

Au Yard Wah

2022 Fulbright Distinguished Awards in Teaching (DA) Program:

Embarking on a Journey

It has been both a privilege and a superbly humbling experience to have been a participant on the 2022 Fulbright Distinguished Award for International Teachers at Indiana University of Pennsylvania (IUP). Working alongside and learning from a team of international colleagues from 14 other countries had broadened my perspective to the many possibilities the educational fraternity around the world can work towards. Together, with a common heartbeat, we can overcome challenges and be that strong advocate for our students. This is an indelible mark that the four-and-a-half months of



21 Fulbrighters from 14 different countries (Botswana, Brazil, Finland, Greece, India, Indonesia, Israel, Mexico, Morocco, New Zealand, Philippines, Senegal, Singapore and Uganda)

overseas exchange programme had left on me. I returned to Singapore humbled and grateful, and even more affirmed that education is an enabler for all, regardless of one's background.

My initial departure was fraught with questions—navigating unknown and uncharted territories, fear of not being able to adapt, and how I would cope as I had never been away from home for an extended period. My initial fears and trepidation were uncalled for. From the time we arrived at Indiana University of Pennsylvania to the end of the programme at Washington DC, there was never a dull moment, and each day was full of learning and fulfilment.

Professional Learning

Throughout our exchange programme, we were immersed in professional development learning i.e., Fulbright Seminar, Technology Workshop and attending Audit courses. Through these platforms, we learnt about the educational contexts from our peers all



Exploring the use of drones in one of our Technology Seminars

over the world. We had deep and insightful conversations that addressed the different educational challenges we faced. The varied technological tools we were exposed to



At our weekly Fulbright Seminar Sessions with our course instructors, Dr. Stephan Schaffrath and Mrs. Atia Rasul

helped us in our instructional pedagogical approaches in our classrooms. I had newfound respect for my esteemed colleagues from different parts of the world who were determined to scout for solutions towards the betterment of the lives and learning of their students.

In the Audit class, Methods and Curriculum (Mild – Moderate Disabilities), I was encouraged by how inclusivity is included in all aspects to ensure that students with learning challenges were given the opportunity to grow and flourish. The Least Restrictive Movement in the US got me thinking about the Tiered Systems of Support we have in Singapore and how we might strive for even greater inclusion of learners with varying learning needs.



Co-teaching with my partner teacher in a Grade 5 English Language Arts Lesson

Weekly field visits to schools gave me the opportunity to observe and co-teach in American urban and rural settings. This gave me a fabulous insight into the day-to-day education enactment. The rich discussions I had with my partner teachers and opportunity

to plan for a close reading English Language Arts lesson were priceless. The partnership was also extended to my Primary 5 students in Singapore where we used Padlet for class to communicate and make friends with the students in my partner teacher's Homeroom. Such connections were precious, and technology made it possible, even with the 12-hour time difference.

Cultural Excursions

“All work and no play make Jack a dull boy!” Whilst we worked hard, we also played equally hard! To assimilate ourselves into the way of life and culture, and expand our



Visit to Indiana County Fair

world view in the United

States, we went on different cultural excursions. Apart from appreciating the different wonders on these journeys, we were given an opportunity to sit next to our colleagues from the different countries to forge new relationships. In our conversations, we built relationships at a personal level, sharing



With fellow Fulbrighters in New York City

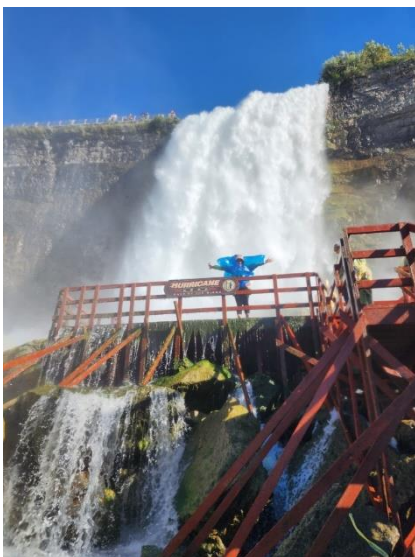
our aspirations and dreams for our students in our countries. We are reminded of the strong common beliefs in education that would propel us to go beyond our call of duty to meet the needs of our learners.

One of the most impactful excursions was the visit to the Niagara Falls. The majestic view and roaring waters reminded me of the boundless possibilities as educators. I was not surprised to learn that the City of Niagara was the birthplace of hydroelectric power, supplying homes and businesses with electricity. It was an awe-inspiring moment standing directly under the Falls when I visited the Cave of the Winds, located behind the Bridal Veil Falls.



At Niagara Falls

Witnessing it up close reminded me that nature is a miracle and no matter how arduous any journey might be, we will see the beautiful colours of the rainbow at the end of the



tunnel. There will always be solutions to challenges, we just need to persist and explore all possibilities. This was one huge tick off my own bucket list.

Doing it as the Locals would

To be able to fully immerse into the culture of the United States, I had the opportunity to go into the different homes of my Friendship Hosts and my partner teacher to fully appreciate the different holidays celebrated.

My first experience of plucking a pumpkin from a patch was at the 100-acre home of my

partner teacher together with her two younger children. Apart from this experience, all



Celebrating Thanksgiving with my Friendship Hosts and their family – Jim and Sharon Kendall

the Fulbrighters were brought to Yarnick's Farm to experience the Corn Maze and to pick out pumpkins from a larger pumpkin patch! If not for this opportunity on the Fulbright DAI programme, I probably would never had the chance to experience this season as it would be term time.



Visit to Yarnick's Farm to pick out our pumpkins

We were also introduced to the world of sports: a favourite American pastime and one that bonded people together. I have never been much into sports, but being in the stadium with the locals, I could feel the excitement



Fulbrighters at a Indiana Football Match

course through my blood. I

unconsciously started to rally the Hawks in a basketball match or the Indiana Home Team in football! Sports brought the entire community together, and it was exhilarating to witness it first-hand.



Fulbrighters at a Basketball Match with Acting Dean, Dr. Sue Rieg and IUP's President, Dr. Michael Driscoll

A Family away from Family

Having to live and to work with colleagues from 20 different other countries proved to be the most eye-opening experience for me. Apart from the casual conversations taking us late into the night, we also had “Whanau”, family time which was shared by our colleagues from New Zealand. It was the coming together of different cultures, cooking for one another and learning about different cultures and practices that made it easy for all of us to connect with one another.



One of the nights where we celebrated as a Whanau and including other International Students in our cookouts



My version of Laksa, improvising with Angel Hair spaghetti instead of Bee Hoon

It was amazing to see the coming together of the 21 of us at IUP as we celebrated one another's birthdays and had our weekly Movie Nights. Such bonds, I believe, would lead to a lifetime of partnerships as we continue to explore ways to advocate the kind of learning experiences we want to create for our learners.

All in all, the experience was invaluable. All good things must come to an end. I truly believe that it is never “Goodbye” but rather “Till we next meet!” In the words of the Indiana Community, “Together, we are better!” I look forward to keeping in touch with all of them as we advocate for a kinder and more inclusive world for our students!



*Donning the Indiana Tee-shirt gifted to us by Superintendent,
Mr. Michael J. Vuckovich, with the slogan, 'We are Better Together'*