and paraphrased based on codes. Researchers then invited data providers to confirm if the paraphrasing text expressed what they really thought or not. While in focused coding, researchers selected and compared initial codes to narrow down to more related and direct codes. The axial coding aimed to categorise the focused codes, construct a professional belief system of exchange teacher candidates for further exploration of changes in their professional belief system. The coding process is described in the following table (Table 1).

Table 1. Example of data coding.

Data	Initial Coding	Focused Coding	Axial Coding
It's my first day of primary school placement ... We discussed the 'School Rules' we had been taught one day before, and felt a little bit nervous. We could understand most of the requirements we need to follow, such as 'Don't take any seafood or food with peanuts to school in case some children are allergic', but we still felt puzzled for some tips, for example 'Don't touch children to protect them'. Is it because people in Canada have some taboos based on their different cultural backgrounds? Or some religious to be too 'close' to these children ... I don't know why we should keep distance with China who always use some kind of caring 'body-touch' behaviours to express their love and encouragement towards students ... Later, I was told that teachers are required not to 'touch' students just because the whole society aims to protect use their rights and superiority to take advantage of children. In my opinion, that use their rights and superiority to take advantage of children. In my opinion, makes sense ... My assumptions were proved pointless after entering my associated teacher, Mrs. D.A.'s class. She told me later that teachers' first responsibility is to make students' school life safe, happy and fascinating, not just make students' learning process more efficiency. What she said was really embodied in her classroom teaching and management, which made me reconsider the role of school education and responsibilities of teachers. From my past school learning experiences, I felt that teachers' first responsibility should be responsibility should be knowledgeable to teach. (File No.:YH20151012)	(1) Teachers need to protect students' safety; (2) Teachers should learn how to protect students' safety; (3) Teachers should use appropriate 'body-touching' behaviours to show their care and love; (4) Teachers should not do anything to take advantages of children; (5) Teachers' first responsibility is;	(1) Teachers are required to have professional attitude towards students; (2) Teachers should know professional boundaries between students and teachers. (3) Teachers should treat students equally, fairly;	(1) Teachers' Professional behaviours towards students; (2) Teachers' professional attitudes (3) Teachers' professional competencies; (3) Teachers' professional attitudes towards students;

The researchers then selected eight exchange teacher candidates who was back to China from Group 2015 and Group 2016 to conduct group interviews in order to confirm the findings of the first stage. The researchers involved teacher candidates from all discipline in the second stage of the research. Interviewees were asked to discuss the positive changes that had happened on their professional beliefs after participating in the exchange program, and the interview questions are listed in Table 2. Professional belief changes were identified during the interview and the interviewees were asked to evaluate whether these changes were positive or not.

At last, to explore the causes of the positive changes identified by the teacher candidate participants, the researchers conducted interviews with five exchange teacher candidates and two guide teachers from Group 2015 and Group 2016. The individual interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed into text with permission of the interviewees.

Findings

The first-stage data indicate that SWU exchange teacher candidates expressed great interest and intentions to change in many areas related to their professional life. Figure 2 demonstrates the frequency of themes SWU exchange teacher candidates mentioned. It shows that in all the 1756 focused coding sentences, teaching strategies/methods were mentioned 454 times, accounting for 25.9% of the total; teachers' professional attitude/ethics were mentioned 257 times, with a frequency rate of 14.64%; and teachers' professional responsibilities were mentioned 221 times, accounting for 12.59% of the responses.

The most-frequently-mentioned themes indicate the most-likely-changed aspects of teacher candidates' beliefs. This is evident in the focused group interview that followed. Using the same approach in data analysis, the study found that exchange teacher candidates changed their original professional beliefs and attitudes in many aspects, such as, lesson design and implementation, teaching strategies and competencies, student evaluation and assessment, teaching reflection and professional learning, research and publications, communications with parents and colleagues, and so forth. Most of the statements coded from the data could be categorised into four types of beliefs on professional life as demonstrated in the following table (Table 3):

Table 2. Focus group interview questions.

No.	Questions
1.	What have you learned in Windsor?
2.	What have your team members learned in Windsor according to your observations?
3.	Could you give an example to describe the changed behaviours of you or your team members, which were influenced by the exchange experience?
4.	What professional competencies have acquired in the exchange program?
5.	Could you give an example to describe the improved competencies of you or your team members, which were influenced by the exchange experience?
6.	What new teaching philosophies have you learned in the exchange program?
7.	Is there any changes happened on your professional beliefs? What are they?
8.	Could you give an example to illustrate the professional belief changes of you or your team members? which were influenced by the exchange experience?
9.	Could you list some positive changes of your professional life influenced by the exchange experience?
10.	Could you list some changes of your professional life influenced by the change experience which you are not sure they are positive or not for your future professional career?

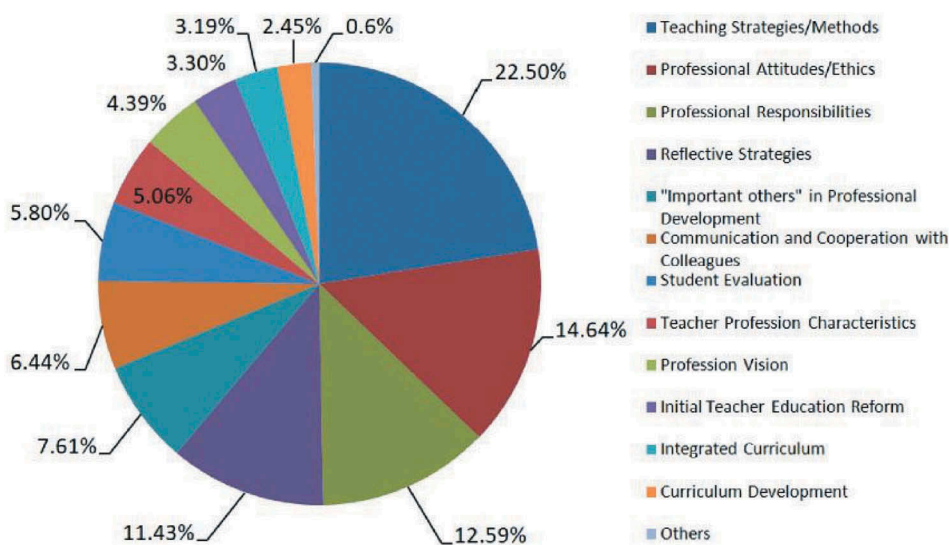


Figure 2. The frequency of coding themes.

Table 3. Four types of professional beliefs of chinese exchange teacher candidates' professional life.

Types	Aspects
Beliefs on Life of Teaching	Lesson design and implementation Classroom atmosphere Time and space given to students Language and actions in classroom Relationship and closeness with students Types and amounts of homework and assignments Frequency and modes of teaching relating to activities
Beliefs on Life of Learning	Types and amounts of professional learning after work Formal training and course learning Types and amounts of reading Ways and mean of daily reflection
Beliefs on Life of Researching and Academic Writing	Reasons and causes of research activities Programs and projects of professional development Journal articles and books publication
Beliefs on Professional Social Life	Communication and cooperation with colleagues Communication and cooperation with parents Communication and cooperation with other professionals

The interviewees mentioned that they learned many teaching strategies focusing on students, curriculum implementation and development skills, and various professional methods in Canada, which made them reflect constantly on what they had learned in China and decided to make some changes in their future professional life. Some interviewees said that in the past, they had mainly focused on the textbook content and curriculum guidelines in lesson design. After doing several classroom observations in Canada, they found that lessons there were more focused on individual student needs rather than the content of the textbooks. Although they felt some lessons were not as efficient as expected, they still found the importance of satisfying the different needs of students during lesson design and implementation and decided to make changes in their future life of teaching. The exact belief changes on the above-mentioned four types of professional life of exchange teacher candidates are listed in Table 4 based on the data collected in the focus group interviews.

Table 4.: Positive changes of chinese exchange teacher candidates’ beliefs on their professional life.

Types	Aspects		Positive Changes		
	Past Beliefs	Present Beliefs after joining the project	Yes	Not Sure	No
Beliefs on Life of Teaching	Contents-centred, instruction-centred, teachers-centred lesson design and implementation;	Students-focused, activities-focused, students-centred lesson design and implementation;	93.75%	6.25%	0%
	Teacher-dominated S-T relationship;	More equal and respectful in S-T Relationship;	100%	0%	0%
	Paperwork and compulsory homework;	No homework or optional homework;	25%	25%	50%
	Teach during holidays and spare time to meet students need	Never teach after work, strictly follow the rules and regulations of teachers’ unions	12.5%	31.25%	56.25%
Beliefs on Life of Learning	English is important but not necessary for future teaching jobs	English is not only important but also necessary for future teaching jobs	100%	0%	0%
	One could still be a teacher, even if he/she doesn’t like teaching and children	One could be a good teacher, only if he/she likes teaching and children	68.75%	31.25%	0%
	Formal, school-decided, subject knowledge-oriented learning	Informal, self-dominated, interest-oriented learning	62.5%	31.25%	6.25%
	Do reflection of teachers’ teaching	Do reflection of students’ learning	100%	0%	0%
Beliefs on Life of Researching and Academic Writing	Do reflection but not in a written way	Always record reflection in a well-structured way	87.5%	12.5%	0%
	Read academically and with obvious reading purposes	Read widely and without specific purpose but expand one’s knowledge	56.25%	25%	18.75%
	Do research because of the requirement of higher professional titles and higher salaries	Do research because of the desire of solving problems in daily teaching work	75%	12.5%	12.5%
	Take part in teaching competency improving programs and projects sponsored by schools and government education administrations	Take part in student development programs and projects sponsored by stakeholders	18.75%	25%	56.25%
Beliefs on Professional Social Life	Write journal articles and books based on requirement of school administration	Seldom considering publishing but prefer write practical “how to” articles and books	75%	12.5%	12.5%
	Establish intimate and face-to-face relationship with colleagues	Keep reasonable distant relationship with colleagues to protect one’s privacy	0%	6.25%	93.75%
	Close relationship with parents, even share personal and private life	Distant relationship with parents, never make benefit from the relationship	6.25%	56.25%	18.75%
	Can always get support from other professions, but cooperation should be decided by schools not teachers	Manage to get support and establish cooperation with other professions in order to satisfy students’ need	75%	25%	0%

During individual interviews, researchers mainly discussed positive changes found in the group interview in order to determine how these positive changes benefited their professional development and why these positive changes happened, especially from the perspective of reciprocal learning projects. Table 4 shows that most of teachers' belief changes of professional life were regarded as positive ones.

Exchange teacher candidates' beliefs on professional competencies have been expanded from focusing on content knowledge of teaching subjects to more comprehensive and practical knowledge relevant to students' learning life. Some participants reflected:

In the past, I learned student-centered strategies from books and thought it was not practical in China, and after I observed Mrs. D's class, I still felt these strategies could be adopted in small-sized class. However, after discussing with her, I got a deep understanding of "student-centered" strategies, and believed I could also adopt them in my future teaching ... (File No.: LXY20151015)

"The Windsor experience made me feel that it is essential for future teachers to equip themselves with ability of understand and accept different cultures and sub-cultures. For example, in the past, I thought all the westerners will spend Christmas holidays and schools will also have some kind of celebrations, however, In Westwood, I was told by a teacher that schools do not encourage any religious festival celebration because they need to respect different cultures in school, as for me, I don't think I will face such multi-cultural teaching environment in China, but I still feel teachers should have the ability to understand and respect students from different sub-cultures and nurture their own and students' international understanding competency for the internationalized future world. (File No.: YXD 20,161,217) Exchange teacher candidates' beliefs on professional identity have also changed. They, who had seen themselves as classroom teachers, saw themselves as educators after the program. They came to realise that teaching is an art, which involves personal devotion and commitment, consisting of more than just a set of skills:

My idea of teaching is not just a job to get a salary has been enhanced by the Windsor experience. In Ms. P's class, I observed how devoted she is and how deep her love of education is. I do know a lot of teachers in China are very devoted, but Windsor experience make me feel "love" is more important than "devotion", ... I had a math teacher in middle school, who, honestly speaking, was very strict, I didn't like him very much at that time, but he loves math and teaching very well, and can explain math to us clearly and patiently, which made me love math ... in future I would be a math teacher, I believe I would love not only math, teaching, but children ... (File No.: CXY20161210)

Exchange teacher candidates' beliefs on professional relationship have been developed from a superior-subordinate relationship to a more equal teacher-student relationship. They stated that the Canada experience reminded them of the importance of developing harmony in the teacher-student relationship and encouraged them to convey a supportive and positive attitude when working with their students. One interviewee said:

In Canada, I saw so many amiable faces of teachers and teachers in Canada treated students more equally ... I like these beautiful teacher-student relationship, and I do believe I could be a nice and skillful teachers who know how to keep good and proper relationships with students ... (File No. LT 20151013)

Discussion

What unfurled in the international teacher education exchange to some extent aligns with Korthagen's Onion Model's description. The reciprocal learning project designers are acutely aware of the importance of environment to exchange teacher candidates' development. University instructors and schoolteachers involved in this project created an environment that provided guidance and activities, which allowed exchange teacher candidates to overcome challenges and make achievements. These are key factors leading to the positive changes on exchange teacher candidates' professional beliefs. Take the program in 2015 as an example, Chinese and Canadian university professors and school teachers had been formally involved into the program as early as February of 2015, 6 months before Chinese exchange teacher candidates' overseas journey. The details of their intervention strategies and activities are shown in the following table (Table 5).

Firstly, two Canadian and three Chinese university professors cooperatively gave three 2-h lectures and two 3-h workshop to publicise the program, introduced education and culture of both countries, and selected the potential participants. When Canadian exchange teacher candidates arrived China in May 2015, Chinese teacher candidates who were interested in the program were invited to take part in three formal communicative activities with Canadian exchange teacher candidates. In June, a selection written test and an interview were conducted. Once new participants were accepted, program facilitators and instructors would give lectures and workshops about classroom observation, school cultures and education research. At the same time, new participants were requested to do a 2-month class observation in local school with the help of Chinese school teachers. Before the participants departed to Canada, they were given an orientation lecture and were suggested to make personal study and research plans. During the 3-month exchange, these Chinese teacher candidates attended weekly meetings with their Chinese and Canadian university instructors and graduates from the Education department. In the Canadian school placement, exchange teacher candidate went to local school every weekday to observe lessons, co-teach with school teachers and participate in the school's professional development activities. They were also invited to demonstrate Chinese culture and some were invited to school teachers' home. After they went back to China, Chinese university instructors arranged them to do a debriefing report for all the teacher candidates, students and faculties on campus, sharing what they had learned in Canada.

Just as the interviewed guide teachers mentioned, although the exchange teacher candidates have strong positive attitude towards the overseas learning, they still need to be carefully guided, ensuring they could make most of the reciprocal learning experience. One of the interviewed guide teachers emphasised the necessary of orientation lectures and class observation in China and pointed out that exchange teacher candidates should be familiar with teaching situations in China in order to better understand what happens in Canada. Both interviewed guide teacher's thought constant debriefing with exchange teacher candidates in a fair and equal manner to provoke deeper reflection is key to their positive changes. One of them remarked:

Table 5. The intervention strategies and activities of Chinese and Canadian university instructors and school teachers of reciprocal learning program (2015).

University Professors/Instructors	Intervention strategies and activities		Topic/Area	Frequency (Times)	Duration (Hours)
	Lectures on program publicity and introduction				
School Teachers	Lectures and workshops on Canadian and Chinese cultures, history, society and education	Cross-cultural communication awareness	4 (2 lectures & 2 workshops)	1	2h
	Communication activities for Canadian and Chinese exchange teacher candidates in China	Cross-cultural communication competence	3		10h (Lectures: 2h/Time; Workshops: 3h/7Time) 9h (Avg. 3h/Time)
	Exchange teacher candidate selection test & Interview	English communication competence,	2 (1 written test & 1 interview)		5h (2 hours for written test; 3 hours for interview)
	Lectures and workshops on classroom observation and education research	Professional knowledge, and professional disposition			
	Orientation Lectures on University study and school placement in Canada	Classroom research and reflective competence	4 (2 lectures & 2 workshops)		10h (Lectures: 2h/Time; Workshops: 3h/7Time) 3h
	Communication activities for Canadian and Chinese exchange teacher candidates in Canada	Knowledge of Canadian Education; Cultural adaptation	1		
	Guidance during university study and school placement in Canada	Cross-cultural communication competence	3		9h (Avg. 3h/Time)
	City Tours and cultural studies in Canada	Classroom teaching skills & Professional Development	12		24 h (2h/Week)
	Field notes collection and debrief meeting	Cross-cultural understanding and communication	5		80h (Avg. 8h/Day; 2d/Time) 24h (2h/Week)
	Debriefing report after returning	Professional self-awareness and self-development competency	12		3h
	Guidance during classroom observing in China	Professional self-awareness and self-development competency	1		
	Seminars and workshops on classroom teaching in China	Classroom research and reflective competence	8		16h (Avg. 2h/Week)
	Guidance during classroom observing in Canada	Classroom teaching skills and research competence	4		12h (Avg. 3h/Time)
	Seminars and workshops on classroom teaching in Canada	Classroom research and reflective competence	28		28h (Avg. 1h/Day)
	Chinese traditional cultures sharing and performing in Canada	Classroom teaching skills and research competence	3		15h (Avg. 5h/Time)
	Home visiting and cultural communication activities in Canada	Cross-cultural communication competence & confidence	4		8h (Avg. 2h/Time)
		Cross-cultural competence	3		12h (Avg. 4h/Time)

“The courses provided in UW are quite different from what exchange teacher candidate learned in China ... one or two students felt some courses had no relations with their future work; but after discussing with us and others, they not only see the connections but also changed their views towards the teaching professions ... They told me that they are going to be an omnipotent, not just a subject expert ...” (File No.: ZHH 20171109)

With the interventions of university instructors and school teachers, an ideal professional environment for exchange teacher candidates were created. In this environment, Chinese exchange teacher candidates gradually changed their professional beliefs since they had been ready to acquire some knowledge and competencies championed by the reciprocal learning project before they started their overseas journey. And they gradually had a clear version of their future careers and were willing to abide by some principles, demonstrate some behaviours and perform some tasks, which undoubtedly bring positive changes.

The lectures and workshops on education and culture and the constant communication activities with Canadian buddies made Chinese exchange teacher candidates less worried about their overseas learning. And they were encouraged to have a positive and objective attitude towards their overseas experiences. All the program participants were warned not to hold any cultural stereotype or bias against the other culture, and that ‘reciprocal learning’ pertained to both ‘teaching’ and ‘learning’. Each exchange teacher candidate was regarded as part of the reciprocal learning cohort, which offered them opportunities to communicate in an in-depth way and naturally acquire a deep and genuine understanding of different teaching and learning in another culture. As a result, the exchange teacher candidates became more confident and open-minded. One interviewee recalled:

I met M. before I went to Canada in Southwest University, I accompanied her to visit a lot of places in Chongqing ... she is an excellent friend, I learned a lot from her in China, and when I went to Canada, She expressed her warm hospitality, and brought me to her home ... Her parents were nice people, they prepared a lot of food, and even asked me teach them Beijing Opera ... I’m so proud of my culture and wish to share a lot with people I met in Canada ... (File No.: FRY 20160109)

The goal-targeted selection test and the program requirements promoted changes of teacher candidates’ belief on professional competencies. Excellent written and spoken English was compulsory in the program, which was very challenging for them, especially for those who would not teach in English. All the exchange teacher candidates agreed that English is important, but they did not expected the program attached so much importance to English. And some of them thought English had remotely connected with their professional development at first. In their reflective journals, the exchange teacher candidates recorded the anxiety they experienced when they were asked to do presentations in English and they also mentioned that they gradually realised the importance of English after they went through all the language challenges with the help of instructors and school teachers. An interviewed exchange teacher candidate who would teach maths in future expressed his understanding of English competency:

"I used to think that teachers only need to master subject knowledge and relevant teaching strategies; as a math teacher, it's no need for me to learn English well, because I can use English to communicate. However, the Windsor's learning experience made me think differently, I came to realise that in our current society, even you just work in a primary school, you still need to learn English well. If your English is good enough, you can have more chances to observe, learn, even teach in another country, just like Shanghai teachers who are invited to teach in U.K., I want to be a teacher who can teach in English-spoken countries or introduce our Chinese teaching experience to foreigners I never thought all of these in the past."(File No.:ZSC20151027)

The well designed and practically implemented program courses provided genuine and authentic learning and teaching experience for exchange teacher candidates, encouraging them 'learning by doing' and 'learning by sharing'. When they did school placement in China, exchange teacher candidates were given opportunities to do teaching practice with the help of school teachers. Chinese university instructors emphasised the principal of 'reciprocal learning' and advised them to prepare lesson plans about Chinese culture in English to share in Windsor. All the guidance was proved worthwhile when exchange teacher candidates were asked to do co-teaching and give lectures in Canada. This process made Chinese exchange teacher candidates more confident and open-minded in cross-cultural communication. Consequently, they got a better understanding about what they learned in Canada. One of them talked about his experience:

I was asked to do a demonstration class in University. Actually, I had prepared a lesson about Chinese food in China before I went to Windsor; the original lesson was designed to be implemented mainly in an instruction way, no activities at all. However, after I observed several classes in Windsor, decided to put more activities in my lesson, I bought "numbing peppers" from local Chinese supermarket, and invited some classmates to taste, and let them experience the strong flavor of Sichuan Dishes the class atmosphere was so good, I decided to learn how to use activities in my future language classes ... by the way, I also found out that Canadians are very interested in our culture, I feel so proud about this ... (File No.: LJ20161209)

The concept of reciprocal learning advises both researchers and program participants to listen to the voices of others in real life, to experience and learn the tradition and culture of other countries, and to develop an empathic understanding in teaching. To realise these intentions, university instructors and school teachers not only organised seminars and workshops for exchange teacher candidates but also invited them to take part in local teachers' professional development activities. In addition, many cultural activities were arranged for exchange teacher candidates, including home visits on Thanksgiving Day, Halloween and Christmas holidays. All of this reinforced exchange teacher candidates' international competencies and aroused their professional and social responsibilities. One participant had the following to say about his experience of teachers' professional development day in Canadian schools:

We were invited to take part in the PD day activities of PE Primary School. We found that all the teachers, no matter young or old, were invited to share their teaching experiences, and some of them even offered advice to the school board and different community organizations, which reminded me that teachers should be leaders in a learning community and should undertake more responsibility in curriculum design and development (File No. ZYZ20151023)

In order to promote exchange teacher candidates' positive change, the program insists that exchange teacher candidates should make meaningful reflections. With the help of university instructors and school teachers, the exchange teacher candidates gradually learned to record and reflect their reciprocal learning experience and constantly examined their teaching beliefs and practice. They even found the differences between Chinese teachers' reflections and Canadian teachers' reflections and mentioned that they would make some improvement in their future teaching reflection. One interviewee mentioned that:

All of us were asked to keep field notes and record reflective journals, I thought that I had been very familiar with "Reflection" and "Reciprocal Learning" in Chinese culture, but when I was in a Canadian classroom, I found out more about these two notions. Since the time of Confucius, teachers in China were encouraged to reflect and discuss with other teachers or experts about teaching every day. However, the practice of Chinese teachers are more theory-oriented, demanding individual teachers to draw conclusions and theories for their teaching and also pass on these theories to the next generation. It is not easy for younger teachers to put what other teachers do into practice. They need to find their own experiences and lessons through observing, comparing, reflecting on their own or other teachers' teaching. Recording and Reflecting daily teaching activities in detailed way provides me a solution ... I will persist in doing this in future ... like Mrs. Malone did in her class, she prepared personal files for every student and recorded detailed information to share with us ... (File No. YXJY201612197)

All in all, it has been proved that the support and enthusiasm of the university instructors and school teachers no doubt influenced the program participants in a positive way. Although SWU exchange teacher candidates only had 3-month visit to Canada, the good-intentioned intervention of university instructors and school teachers had been made for a long time and would continue for a long time. What university instructors and school teachers did not only made exchange teacher candidates' overseas learning more agreeable and rewarding but also promoted positive changes of their professional beliefs consequently.

However, as researchers, we are aware that this paper reflects mainly the positive aspects of the program, which is a result of three main reasons. The first reason is that teacher candidates enrolled in SWU possess strong comprehensive skills. The teacher education program at SWU is one of the five teacher education centres that are directly appointed to and administrated by the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China. These potential candidates, who have outcompeted their peers to become SWU students, show great confidence in themselves and the Chinese culture. Most of them are open-minded to new thoughts and other cultures and identify themselves as not only a teacher candidate but a Chinese educator and an ambassador for Chinese culture. This program for the candidates is a platform to practice their teaching philosophy and practices on a foreign land and with friends and colleagues from a different culture. That is why the reciprocal nature of this pre-service teacher program caught eyes of generations of teacher candidates.

There is a deeper reason that the data mainly showed positivity of the program. The Confucius culture is engraved in the teacher candidate participants in the program, and most Chinese students. It is our tradition and second nature to respect the teacher, which is a distinctive student-teacher relationship under the Chinese context. Teachers,

especially university instructors and school guide teachers, are also regarded as *Shifu*, which refers to teacher, who passes on knowledge, and father, a figurative term for a respectful person in the family. Teacher candidates from this culture value the tradition and likely responded and acted upon their instructors and professors' expectations in particular ways. They might have revealed part of how they felt to their teachers and researchers of the program who to the exchange teacher candidates are also 'teachers' (a generic term for teachers, instructors and professors in Chinese).

One other possibility of the limited negative responses is a practical concern. Exchange teacher candidates' academic performance at University of Windsor would be directly reflected on their same school year performance at SWU, because they can convert course credits to SWU credits. Also, a poor academic record would affect their application for the scholarship and grants to which they are eligible. These are why the paper recorded and reflects limited critical responses from the participants.

Conclusion

One assumption perceived by members of the reciprocal learning project is that participants from Canada and China can learn from each other and acquire knowledge and experiences suitable to their own development through reciprocal learning in education, since western and eastern cultures have their own strengths and weaknesses. In order to make reciprocal learning happen, the project designers managed to construct a supporting environment, to encourage constant reflective inquiry and to promote positive changes in teacher candidates, especially in their professional beliefs through face-to-face contact. In conclusion, the mutual collaboration of university instructors and school teachers in both countries fuelled positive changes of exchange teacher candidates' professional beliefs.

As Harold Taylor stated: 'Whatever they teach, teachers should be educated in a way calculated to raise the level of their awareness of what is happening to mankind in the worlds' contemporary circumstance ... through entering other lives they begin to enter the world ... by comparison to learn to look at mankind from a broader perspective ...' (Taylor, 1969, xxi). Such is the mission of the reciprocal learning project: to facilitate teachers' understanding of eastern and western education and to establish a common knowledge base for future teacher education worldwide. It sets good examples for future international teacher education program designers and developers around the world. It reminds us that the purpose of teacher candidates' overseas learning is not just knowledge or skills acquisition but also concepts and philosophies updating. The principles of 'reciprocal learning' and 'constant reflection' embedded in the project will help to provide a platform for future cross-cultural teacher education exchange programs. The program participants, including teacher candidates, teacher educators, teacher education researchers and other program assistants should be encouraged to keep an open mind towards other cultures and realise personal and professional development through constantly telling, sharing and reflecting on their stories. It is hoped that this project will generate a new theoretical framework for future international teacher education projects and promote teachers and students to be active and knowledgeable global citizens who are sensitive towards the diversity of the world and passionate about changes in their professional life.

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