

Ms Valerie Joan Baptist

My Fulbright Experience

I am both grateful and honoured to have been a part of the Fulbright programme hosted by Indiana University of Pennsylvania (IUP). I applied for the Fulbright Distinguished Award in Teaching for two key reasons. Firstly, I was interested to learn how student resilience is developed by teachers and thought leaders. Secondly, I wanted to experience working with and living among a diverse and international group of educators.



18 Fulbrighters from seven different countries (Botswana, Indonesia, Mexico, Morocco, Senegal, Singapore and Uganda) at Indiana University of Pennsylvania.

My interest in exploring how resilience is being developed in schools in America, brought me into classrooms at Indiana Junior and Senior High schools. It was at these schools that I got to dialogue with fellow educators on ways to build a growth mindset and identify strengths of both students and staff in the schools. Besides picking up useful strategies, I was able to broaden my understanding of building resilience from the enriching discussions and lesson observations.

Learning Opportunities

I also visited Portland, Oregon, where I discussed with school district leaders the challenges and opportunities arising from the implementation of a growth mindset curriculum. Such rich conversations not only enabled me to challenge my own assumptions, but they also emboldened my understanding of positive education.

Needless to say, this experience influenced how I would develop my own curriculum at Catholic Junior College, the school I am currently teaching in.

Weekly school visits allowed me to both observe and teach in American public schools. Arrangements were made for us Fulbrighters to experience teaching in both rural and urban settings, which contributed vastly to my understanding and experience of education in America. The diverse and contrasting experiences I gained from these schools pushed me to reconsider the role, priorities and challenges of education. My interactions with students from these schools were eye-opening and transformational, challenging my beliefs about the role of a teacher. For their openness, generosity and trust, I will always be grateful.



With our partner teachers and IUP staff at Indiana High School

At IUP, I was fortunate enough to audit classes: one on Special Education and another on Multicultural Counselling. The professors, Mr Andrew Weaver and Dr Lorraine Guth, were stellar. Besides helping me with my research project, they took a genuine interest in my work related to the provision of educational support to students in Singapore. These classes also pushed me to think about the different facets of a student, while redefining my understanding of differentiated teaching and learning. Very often teachers focus on the academic ability of a student alone, but I learnt that there are also other factors like gender, race, religion and sexuality that can influence a student's readiness to learn.



At the Fulbright Tea Reception hosted by IUP's President, Dr Michael Driscoll

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Fulbright and Technology seminars were also useful in empowering me to be a more inclusive and creative educator. For example, working with Mrs Holly Rogeaux and Mr Roger Briscoe II allowed me to explore coding, artificial intelligence and assistive technology. As a result, it opened my mind to new possibilities for student engagement, particularly for students with special needs, and I am hopeful that these innovative styles of learning will unlock new skills for a better life for my students in and out of school.

The dedication of the team at IUP really showcased American hospitality and community spirit. The professors took great efforts to ensure that the Fulbrighters were settled in. They took us on cultural trips to New York City and around Pennsylvania, organised a baseball game for us to learn about one of America's most loved sport and even invited us to meet their families.



Getting ready to play baseball



In Brooklyn, New York with Indonesian Fulbrighters
Juliana Tando and Ismiati



Visit to Frank Lloyd Wright's masterpiece, Fallingwater, Pennsylvania with our Technology Class
Teachers, Mrs Holly Rogeaux and Mr Roger Briscoe II

Forging Friendships

Living and working with teachers from seven other countries proved to be the most rewarding part of my Fulbright journey. From sharing best practices and challenges from our home countries, to cooking, eating and dancing together in our common room at the dormitory, we opened our hearts and minds to one another and forged lasting friendships that will continue well beyond our Fulbright experience. I look forward to continuing our partnerships across international borders as we each work to make our own communities better and brighter.



Juliana (Indonesia), Flavia (Uganda), Lemine (Senegal), Ismiati (Indonesia) and Memo (Mexico) trying my laksa



One of many nights spent in our common room eating, dancing and getting to know each other and our different cultures better

On the whole, this Fulbright experience has been enriching on both professional and personal fronts. It was very heartening to see that there are many more things that bind us than separate us: we have the same hopes and dreams, and encounter the same challenges as we work towards peace and prosperity in our different communities. I am thankful that through this Fulbright experience, we were given the chance to listen to one another's personal stories and see these similarities and dreams, and have returned home inspired to build bridges and partnerships that will contribute to making the world kinder, more understanding and more inclusive.