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China Trip Teaches Professor, Graduate Student New Culture

Winthrop University

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China Trip Teaches Professor, Graduate Student New Culture

Quick Facts

- Marleah Bouchard, an assistant professor of curriculum and pedagogy, and graduate student Sarah Ramsden spent two weeks in China.

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Bouchard in the classroom

ROCK HILL, SOUTH CAROLINA — **Marleah Bouchard** thought about China a lot this summer.

Bouchard, an assistant professor of curriculum and pedagogy in Winthrop University's **Richard W. Riley College of Education**, recently returned from **Shijiazhuang, China**, where she and graduate student **Sarah Ramsden** spent two weeks teaching English to students at the Ellson Elite School.

The opportunity was made possible through an agreement with the Chinese

Cultural Education Center, housed at the University of South Carolina-Upstate. When she heard about the program in a meeting, Bouchard thought it sounded like a great opportunity.

"I'm always looking for opportunities to take my work international," she said. "China is a cultural experience unlike anything I've ever imagined. The more I thought about it, the more I decided I just needed to see it."

She and Ramsden, a school psychology major from Fort Mill, traveled to the city of Shijiazhuang on July 2. Ramsden taught a fourth-grade class while Bouchard took on a kindergarten class at the school, which had just begun its summer camp session. Bouchard said everyone was so welcoming and hospitable, including her two Chinese teaching assistants.

Bouchard noticed some differences between the structures of schools in the United States and China. Ellson Elite's school day runs from 9 a.m.-4 p.m., and students often stay in the same room throughout the day. She implemented some new structures, such as moving her class in the hall for music or to the library for reading, and including arts and crafts. Though the school is English speaking-only, Bouchard had her teaching assistants translate to help better communicate with her students, which helped establish expectations and rules for the classroom.

But some things remain the same across cultures.

"The same strategies that work here will work there," she said. "They respond the same to your warmth, your planning, your methods. That's comforting."

The goal of the visit was to teach English, but it also included a cultural exchange. This group focused

on American holidays, and Bouchard said Christmas was her students' favorite holiday to learn about. In return, her students taught her about their holidays, including the Mid-Autumn Festival and the La Ba Festival.

Ellson's headmaster asked Bouchard to lead two professional development sessions. She spoke with area teachers about high-order thinking skills, classroom management and student engagement.

Bouchard's students put a book together for her at the end of her trip as way to say 'thank you.'

She said her trip really emphasized the importance of establishing connections with students' families outside of school. Several of her students' parents invited her to dinner in their homes, which she said made her feel more connected to the community and the students.

Bouchard hopes to return to China someday. Meanwhile, she has some advice she learned from her trip for upcoming teachers: "Be comfortable with ambiguity and change. Find that confidence and comfort and just go with it."

Sarah Ramsden's experience

This trip marked Ramsden's first one to Asia, although she had some traveling experience from previous trips abroad. Right away, she noticed that the differences in pronunciation and language were something she was not accustomed to, which made getting around the city a little bit of a struggle.

Like Bouchard, she said people were always willing to help.

"The amount of respect demonstrated on all fronts was amazing, and people were so genuinely kind and helpful," she said. "I enjoyed getting to know people there as I worked in the schools, which doesn't happen as readily as a tourist. People were generous and thoughtful, and they went out of their way to make sure that I really got the most out of my China experience."

The highlight for her was, of course, teaching. She said she fell in love with her group of students.

"The trip meant so much to me," she said. "As a married mother of two children, the opportunity to go abroad and experience something brand-new on my own was monumental. Being thrust into new cultures and places can be disconcerting for some, but being able to experience this on my own helped me get back in touch with my core and really appreciate each day we had there."

"The trip was amazing, and I cannot wait to discover somewhere new and continue learning about our vast world."

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