Summer Bridge Program for High School Students

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During July 2010 Columbus High School teacher Jana Thompson and I had the honor to chaperone 28 of the brightest high school students in Central Indiana as they journeyed to China for the Confucius Institute Summer Bridge Program. The group represented freshmen through seniors and by the end of the two-week program, several were discussing plans to move to China for university studies.

Students spent three days in Beijing, where they visited the Confucius Institute headquarters, Tiananmen Square, the Forbidden City, the Temple of Heaven, the Great Wall, and the China Science and Technology Museum. They then boarded a plane for Zibo City in Shandong Province, where they studied Chinese language, tai chi, paper cutting, and got to know their peers at Shandong Experimental High School. In addition to the classroom instruction, the Indiana students visited the Confucius Temple and Confucius cemetery in Qufu, toured the home of 17th century author Pu Songling, and shopped at the local mall.

The most significant part of the journey was the opportunity for the students to spend an evening at the homes of their peers who attend Zibo Experimental High School. Despite some language barriers, they found common ground in their hopes for the future and learned that we are more alike than different—perhaps the most important thing for young people to understand.