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**Teacher Educators' Professional Development in Unknown Contexts**

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Our recent summer travels to unknown lands served as “different” contexts from which to learn. We see these experiences as sources of our professional development that inform our teaching, research and service. Gertrude travelled to different countries in Asia this past summer: Hong Kong, China and South Korea. For Gertrude, it was a first time visiting Inner Mongolia in China. For Ruchi, her travels to Brazil for the first time, provided unique lens for learning about this South American country.

**Gertrude**

I travelled to Baotou, Inner Mongolia, China, from Hong Kong via Shanghai. This was my first visit to the northern region of China. Inner Mongolia is crescent shaped and borders to the north, a small part of Russia and a large section of Mongolia, which is a country that people often confuse with Inner Mongolia. Inner Mongolia is an autonomous region of China that has a population of around 24 million according to the 2022 seventh national census and its topography is dominated by plateaus, mountains, grasslands, plains and deserts.

The first inspirational experience on this trip to Inner Mongolia, was overnighting at Shanghai's International Airport. I arrived there after midnight and my flight to Baotou was due to depart around 8 a.m. in the morning. I decided to reduce cost, time and effort by staying right in the airport, not far from the check in counter for Baotou. It seems that a lot of people had a similar idea as there were a lot of overnights around. I found a place to sit with my luggage not far from many others who were also camping out. One young couple sat close to me and proceeded to prepare their meal in a portable hotpot. It was very interesting to observe their machinations in preparing the meal. However, it was clear to me, that I was the only African descended person around and many people wanted to take pictures with me. Eventually, I

became engaged in 3-way conversation with some of my curious fellow travelers. One man tried a little bit of English, I was fumbling through my limited Cantonese and the other family member spoke Mandarin. The English-speaking man translated the Mandarin into English while I tried to make equivalent utterances in Cantonese to support the Mandarin comprehensibility but alas, the two languages do not overlap too much and it was somewhat futile. The language exchanges were very hilarious and we had great laughter that warmed our unfamiliarity. At the end of it all, we were fellow traveler friends waving good-bye when it was time to stand up and go to our respective check-in counters.

My second wonderful encounter was visiting the desert in Baotou. My Chinese doctoral student, Ji Ma and her family were my gracious hosts and we drove out of the city for about an hour or more to get to the desert. Once we got there, we took the cable car over the terrain to get to the sand dunes in the desert. It was a spectacular view. When we arrived at the entrance, we adorned special shoes for trekking in the sand and broad hats to shield our faces from the sun. The desert had been transformed into a desert park oasis replete with themed tents that held different attractions such food, cultural shows and an outdoor water park. Our first experience was riding a camel and then the spectacular cultural shows and water park. After the visit to the desert, we toured Baotou, visited a local elementary school and did some professional development work with the administrators. Later, we took the train to Hohhot the capital city of Inner Mongolia where Ji and I visited the University of Inner Mongolia to give a talk. Our visit to Hohhot also included a tour of the Tibetan Five Pagoda Temple, and later the national museum. All were spectacular and most of all, informative. I learned a lot about the different ethnic and cultural groups of China.

My train ride from Hohhot to Beijing was also breathtaking as I experienced the beautiful mountainsides and the luscious farmlands in the valleys. The desert and the mountains of Inner Mongolia are forever etched into my memory but my language encounters are also most memorable. When I arrived at the Beijing train station, I needed to get to Beijing International Airport. I followed the signs for the taxi stand and waited. When I arrived at the head of the line a taxi pulled up and the driver started asking me something. I assumed he wanted to know where I was going so I gave him the note Ji had written in Chinese for such an encounter.

Unfortunately, something seemed to be missing because the driver kept repeating something that was incomprehensible. By this time, we were in the taxi and driving to the airport but the driver needed more information. Finally, he called someone on his phone and then handed the phone to me. An English-speaking woman's voice asked which airline I was travelling on and I smiled and told her and passed the phone back to the driver. The driver gave a universal, "thumbs up," and we both laughed. I felt I was in a world that was not strange but filled with lovely beautiful people who tried to help each other overcome our communication barriers. I am most grateful to my doctoral student Ji Ma, her family and friends who made this trip possible. As I write this editorial on the strangers we encounter in unexpected places, I love recalling that as humans on the face of this earth, we are more alike than different. We need to invest in overcoming our barriers those real as well as imagined ones in our professional and personal lives.

**Ruchi**

This fall I had the opportunity to visit São Paulo, Brazil for an international education conference. This was my first visit to a major South American city. São Paulo is the largest city in the Americas, larger than New York in the United States or Toronto in Canada. However, São Paulo is a lesser known major city! I was so impressed with this city's diversity, history, culture,

color and vibrancy! Hardly anyone speaks English or even Spanish. The majority of the people only speak Portuguese, whether they are of Japanese descent, African descent or European descent. This may seem a bit assimilationist, but they all proudly associate with this language and identify as Brazilian. Despite the language barrier, the people here were so warm, welcoming, and friendly! The food was also very diverse, just like its people and one of the things I learned is that São Paulo is a major destination for the world's best Sushi, outside of Japan, the best middle eastern food, outside of the Middle East, and the best Italian food, outside of Italy.

How did this trip contribute to my professional development and how did this help me become a more creative educator? As an educator, it is always inspiring to see examples of ways that we can all be more welcoming and inclusive in our teaching and in our interactions with students. Criticality, creativity, inclusion is seen everywhere in São Paulo, any mundane street art, graffiti, entrance to a shopping mall, every place had symbols that represented all groups and populations that had become a part of the Brazilian society over the years. For example, Japanese people migrated to São Paulo in early 20th century but they were enslaved to work in sugarcane plantations and had their own struggle to obtain liberation. Their history, struggles and current status is also prominently displayed in all monuments or street art, as is the struggle of the indigenous people, African people and other oppressed populations who lived in Brazil. The museums in Sao Paulo showcased the histories of formerly enslaved people in an asset-oriented manner. The Afro-Brazilian Museum for example showed the rich traditions and customs of kings and queens in Africa. Their jewelry, fabric, and customs are highlighted so that we do not perceive the African people living in Brazil through a single story of enslavement and oppression.

**Conclusion**

These two reports are examples of historically and culturally responsive ways in which we as teacher educators can approach our teaching and research. We travel and we read to learn more about the critical histories of people and most of all, we take risks to remove the barriers that may prevent us from seeing other historically rich contexts like Inner Mongolia in China and São Paulo in Brazil, and learning about their people, their land, culture and their language(s). We take the risks of experiencing encounters in unknown places and we learn from them.

We invite our readers to report on their own travel and/or risk-taking experiences and let us know how they inform your teaching, research and service. Our article for this edition by Caroline B. Rabalais, Stephanie Birmingham, Terynce Butts, Jessica Hormann, Elyse Johnson, Saniha Kabani, G. Sue Kasun, Romonda L. M. Jefferson, Jasmyne Ormond, Yetunde Quadri, Jermal Riggins, and LaKisha Stanley describes collaborative poetry writing in a doctoral class. The students and their instructor took risks to reveal themselves in a space that could be potentially threatening to those from bidialectal and/or multilingual linguistic backgrounds or other backgrounds that potentially minoritizes them in an academic space. The writers resisted defining themselves utilizing dominant structures of representation and instead chose to assert and acclaim their unique identities. The authors demonstrate how we can challenge and resist dominant structures in the academy through risk-taking in celebrating our cultural and linguistic ways of being.

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