



## **Preservice Teachers' Student Teaching Experiences in East Africa**

**Saili S. Kulkarni & Cheryl Hanley-Maxwell**

Perhaps travel cannot prevent bigotry, but by demonstrating that all peoples cry, laugh, eat, worry, and die, it can introduce the idea that if we try to understand each other, we may even become friends.

—Maya Angelou

The world is changing. Human mobility is at an all-time high, and globalization is a consequence of that mobility (Haskins, Greenberg, & Fremstad, 2004; Suarez-Orozco, 2001). The influence of globalization can be felt in terms of transnational employment and recruitment, a greater wealth gap between rich and poor, technological advances, and cultural and/or linguistic diversity in schools (Goodwin, 2010). In response to globalization, there has been a surge across higher education institutions to internationalize the curriculum. Although the idea of being globally competent has been given more importance, there is yet to be a consensus on what this means in terms of planning and implementation at the university level (Roberts, 2007). In the field of teacher education, responding to a more diverse set of learners is one of the most important reasons for internationalization (Cushner

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& Brennan, 2007). Therefore teacher education programs are attempting to place more preservice teachers in more diverse student teaching placements to provide them with this experience before they enter their own classrooms.

Traditionally, a preservice teacher preparation program would require students to spend one to two semesters teaching in local schools under the guidance of an experienced teacher. Conversely, intercultural student teaching programs enable students to supplement or replace such requirements with opportunities to teach internationally. The purpose of such programs is varied but includes language proficiency, increasing cultural sensitivity, providing global connections, and adding a layer of challenge to existing student teaching components (Cushner & Brennan, 2007).

Several studies have been conducted on the experiences of preservice teachers who have traveled overseas (Bryan & Sprague, 1997; Mahan & Stachowski, 1990; Mahon & Cushner, 2002; Quezada & Alfaro, 2007; Stachowski, Richardson, & Henderson, 2003). Each of these studies is briefly discussed, and implications from the studies were used to inform the current study.

Mahan and Stachowski (1990) surveyed 291 students over the course of 9 years to investigate their views about their participation as student teachers in the Overseas Project at Indiana University–Bloomington. These participants were able to articulate more types of learning in every learning category surveyed than those who underwent a traditional student teaching experience. Specifically, 63 students from the Overseas Project were compared to 28 students in the traditional program. Students from the Overseas Project were more likely to report learning related to global issues, classroom strategies, other individuals, curriculum/content usage, and self, even as compared to students who worked in diverse local communities in the United States (Mahan & Stachowski, 1990). The study highlighted the importance of capturing the types of learning student teachers were able to report from their experiences abroad. Because the study utilized a survey, however, there were limitations to the level of deep reflection each participant could provide. Additionally, without an articulation of what each kind of learning meant to individual students, the reader cannot be certain that meaning attributed to learning could be standardized across students.

In contrast, Quezada and Alfaro (2007) captured the self-reflections of four bilingual literacy (biliteracy) teachers who spent time in an international student teaching abroad program in Mexico. Quezada (2005) believed that student teachers who spend time teaching internationally developed a heightened sense of cultural sensitivity and came back viewing the United States from a different perspective. Four major themes emerged from Quezada and Alfaro's (2007) study: knowledge of perceived inequities, teachers as change agents, student intimacy, and internal versus external relationships. Knowledge of perceived inequities referred to the awareness by participants that there were inequalities that affected children on both sides of the Mexican border and how they could avoid perpetuating discrimination (Quezada & Alfaro, 2007).

Participants of the study reported external and internal pressures to adhere to a standards-based curriculum in the United States and how they might need to take risks when it came to educating their students (Quezada & Alfaro, 2007). This study highlights how intercultural student teaching may help construct critically resistant educators who can balance the pressures to adhere to standards with the need to create thoughtful citizens (Bates, 2008; Freire, 1970; Giroux & McLaren, 1986; McLaren & Farahmandpur, 2001). Although the study involved a smaller sample size than previous studies (e.g., Mahan & Stachowski, 1990), it was able to provide a carefully constructed set of opportunities for individual participants to self-reflect and critically construct meaning from their experiences.

Another study investigated the perceptions of 10 preservice teachers in an overseas student teaching program in China and how those experiences might affect their future teaching in culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms in the United States (Zhao, Meyers, & Meyers, 2009). The authors asked how preservice teachers perceived their teaching experiences in China and also their personal and professional growth. They then asked how the preservice teachers could apply a cross-cultural stance through the immersion experience (Zhao et al., 2009).

Findings revealed that the preservice teachers grew in terms of their cultural responsibility. For example, one preservice teacher reported on the opportunity to collaborate with both Chinese and American peers during roundtable discussions and how this made her feel more confident about building cross-cultural relationships with students and families in the United States. This suggests that intercultural student teaching can also support preservice teachers in building relationships with families of their students from diverse backgrounds.

It is important to note, however, that previous studies of intercultural student teaching programs are often framed positively and do not provide significant information on some of the challenges faced by participants or coordinators in implementing these programs. Van Damme (2001) wrote that oftentimes, when international opportunities are present, they are created and implemented in terms of the national frame of reference of the participating nation. For example, if a student from the United States were to travel to China for his or her study abroad or student teaching program, the program would be structured primarily around a more Western lens. Therefore it is important to be aware of the challenges and limitations of international student teaching programs, despite previously reported positive results.

In summary, previous studies on international student teaching programs have examined sources of learning (Mahan & Stachowski, 1990), provided critical reflection on the role of culture (Quezada & Alfaro, 2007), examined the effects on domestic practice with culturally and linguistically diverse individuals (Zhao et al., 2009), and highlighted the need for more studies examining preservice teacher growth (Marx & Moss, 2012). This literature, however, is limited in terms of (a) the kinds of teachers who participated in intercultural student teaching programs, primarily general education teachers; (b) the parts of the world in which these pro-

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grams were offered—no data were previously collected from participants in East Africa—and (c) addressing programmatic challenges in addition to benefits—only two studies briefly addressed challenges. Given these needs, this study examined the role of one intercultural student teaching experience in shaping teacher preparedness, cultural responsiveness, and perspectives on global education: the East African student teaching program at a Western university.

The current study attempted to provide a more balanced view of international student teaching by highlighting benefits while also bringing up programmatic challenges and needs. This study was conducted in rural East Africa, which is a region of the world none of the other intercultural student teaching literature has, to date, covered. Specifically, this study examined the influence of a university-based student teaching program in rural East Africa on the beliefs of four preservice teacher participants.

### **Research Questions**

Three main research questions were important to the objectives of this study:

1. How did preservice teachers feel the East African student teaching program informed their overall preparedness to teach in U.S. public schools?
2. How did preservice teachers feel the East African student teaching program informed their ability to become culturally responsive educators in U.S. public schools?
3. How did the East African student teaching program inform preservice teachers' perspectives on the global context of education?

### **Theoretical Framework**

Several important components have been identified as important to the preparation of preservice teachers: (a) personal knowledge/autobiography and philosophy of teaching; (b) contextual knowledge/understanding children, schools, and society; (c) pedagogical knowledge/content, theories, methods of teaching, and curriculum development; (d) sociological knowledge/diversity, cultural relevance, and social justice; and (e) social knowledge/cooperative, democratic group process, and conflict (Goodwin, 2010). These knowledge domains, particularly contextual knowledge/understanding of children, schools, and society, provide a lens through which to understand the experiences of the preservice teachers who participated in the East African student teaching program. Consequently, preservice teachers' reflections on how they came to understand education through a global perspective were viewed and interpreted using the lens that teachers need to be prepared through the knowledge domains indicated in Goodwin (2010).

The East African student teaching experiences of preservice teachers were also positioned using culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Culturally relevant pedagogy suggests that teaching that is truly responsive to student diversity and needs is created through teachers who are themselves aware of and embrace diversity in all its variations; who have high expectations for all students; and who challenge students to become sociopolitically conscious citizens (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Especially in the current public school system in the United States, where the majority of students come from nondominant backgrounds (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010), it is critical for educators to have a clear grasp on how to work with different populations of students and their families. The theory of culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995) provided a framework for the outcomes of the East African student teaching program at a Western university. It was the main objective of this study to understand how the experience of living within a different sociopolitical and cultural context influenced the beliefs of preservice teacher participants when they returned to teaching in the United States, specifically their beliefs in terms of preparation, culturally responsive practice, and the global nature of education. Both Goodwin (2010) knowledge domains and Ladson-Billings (1995) culturally relevant pedagogy informed the lens and overall study objectives.

## **Methodology**

Because this study was framed through preservice student teaching in East Africa and was structured through the teachers' perspectives on their overall preparedness, cultural responsiveness, and understanding of education in a global context, a multiple case study methodology was used to construct and frame participant experiences. Each student participant served as an individual bounded system (Stake, 1995), and cross-case comparisons were drawn using a priori themes.

## **Research Context**

A description of both the East African country and the program in which participants were able to student teach is outlined in the following sections. Although the country in which student teaching occurred is masked to protect the program and participants, it is important to provide historical data to situate both the student teachers and the overall program in which they participated. Therefore we provide some information about the overall country's historical context as well as the program setup and structure.

*Historical context.* The East African country in which participants engaged in student teaching has a long history of military presence and dictatorships. The country also has a long and violent history of British colonialism. Three main types of violence can be actualized through this enduring colonial history: psychological (Fanon, 1968), physical (Galtung, 1969), and structural violence (Kabwegyere,

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1972). When thinking about psychological violence specifically, colonialism in the East African country left a feeling of distance between “natives” and “educated Africans” (Kabwegyere, 1972, p. 312). Indeed, the educational system in the East African country can be one of the institutions in which psychological violence is most pronounced, especially given the current prevalence of missionary projects centered in rural villages (Kabwegyere, 1972).

***Student teaching program.*** We can then situate the East African student teaching program in a similar context as exemplified by postcolonial, psychological violence. The East African student teaching program started in 2010 through a partnership between a professor in the curriculum studies department at a large Western university and an East African refugee couple involved with a nonprofit organization in Canada. The couple built the school in a rural village as a Community Christian institution. Preservice teachers from the Western university applied for the program through their study abroad office. After a review of letters of recommendation, transcripts, and official documentation, they were interviewed by a study abroad office coordinator and the curriculum studies professor. Preservice teachers selected for the program received a brief preorientation from the professor and an in-country orientation in a major city in East Africa before beginning their 8-week student teaching program at a rural village school during the summer. The preorientation included logistical information about the program but little to no context or historical background, especially for the first cohort of student teachers who participated. The second cohort were given one to two sessions of preorientation, which included program logistics and an overview of the East African country’s history. Within the East African country, participants received tours of a major university and some local schools. These tours were largely situated in metropolitan areas very different from the context in which the student teachers would be working.

Instruction at the village school occurred in English, which is the national language of the East African country in which student teaching occurred. Although there were challenges around certain words in British English versus American English, as well as differences in pronunciation, participants were not required to learn the local village language before beginning their student teaching programs.

Participants of the study could not be interviewed for the study prior to their departure for the program. Instead, the interviews and data collection created a reflection of their experiences after having completed their 8 weeks of student teaching abroad. Some of these interviews asked them to think back to their experiences about 3–6 months after they had returned. This was more true for the participants who went as part of the very first cohort, who could not be approached immediately after returning from the program because of timing and approval of the Institutional Review Board (see “Limitations”).

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**Participants**

Four preservice teachers<sup>1</sup> participated in the East African student teaching program through a partnership with a large Western university (see Table 1 for participant characteristics). All preservice participants identified as White, middle-class individuals between the ages of 18 and 22 years. Three of the four participants were general education preservice teachers, and one was a special education preservice teacher. All had completed part of their student teaching in a Western city and part of their student teaching (8 weeks) in East Africa. The four preservice teachers' experiences were collected through a series of semistructured interviews and weblogs.

**Data Collection**

Semistructured interviews were completed soon after participants returned from East Africa to capture their reflections after they returned and started working in public schools in the United States. Weblogs were collected from each participant and captured their experiences while they were participating in the student teaching program in East Africa. A total of two semistructured interviews were conducted per participant, and each participant kept a total of one running blog (sample interview protocol is listed in the appendix). Interviews with participants were conducted in person or remotely through telephone or Skype. Each interview with participants lasted between 30 minutes and 1 hour and was audio recorded and transcribed. Therefore, a total of 8 interviews and 32 blog entries (1 per week per participant) were collected, in addition to field notes during and after interviews and blog reviews.

**Trustworthiness**

Transcriptions were sent back to participants for review to ensure the accuracy of the interview content (i.e., member checking). Additionally, a series of field notes were collected throughout the process of data collection and analysis to

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**Table 1**  
**Characteristics of Student Teacher Participants**

Name	Gender	Age (years)	Race/ethnicity	Type of certification program	Current U.S. work placement
Wendy	Female	18–22	White/Caucasian	General ed.	5th grade teacher
Ethan	Male	18–22	White/Caucasian	General ed.	2nd grade teacher
Beverly	Female	18–22	White/Caucasian	General ed.	Substitute teacher
Bertha	Female	18–22	White/Caucasian	Special ed.	Kindergarten special ed. teacher

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create deeper understanding of what participants shared in interviews and blogs. The use of multiple sources of data allowed for triangulation of information across data source (Creswell, 2008). Furthermore, because the four participants were part of a multiple case study, recurring themes were also generated across participants (Stake, 1995).

#### **Coding**

Codes were generated from interview transcripts, weblogs, and field notes based on the a priori themes of participant perspectives on (a) preparedness to teach, (b) preparedness in terms of cultural responsiveness to student diversity, and (c) education in a global context. During first-cycle coding, segments of text were categorized using the three broad a priori themes. Then, during second-cycle coding, each set of transcripts and codes was reread and filtered into subthemes that fell within each first-cycle theme. Finally, cases were constructed and relevant subthemes were refined within each participant's individual and through collective experiences. This process was continued until data reached a point of saturation and no new information came forward.

#### **Results**

Analysis of the student teaching program revealed that the opportunity to teach in East Africa had influences on student thinking and that some participants gained new understandings as they transitioned back into teaching at public schools in the United States. Although some variation was apparent with individual participants, all of them reported that the program created some level of personal growth. Based on the original themes of (a) beliefs about teaching culturally and linguistically diverse learners, (b) preparedness to teach, and (c) the global context of education, a series of important themes emerged from participants' individual and collective experiences student teaching in East Africa. These included (a) understanding of second-language learners and (b) Whiteness as equated with wealth and knowledge, (c) "teaching on your toes," (d) curricular negotiation, (e) sustainability of connections to East Africa, and (f) material resourcefulness. Each of these themes is discussed briefly in the following.

#### ***Understanding Second-Language Learners***

Preservice participants all reported feeling empathy toward English language learners as a result of their experiences in East Africa. In East Africa, participants had to communicate with students who spoke both a local language and a version of British English. The challenge of having to communicate across language barriers while completing their student teaching built participants' confidence in terms of working with English language learners. As nonnative speakers of the local language



spoken in their East African student teaching placement, all student teachers had to become resourceful in terms of communicating with their students, sometimes differentiating using visual representations to supplement lessons, small group instruction, and breaking down complex sentences to check for understanding. Although participants learned these strategies informally through student teaching experiences, many of them are actually best practice for working with English language learners (Bal, Khang, Kulkarni, & Mbeseha, 2011).

Beverly also reinforced this idea during her interview. She remarked that beyond the teaching aspect, she saw language as an important takeaway of the program. Beverly felt that the experience teaching in East Africa had given her this newfound understanding and empathetic view of second-language learners. She recognized how the program enabled her to “think about what [she] said and how [she] g[ave] directions.” Beverly was able to come away from the program with the desire “to work with English language learners.”

All participants had encounters with language that suggested that they were empathetic to differences in understanding. Indeed, having an empathetic disposition has been deemed an important trait for teacher success with culturally and linguistically diverse learners (McAllister & Irvine, 2000). Participants were also able to use this empathy to develop supportive practices for working with second-language learners in their schools in the United States.

### ***Whiteness as Equated With Wealth and Knowledge***

In addition to language, because all the preservice teachers interviewed in this study were White, they all mentioned having some different experiences in terms of race. The students and staff in the East African school treated the participants as a source of knowledge and perceived them as wealthy. This had huge implications for their individual practices back in the United States.

Wendy spent most of the latter half of her interview, as well as a few pages of her photo book, talking at length about how those instances of White privilege made her feel. She mentioned how she felt it was “kind of shocking how [she] was received” and how she felt as though she were “put on a pedestal.” Additionally, she noted how “everybody assumed that [she] had tons of money and that [the White student teachers] had way more knowledge than they did at the school.”

Wendy perceived that there was a level of assumed competence and wealth associated with her status as a White person. In many instances, Wendy described how this visible privilege she was given made her very uncomfortable.

Although Wendy felt uncomfortable with the additional attention she received, her ability to place this within her own privilege as a White, middle-class person from the United States showcased her awareness of these differences. She was able to come away from the East African student teaching program thinking carefully about her own privilege in relation to her students and using this to inform her in-

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struction both in East Africa and the United States. For example, Wendy mentioned later in her second interview that, although many of her students in the United States were from White, middle-class backgrounds, it was important for them to have opportunities to engage with people from backgrounds different from their own. She provided her students with opportunities to engage with the children at the East African village school for this specific purpose.

As mentioned in the historic context for the East African country, there is a colonial history in East Africa partially responsible for some of the forms of psychological violence witnessed by the preservice teacher participants (Essed, 1991). Specifically, this manifested in the associations that rural village school staff had toward the preservice teachers. It is important to note that not all preservice teachers came away embracing differences and/or a critical understanding of race. For instance, Ethan seemed to appreciate the attention and came away from the experience forming very different ideas than Wendy:

People here love us *because* we are White—Muzungo, the term meaning “the White man.” They are so happy to have Europeans/Americans here helping them. To me, it seems the ultimate selflessness. They are so open to change and help that they eagerly hand their children and their lives to us without even knowing us. Everyone says hello, everyone welcomes us. It’s not to say that they are not proud of their culture, their ways, or the progress they have made, because they are. But they know that if they are to catch up with the rest of the world, they need us. To them we represent the future, we represent progress, and we represent *hope*.

Through Ethan’s blog reflection, it is apparent that he did not feel the same level of discomfort but seemed to believe that his power as a White person could be used to provide aid to the children in rural East Africa. In the post, Ethan equated his Whiteness with “hope” and “progress” and seemed to suggest that without the outside influence of Americans, the East African rural village would not grow. This seemed to reflect a deficit view of the people he encountered in the East African village. The reflection also connected with his later interview in which he described his school setting in a mid-sized urban district. Ethan remarked that “the kids that are at [his] school are super low and about 50% are like English language learners.”

The description of students as “super low” also has a deficit-based connotation. Thus his blog response and interview both suggest that he may have held a deficit-based perspective of people from nondominant backgrounds, positioning himself as knowledgeable in those situations. Indeed, Ethan perceived himself as providing a service to the children in East Africa and a service to his students from linguistically diverse backgrounds in the United States. Despite this, however, he did learn to appreciate some of the more technical elements of the student teaching experience, as he reported through his later comments on preparedness and the school structure.

**Teaching on Your Toes**

One of the positive outcomes for preservice teachers was the experience of having to “teach on [their] toes.” Wendy described her experience in East Africa as having to constantly teach material without much background or preparation. All of the preservice teachers described being “handed the chalk” and asked to teach during their first hour in the East African school. They explained that without lesson plans or materials prepared, they were forced to “teach on their toes” and how rewarding this experience was in terms of being able to think quickly, which is common in teaching students with a variety of needs and the multitasking needed in U.S. public schools. Indeed, previous research on intercultural student teaching suggests that preservice teachers learn how to work without a set of materials and lesson plans, which are commonly unavailable in international classrooms (Hayden & Thompson, 1998). They are forced to become more creative in their teaching. This is precisely what occurred with student teachers in East Africa.

Wendy, from whom this theme was derived, spoke at length about the experience of “teaching on your toes.” Wendy described it using her impressions of her first day of teaching in the East African village:

It was like one of those nightmare moments that you have when you’re totally unprepared and I had to figure [it] out, and that’s kind of the way the summer went because the curriculum over there was really scarce. We hardly had anything to go on so many situations where I felt like I didn’t know what I was doing, but then you figure it out and you are confident in the kids right in front of you and . . . you just have to take control of the situation and teach on your toes and that’s the piece that I didn’t have from student teaching in [a Western city]. . . . You really had to figure out the material quickly and then figure out how to teach it to these kids, so it was so real life and so on your toes and so that prepared me for really . . . I feel like any situation in the classroom.

Though not negating lesson preparation, this quotation speaks to the moments in teaching that are unpredictable and how Wendy felt confident that she would be able to handle these moments better as a result of her experience in East Africa. Throughout Wendy’s interviews and other reflections, she points out how having to teach on her toes gave her a sense of confidence she would not have otherwise achieved. She compares her experience with that of the Western school district, where everything is structured. Having had the opportunity to experience both predictability and chaos, Wendy found herself prepared for both kinds of teaching environments.

Beverly also suggested that she felt she was prepared in being resourceful. It was important because she had to be creative with what [she] had readily available. She mentioned how she would “like finding ways to use limited things” and learned to “be flexible” and how as a substitute she “know[s] how to handle that . . . and how nothing fazes [her] now.”

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Beverly currently works as a substitute teacher in the United States and was able to reflect on her experiences in East Africa by suggesting that despite the unpredictability of substitute assignments, she does not feel fazed, because there were frequent times during the East African student teaching program where she had to improvise teaching and she continued to expect success from all of her students.

Therefore student teacher participants all indicated that there were multiple instances where they had to teach on their toes and that these lessons in patience, flexibility, and improvisation were helpful to their domestic teaching.

#### **Curricular Negotiations**

In addition to having to maintain a degree of flexibility about teaching in general, student participants also recalled having to be flexible about *what* they taught. For the initial cohort of participants, this meant shifting expectations about what a curriculum at the East African school might look like. For the second cohort, it meant adjustments in how Western materials and instructional tools were integrated into teaching in East Africa.

Wendy negotiated this difference by finding ways to embed her philosophical ideas about education within the existing system. During a lesson “on fractions . . . instead of telling them directly . . . to multiply the denominator by the same number, [she] drew a bunch of strategies on the board and had hands-on materials . . . provid[ing] 3 different strategies and then [they] could pick how to solve the problem.” Wendy differentiated the instruction for the group of learners and was able to find a way of incorporating some hands-on material within the more “rote” learning.

Ethan too noticed the difference in instructional style in the East African school. Ethan also saw value in some of the strategies already implemented in the East African school. In his second interview, he mentioned that in his current teaching, he uses some of the “call and response” he learned in East Africa.

Ethan did find value in some of the more traditional schooling elements found in the East African student teaching program and brought these elements to his classroom in the United States. For example, in East Africa, Ethan’s class would “put up a definition on the board and the class [would] read the definition together,” and Ethan mentioned how he “picked that up there” and used it in his class in the United States. Although he had a difficult time with the unstructured nature of the student teaching program, he was able to come back with something valuable to share with his own classroom.

Beverly had a bit more difficulty with negotiations of the curriculum. She mentioned that she tried to “strike a balance” between preparing students for examinations and using more interactive activities.

Beverly seemed to try to work within the existing framework. Though she attempted to bridge both the philosophical tenets of her Western university training and the expectations of her in East Africa, she seemed to feel a tension to stick

to having students pass their exams. She mentioned that the students “had to get through [exams]” and that the instructional assessments were not “based off what students know.”

As the only special education teacher of the group, Bertha had a unique experience with the curriculum. Interview reflections with her focused on curriculum as well as students who were struggling in the East African school. Bertha spoke at length about stigmatization of students who were struggling. For instance, she mentioned how there was a tendency to call out the grades for student assessment scores and how she did not agree with that practice. Bertha started direct instruction with the students using materials she brought from the United States. She was able to negotiate with teachers as to why she was using direct instruction and was able to begin implementing it into the school structure. As part of Bertha’s unique training among the participants, she seemed to be able to effectively incorporate differentiation and directed instruction into the curricular organization. She remarked afterward that one of the teachers mentioned a desire to “continue on with direct instruction” after the student participants left.

Overall, one of the main challenges that students faced as teachers in East Africa included the negotiation of curricular differences. The structure of schooling in the East African school was very “old school,” as Ethan remarked. Instruction for students was geared toward preparation for examinations. The students were made to sit in rows, and teachers initiated a call-and-response method of instruction. Some student teachers had more overall success with achieving balance. In particular, Wendy was able to find ways of balancing the values of the East African community with her own philosophical stance toward education. Similar to Quezada and Alfaro’s (2007) theme of external and internal pressures, preservice teachers in the East African student teaching program had to learn to negotiate the standardized curriculum in East Africa with their own university training in more conceptual pedagogy. This opportunity was able to provide preparation for such negotiation in their domestic practice, as there is a continued push for standards-based instruction in the United States (No Child Left Behind Act, 2001).

### ***Global Perspectives on Education***

Goodwin (2010) explained that contextual knowledge and an understanding of children, schools, and society are important components of teaching. Situated within this framework, artifacts were coded for global perspectives on education. For student teaching participants, global understanding of education revealed the additional subthemes of (a) sustainability of connections to East Africa and (b) material resource appreciation.

***Sustainability of connections to East Africa.*** All student teaching participants had opportunities to share their experiences of how teaching in East Africa helped them create a more global definition of education. In their interviews, most of the

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student teachers found this question challenging and provided examples from their own classroom teaching experiences of how they were connecting the experience in East Africa with their instruction in the United States. Bertha in particular described how, despite the mandates that go along with her current job as a special education teacher, she wants to continue to be present in the lives of the people she met and connect that with her domestic teaching. She was interested in “keep[ing] this flame burning” and “want[ed] to see how the direct instruction had taken off.” She additionally mentioned how she “thought about different avenues of how to get back there.” She worked with her students to write letters and “took pictures of [herself] and two of [her] students,” and she talks to her students in the United States about the school. As Bertha worked with kindergarteners, her students even asked if they could “ask the [East African village students] for a play date.”

As the special education teacher of the group, Bertha was invested in seeing specific strategies, such as direct instruction, which she started in the East African village school, continue to be implemented after her departure. She tried to find ways to reach each of her students in the village school, which was part of her previous training through the special education teacher program at the Western university. Additionally, she found a way to connect the students she sees for resource instruction in her kindergarten class with the students in East Africa through letters. Bertha was trying to sustain the connections she built through her student teaching experience. Bertha was, however, not the only student to continue to sustain a connection with the East African village school. In fact, all student teacher participants, when asked about how their perspectives of education expanded as a result of their experiences, mentioned that they had maintained some kind of direct connection with the East African village school.

Ethan mentioned how a YouTube video he created, which contained pictures of the 8 weeks in East Africa, was something he showed his second-grade students in the United States. He also mentioned how his class wrote letters to the students in East Africa and that these letters were being mailed out within a few weeks of the interview. He also mentioned becoming friends with a man from the same country in East Africa as the village school. This connection, however, was superficial in some respects, as he described how he connected with the man based on being from the same country and generalized this with his experience of visiting. For example, he said how he explained to the man that “he too had been to Africa,” suggesting an overgeneralization of the continent and also bypassing within-group differences among individuals from the continent of Africa.

As a substitute teacher, Beverly did not have as many opportunities to directly connect her students to the students in East Africa. She does, however, maintain connections with the program coordinators and fellow teachers in East Africa using technology such as Facebook.

Wendy also mentioned that she used technology such as Facebook to keep in touch with teachers in East Africa. Of the four participants, she was also the only

teacher able to directly implement her student teaching experiences into the fifth-grade curriculum at her school. Wendy mentioned how the “coolest thing about 5th grade in the district is that in social studies” the students had standards related to “cultures of the world” and that she “spent a month and a half teaching about Africa.” Without generalizing, Wendy capitalized on her visit to East Africa by sharing her experiences with her fifth-grade students and trying to stay connected to her student teaching experiences. Wendy’s class wrote letters to the students, similar to Ethan and Bertha, and additionally sent short stories of their course work to the rural village children.

Therefore all of the teachers of the East African student teaching program were able to maintain some kind of connection to the teachers, students, and/or coordinators of the program. This speaks directly to the sustainability of the preservice teacher relationship with the East African student teaching program. Preservice teacher connections made during their student teaching in East Africa demonstrate continued presence and contact despite the lapse of time. Furthermore, this means that the outcome of the intercultural teaching experience was not an isolated event but continues to inhabit the participants’ thoughts about education and instruction. Each student teacher found a way to keep his or her “flame burning.” Through such efforts, the program, the school, and experiences for the preservice teachers’ students in the United States continue to flourish.

The experiences of the four preservice student teachers who completed part of their student teaching in East Africa suggest that international student teaching is complex and multifaceted. Similar to previous comparisons made between intercultural student teaching and traditional student teaching programs in the United States (Mahan & Stachowski, 1990), international student teaching in East Africa provided the four preservice teachers with opportunities to apply their knowledge and display different kinds of learning. The East African student teaching program pushed preservice teachers outside of their comfort zone by enabling them to think carefully about language differences, negotiate differing curricular philosophies, and consider their students’ immediate context. Although it can be argued that these elements may be found in traditional student teaching placements, there is something to be said for the unique immersion experience that intercultural student teaching programs provide (Cushner & Brennan, 2007). Indeed, each preservice teacher commented on how being in a different country and teaching context helped strengthen his or her classroom preparation in these ways.

The drawback to intercultural student teaching programs, however, is that there needs to be a heavy reflection component both before and after the experience to avoid what Van Damme (2001) called a voyeuristic view of the culture of the “other.” The Longview Foundation (2008), in its report of best practices for internationalization in higher education, suggested that pre- and posttravel reflection should be a part of international experiences. More opportunities to deconstruct experiences would have been an important addition to the East African student teaching program and

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could possibly help minimize a more voyeuristic view of the East African village community. Aside from this, reflection was also something that every preservice teacher suggested as important and underdeveloped in the program. Thus it is important to note changes that need to occur for the East African student teaching program to thrive. Whether the East African student teaching program should be implemented more fully at the Western university depends on the implementation of several of these changes. Though intercultural student teaching programs are certainly important influences on preservice teacher learning, structure is critical.

### **Discussion**

Burant and Kirby (2002) suggested the importance of field-based experiences in informing teaching beliefs. The student teaching program in East Africa provided some direct opportunities to inform the beliefs of preservice student participants. It is important to consider that simply by participating in the East African student teaching program, these participants showed their abilities to step outside comfort zones and take risks. In final reflections, preservice teachers were asked if they would recommend the program for *all* teachers. Many suggested that, despite being effective educators, not every individual is cut out for such an experience. In some ways, the student teaching in East Africa created new tensions and opportunities to reexamine previously held notions about education, preparation, and privilege. In other ways, it reinforced stereotypes and deficit-based perspectives.

In particular, Ethan seemed to take the position of “the savior.” He used this position when his blog post suggested that the White people “represented hope” for the rural East African village. Unconsciously, Ethan gained a lot from his experience. Although he suggested that he used several of the directed teaching methods from East Africa, and also that he felt some confidence after having to teach on his toes, he minimized these in his interviews, not directly acknowledging them as benefits of the experience. Ethan also continued to use deficit-based thinking when describing his own students as “low.” Although the experience was somewhat valuable for him, his failure to fully reflect on these valuable components has led to him solidifying previously held stereotypes of different communities. Indeed, Van Damme (2001) suggested that there is a risk associated with internationalization in higher education, namely, the creation of a voyeuristic view of culture, which could be true in Ethan’s case.

Similarly, as the only special education teacher of the group, Bertha held some deficit-based views of the educational structure for individuals with disabilities in East Africa. These ideas likely came from the perspective that Westernized policies for people with disabilities are viewed as most progressive around the world (Thomas & Loxley, 2001). This became evident when Bertha described education in the East African village before the school was built as nonexistent. She privileges certain kinds of knowledge, particularly traditional school-based instruction. Indeed,



Western notions of special education have the “potential to erase local, indigenous ways of responding to and accommodating difference” (Artiles, Kozleski, Waitoller, & Lukinbeal, 2011, p. 8). This idea coincided with what Bertha deemed her greatest achievement in East Africa: the use of directed instruction with students. Bertha seemed frustrated that many of the materials she brought with her were not adopted by the East African teachers but was happy when the teachers took up direct instruction. Although the use of directed instruction with students who are struggling in school is valuable, it became the major focus of Bertha’s program, as opposed to community engagement.

Beverly also had some difficulty engaging with community; however, she presented the unique perspective of having traveled to East Africa previously, as well as other parts of the world. For her, the struggle to adjust was not as difficult because she had done so in the past. Though she had an easy time staying connected with the coordinators and the program overall, her substitute position made it difficult for her to engage her students in the United States with those in East Africa. Despite her vast experience, Beverly was still able to come away from East Africa with some new takeaways, particularly as it related to her overall confidence and ability to handle the sometimes chaotic classrooms that come with her substitute position. She also felt she was able to challenge societal norms in terms of material resources available in the United States.

Wendy’s responses and artifacts presented as the clearest illustration of a culturally relevant educator. Wendy reflected on how the experience in East Africa gave her new confidence going into any kind of classroom. She learned to negotiate the curriculum mandates in East Africa so that she could balance requirements with critical thinking skills. With the advent of standards-based curriculum, which teachers across the United States are being required to follow, this negotiation is critical (Schmoker & Marzano, 1999). Wendy also seemed to come away with a new perspective on education. She was able to understand that sometimes the decisions put forward in staff development meetings, such as “what color paper to use,” can be arbitrary. She saw the bigger picture and realized that many issues were more important. Wendy commented at the end of her second interview that she had come away from the experience with an even greater “appreciation for the profession.”

Across cases, however, all preservice teacher participants noted how the East African student teaching program influenced their beliefs. All preservice participants noted an appreciation or empathy for second-language learners as a result of having to work with learners who spoke a different kind of English. All preservice participants felt that the hands-on approach to teaching in East Africa prepared them for chaotic situations in their U.S. classrooms. All preservice participants continued to maintain ties to students, staff, and coordinators of the East African student teaching program. Finally, all preservice participants came away from the East African student teaching experience thinking differently about education—although this part of their experience is something they continue to process and

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understand over time and experience as educators. Thus the East African student teaching program did influence preservice teacher beliefs regarding (a) culturally relevant instruction, (b) overall preparedness to teach, and (c) the global context of education.

### **Conclusion**

Although this study provided detailed information about participants' student teaching experiences in East Africa, it was in no way meant to be comprehensive. This preliminary examination focused mostly on the four student teacher participants and their interviews and blog writings. There are limitations related to both study results and the implications derived from these results.

### **Limitations**

The interviews conducted with student participants were done after they had returned from East Africa. This was due to timing of the initiation of the study. By the time approval was granted, student teachers had already finished their 10-week programs. Future studies could examine beliefs of these teachers before and after their return and/or conduct field observations of their student teaching within East Africa.

Participants of this study came from various background experiences and perspectives. All student teaching participants who agreed to take part in this study, however, were White, middle-class individuals. This provided certain kinds of reflections, particularly when referencing how they felt about their status as outsiders in East Africa. Future studies could examine how participants from nondominant backgrounds in the United States are able to conceptualize their experiences in East Africa.

This study was also conducted using a priori themes gathered from the theoretical framework. This meant that questions were structured around a particular lens. Codes and themes may have emerged differently if this study had used a different methodological approach. Research positionality meant that previous experiences of the researchers shaped the construction of this study and the kinds of information presented. Additionally, finding emergent themes within the broader themes presented has the risk of using codes that "lose their sensitizing aspect" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 242). The broader themes of beliefs about culturally relevant pedagogy and preparation to teach sometimes blended together in this study. This was partially due to the nature of the theoretical framework, which used culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995) to view the data as a whole. Some of the emergent themes of preparation, such as teaching on your toes, also included excerpts, which may have suggested use of culturally relevant pedagogy.

It is also important to note that none of the students made explicit connec-

tions to the colonial history of East Africa and the ways in which this may have influenced the structure of the educational system there. Kay and Nystrom (1971) suggested that the relationship between education and colonialism is complex. There is a risk of adopting a deficit perspective toward the structure of schooling in East Africa while negating the historical context through which this educational system gained fruition. Understanding the historical implications of colonialism as it relates to their field placements could serve as an opportunity for developing critical consciousness among teachers.

### ***Implications***

Although this study has focused on four preservice teachers who student-taught in East Africa, their reflections have provided several implications for the East African student teaching program at large. It is important to note that some of the participants indicated that their interviews were the first real opportunity they had had, after returning to the United States, to deconstruct their experiences and beliefs. Some of these interviews occurred between a few months to almost 6 months after their return. Opportunities to engage in deep reflection after the 8 weeks may be critical to shaping teacher beliefs (Jacob, Swensen, Hite, Erickson, & Tuttle, 2010). Therefore, the East African student teaching program would benefit from more opportunities to engage preservice teacher participants in activities that promote deep reflection.

Second, individuals continued to cite financial hardship as an issue both in participating in the program and also in rushing to find employment after completing their certification program. Many of the teachers had very little time to process their experiences because they were concerned about obtaining employment. Financial hardship also limited the number and demographics of individuals who were able to participate in the experience. It is essential for programs to begin offering more financial assistance to students to diversify the kinds of applicants who participate in international student teaching programs. Additional programmatic grants might also make this possible.

Next, some intercultural student teaching programs have benefitted from instruction on language (Longview Foundation, 2008). The East African student teaching program, perhaps for sake of convenience<sup>2</sup> and the national language of the East African country being English, decided not to include such a component. Some prior knowledge of the local village language may have proved useful for the preservice teachers in their early days of teaching. Building in information about how the English spoken at the East African student teaching site differed from standard American English might also have been useful for participants prior to their departure.

Furthermore, it is important to consider the ethical implications of sending preservice teachers to a remote village in East Africa without language and historical/

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sociopolitical context prior to their trip. During the first two cohorts of the student teaching program, very little context was given, and some participants returned with deficit-based views of the East African village's educational system as well as their role in educating youths from the East African country. It is an important consideration for any preservice student teaching program. Specifically, teachers must engage in discussions of culture and history prior to beginning to teach. Ongoing discussion would be critical to supporting beliefs that capitalize on strengths rather than engage in deficits.

Despite these suggestions, however, the East African student teaching program did build on previous intercultural student teaching programs in terms of its ability to challenge preservice teachers to learn from context. No other programs to date have utilized a student teaching component in a rural East African village. Literature around other intercultural student teaching programs that expose preservice teachers to completely new cultures and environments provided some long-term benefits to teachers in terms of their learning, beliefs, and teaching (Mahan & Stachowski, 1990).

The level of engagement with the East African village students is also something that separates this student teaching program from other programs described in the literature (Cushner & Brennan, 2007). Each preservice teacher remarked how he or she continued to sustain contact with the students and teachers with whom he or she had worked in East Africa, even months after the preservice teacher's return. This suggests some level of program commitment to encouraging participants to continue to engage with the East African village school and, for some, that the experience was impactful in their lives.

For these reasons, with cautious optimism, wider funding for programs like the East African student teaching program is recommended. Funding might provide more preservice teachers with access to the intercultural student teaching experience. While the question remains of how to engage students in ways that prevent deficit-based thinking about other cultures, wider funding might enable more opportunities for conversations both before and after the intercultural experience.

Overall, this article has presented the perspectives of four participants who student-taught in East Africa for 8 weeks as part of their student teaching requirement at a Western university. Each of the participants had unique and valuable experiences that shaped the ways in which he or she worked to become an educator in a rural East African community. Curricular negotiations, the visibility of White privilege, and their need to be resourceful all provided challenges, which showcased their different perspectives and abilities to meet these challenges. It is important to note that experiences build over time. Although working within a completely new context and culture influenced each of the participants' teaching and ways of thinking, it did not necessarily transform them all into culturally relevant, global educators. The program did, however, shape their beliefs about teaching and continues to be an experience they reflect on in their lives. As Ethan

suggested in his blog, “when the road is bumpy and you’re not driving, all you can do is hang on for the ride.”

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Pseudonyms were utilized to protect the identities of all participants.

<sup>2</sup> Several local languages are spoken by rural communities in the East African country in which the student teaching program took place.

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## **Appendix**

- Q1: So maybe we can just start by talking a little bit about your background. What got you interested in teaching?
- Q2: Are you working in a classroom now? If so, what age level or grade level?
- Q3: What kinds of experiences are you provided with in your teacher education program? Would you say it's well rounded in terms of the information you felt you needed as a teacher? Was there something you feel was missing?
- Q4: How did you hear about the student teaching opportunity in Africa?
- Q5: What made you decide to take part in this program?
- Q6: How long were you there for?
- Q7: Of your time in Africa, how much of your time was spent in classrooms as a student teacher? What was the school/environment like where you worked?
- Q8: Describe your experience in Africa and what it has meant to you as a teacher.
- Q9: What was the best part of the experience, and what would you hope to improve?
- Q10: Did you receive any predeparture orientation through your university? Describe that process and what information you were given before you left.
- Q11: Did you, through your own research or information provided, have knowledge of the political and social structure of the region in which you would teach? How do you feel your perspective on education, globally, has changed, if at all?
- Q12: What would you say was the total time you spent preparing for your student teaching opportunity before leaving for Africa? Where was the most time being allocated?
- Q13: What kind of preparations were you involved in for student teaching in Africa? How did you access the materials you needed?
- Q14: Was there an evaluation process, and how did this occur?
- Q15: If you had to reflect on your teaching in Africa, how would you evaluate your performance as a teacher?
- Q16: I saw that you had kept a blog while you were over in Africa. Were there any other ways in which you documented your experience? Journaling/assignments?
- Q17: Can you describe what it felt like to work in a country in which you were not part of the majority culture? How was the adjustment for you?
- Q18: Now let's talk about the trip back home. What did you notice about yourself and your teaching that you felt changed the most after your experience?
- Q19: How did this experience impact your practice in the United States?
- Q20: Would you recommend this experience to other educators?
- Q21: Is there anything else you would like to add that I have not asked you about?