

# **International Practica Experiences as Events of Influence in a Teacher Candidates' Development**

## **L'expérience d'un stage international comme élément influent sur le développement de futurs enseignants**

Nancy Maynes, John Allison and Lynn Julien-Schultz

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Article abstract

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# INTERNATIONAL PRACTICA EXPERIENCES AS EVENTS OF INFLUENCE IN A TEACHER CANDIDATES' DEVELOPMENT

NANCY MAYNES, JOHN ALLISON & LYNN JULIEN-SCHULTZ

*Nipissing University*

**ABSTRACT.** Experience may influence beliefs and beliefs may influence practices. Following these premises, we investigated teacher candidates' post experience reflections nine months after an international practicum where they taught for three weeks in rural Kenya. Teacher candidates were placed in non-governmental organization (NGO) sponsored schools on the Maasi Mara southwest of Nairobi. They taught in both elementary (Standard) and secondary (Form) classrooms. Eleven of these candidates responded to a questionnaire with open-ended prompts requiring reflective responses about the perceived impact of their experiences both personally and professionally. Responses were analyzed using qualitative methods to identify common themes and recurring ideas. Examining participants' responses allowed us to consider how teacher candidates perceived their personal beliefs to impact their personal and professional practices. The significance of the international practica on personal and professional beliefs and practices was evident in responses. Concerns and advantages about the impact of the international experience are explored and directions for further research are identified.

## L'EXPÉRIENCE D'UN STAGE INTERNATIONAL COMME ÉLÉMENT INFLUENT SUR LE DÉVELOPPEMENT DE FUTURS ENSEIGNANTS

**RÉSUMÉ.** Des expériences peuvent exercer une influence sur les croyances et ces croyances peuvent à leur tour influencer les pratiques. Partant de ces hypothèses, nous avons analysé les réflexions de futurs enseignants neuf mois après une expérience pratique internationale d'enseignement de trois semaines dans une région rurale du Kenya. Pour les fins de ce stage, les futurs maîtres enseignaient dans des écoles subventionnées primaires (Standard) et secondaires (Form) d'une organisation non gouvernementale (ONG) de la région Maasi Mara, située au sud-ouest de Nairobi. Onze de ces candidats ont répondu à un questionnaire composé de questions ouvertes les invitant à réfléchir sur leurs perceptions de cette expérience sur les plans personnels et professionnels. Les réponses ont été analysées qualitativement afin d'identifier les thèmes communs et les idées récurrentes. Cet examen des réponses fournies par les participants nous a permis d'analyser comment les futurs enseignants perçoivent l'impact de leurs croyances personnelles sur leurs pratiques personnelles et professionnelles. La portée d'une expérience internationale sur les croyances

et les pratiques personnelles et professionnelles est clairement ressortie dans les réponses. Les préoccupations et les avantages relatifs à l'impact d'une expérience internationale sont examinés et des indications pour des recherches futures sont formulées.

In 2006, a small University located in Northern Ontario, Canada formed a partnership with a globally-active, non-governmental, non-denominational organization. The focus of this organization is on empowering each community where it undertakes a partnership. These partnerships include school building projects, health care services, developing alternative and sustainable income projects, and clean water projects and sanitation systems. In 2006, the partnership between the NGO and the University's Faculty of Education initiated an opportunity for teachers from newly built community schools in rural Kenya and teacher candidates from Ontario to exchange professional ideas about instruction and learning. Since then, teacher candidates from the University's two campuses have had the opportunity to engage in a practicum for three weeks in Kenya. As an organizational partner, the NGO benefits by having well trained Canadian teacher candidates available in Kenya to partner with the experienced teachers in that country. Canadian teacher candidates benefit by having Kenyan teachers and NGO workers teach them about the culture of Kenya and help them negotiate the differences in the educational system within the rural areas. The Kenyan teachers benefit from exposure to interactive instructional strategies, new resources, cooperative learning approaches, and opportunities to practice teaching in English. Teacher candidates participated in this practicum through selection by a faculty committee that looked for suitability for international placements, resilience to culture shock, and ability to adapt to different environments as assessed in their applications to participate and initial orientation meetings. Fundraising and students' own financial resources funded the practica. This meant that some students in the program were unable to participate because of financial restrictions. All of the students in the program took courses in education foundations, which addressed issues of cultural responsiveness, and many took a course in international teaching in advance of the experience (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). On their return, some participated in seminars in the international teaching class designed as a follow-up to their experience. Others made presentations to faculty and the University board of governors.

During the years that the NGO has worked to build schools in remote parts of Kenya, the organization has developed a reputation for good management and caring stewardship. The NGO vehicles are recognized throughout the country and given unhindered passage within the towns and villages. Village and rural residents are openly appreciative of the benefits of associations with the NGO and welcome the involvement of Canadian teacher candidates in their schools.

In this environment, we placed teacher candidates in sponsored schools for one practicum session in their teacher preparation year. During this placement, it was evident that teacher candidates found the experience beneficial and often referred to this as “life changing.” Researchers, two of whom were participating in this practicum experience as supervisors, became interested in examining what teacher candidates meant by this expression. Answering the question of how their views of the experience would evolve over the short-term, after completion of their B.Ed. degree, became very important. What links existed between their “life changing experiences,” their beliefs, and their practices in the classroom? What role did this experience in Kenya play in the new teachers’ views on curriculum? How did the international experience in a developing world rural context impact both their personal and professional lives over time? This paper addresses these questions with an eye to the longer-term impact of international teacher practica.

## LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The existing literature on the potential impact of international practice teaching experiences must be examined with several issues in mind. Reflection is an important aspect of the preparation of teacher candidates during their professional education (Schon, 1987; Van Manen, 1990). Similarly, reflection is an important activity for teacher candidates on international practica (Lee, 2005; Pence & MacGillivray, 2008). Lee does an excellent job of characterizing the number of different levels of reflection. These levels include non-reflection / description, mere recall, descriptive reflection / recall level, an attempt at simple explanation, dialogic reflection / rationalization level, involving exploration of alternative explanations from different perspectives, and critical reflection / reflectivity level, involving a critical analysis that situates reasoning within a broader historical, social, cultural or political context, with a view to changing or improving in the future.

The distinction between Lee’s (2005) lower levels of reflection and the upper level is that the latter includes reflection that is used as a basis for action, particularly so in the classroom. Therein lies the notion of “reflective practice” (Schon, 1987; Van Manen, 1990). This was an important theme of the students’ preparation year and is an expectation over the longer term for teachers. Reflective practice ensured that each teaching experience was considered with a professional, educative focus. The international practicum experience needed to receive the same introspection through formal reflection by teacher candidates because the possibility that this experience might impact the personal and professional lives of these candidates was substantial. The practicum provided that reflective opportunity through this research as it would not be common for pre-service teachers to reflect on standard practica to this degree nor in this timeframe. Research on reflective practice has also shown that teacher candidates develop greater awareness of themselves, their curriculum design,

and the teaching strategies they use (Mckay & Montgomery, 1995; Stachowski, 2001). This further supported our decision to initiate this reflective research several months after the international experience.

International teaching experiences have also been found to increase tolerance and respect for others and to contribute to personal development (Hull, 1974; Mwebi & Brigham, 2009). Conceptual change theory suggests that changes in perspectives are directly related to changes in experiences (Wilson, 2001). Such experiences create both personal and professional paradigm shifts for those who engage in them. Wilson found that international experiences had impacts in both cognitive and affective areas. This is the essence of conceptual change theory. The notion of culturally critical reflective practice is also significant in this context because the teaching practicum in a developing country is very different from pre-service practica in Canadian contexts. Teacher candidates need to be aware of the cultural component of what they do (Brookfield, 1995; Brookfield & Preskill, 2005), particularly in contexts different from their “home” university or “home” teaching environment.

International teaching experiences strive to provide opportunities for deeper understanding of and reflection on the world, and create global-mindedness among the teacher candidates. Grove (1980) described this as trying to create a feeling of identity with the total world community and a desire for diversity in personal relationships. Many international teaching program experiences assume as a goal that teacher candidates’ understanding will be increased through exposure to other cultures (Korsgaard, 1971) and that teacher candidates will be better prepared to work in multicultural classrooms after an international teaching experience (R. Baker & Giachhino, 2000). The experience is offered to allow the teacher candidate to learn more deeply about culture through international practica immersion, which includes significant, direct personal interaction within the culture (Brislin & Cushner, 1996). Researchers have identified this outcome as a result of international teacher candidates’ experiences abroad. Goals such as expanding world horizons, increased world-mindedness, and better classroom teaching upon returning home are common outcomes of such programs (B. Baker, 2000; Cole & Mulder, 1983; Korsgaard, 1971; Krogh, 1990; Wheeler, 1985; Williams & Kelleher, 1987).

International teaching in Africa brings with it particular challenges (Mwebi & Brigham, 2009). Within the University where this program was undertaken, there is institutional and individual memory of past practicum experiences in Africa. Past experiences in Kenya have provided the University with basic knowledge that is used to prepare participants practically (e.g., what to pack) and culturally (e.g., how to prepare for differences in family structures, resource availability, hygiene, and travel conditions). Very few participants have taken a course that includes any aspect linked to Kenya in their undergraduate studies, whether it be literature or politics (Thiong’o, 1977; Worger, Clark, &

Alpers, 2010). The Kenyan education system in which they are immersed is one of great variety (Eshiwani, 1993). The quality of education is dependent on location, local development, and affiliation with a well-established NGO (Somerset, 2007).

The teaching cohort in most countries is made up of a majority of candidates from the dominant culture. They bring with them a series of school practices embedded in their own cultural beliefs and their own experiences as students (Stuart & Thurlow, 2000). However, these teachers must be prepared to address minority cultures within their classrooms (Cushner, 1998). The international practicum is an opportunity to increase exposure to diversity that will better prepare teacher candidates for multicultural classrooms.

Theories of transformative learning (Bell, 2000; Cranton, 1998; Taylor, 2009; Walsh & Brigham, 2007) further enrich our theoretical framework and provide another means of examining our data. Through this theory we examined the changes in beliefs and values (e.g., Africentricity) as expressed by participants in this study. This approach allowed us to examine the participants' perception of the cultural differences and the significance of recognizing these differences to how the participants processed their experiences.

Previous research has emphasized the need to make a commitment to exposing teacher candidates to opportunities that educate them about the diversity in the world (Mwebi & Brigham, 2009). Studies of the value of international practicum experiences have asserted that teacher candidates learn about diversity, planning, and professionalism (Bryan & Sprague, 1997; Mundy & Manion, 2008). The teacher candidates develop understanding about the value of extra teaching experience, flexibility, content knowledge, preparing and selecting teaching resources, and methods (B. Baker, 2000). Classroom teaching strategies, curriculum development, human relations, global issues, self-discovery, and aesthetic knowledge are also influenced by international practicum experiences (Mahan & Stachowski, 1995). These studies have focused on the experiences of students during the practicum and the analysis of these experiences immediately upon their return. Our study has examined the perceived impact of the experiences nine months after the practicum.

Additionally, our theoretical framework is informed by Merrifield, Jarachow, and Pickert's (1997) synopsis of the likely outcomes of cross-cultural teaching experiences. Their study found that teachers with cross-cultural experiences are better prepared to work with diverse populations, understand the power and potential of world connections, teach global connectedness, make students aware of other perspectives, and appreciate and use cross-cultural instructional approaches. This framework directed some of our approaches to analysis of the participants' responses in our study and guided us to examine concepts related to diversity, connections, perspectives, and cross-cultural approaches as perceived by participants.

Opportunities to experience the culture shock of total immersion in a new professional environment force teacher candidates to reflect on the assumptions they hold about teaching, to teach more reflectively, and to discover new insights about themselves (Tice, 1992). Cushner and Mahon (2002) reported teacher candidates' awareness that they have faced opportunities to develop appropriate international understanding. Teacher candidates' reflections typically focused on their awareness of the impact of their beliefs about self and others as seen through their increased cultural awareness, improved self-efficacy, strengthened sense of global-mindedness, and improvements in their understanding and ability to work with students of diverse backgrounds (Bradfield-Krieder, 1999; Pohan, 1996; Sleeter, 1995).

Growth is related to reflections on the experiences and related to gaining insights about the participants' strengths, limitations, values, and ability to adapt both personally and professionally (Mahan & Stachowski, 2001). The reflections of internationally experienced teacher candidates showed that they were less likely to see experiences as a tourist program and to consider the professional effects of the experience (Stachowski, 2001). International experience can help to prepare teachers to be culturally sensitive and responsive in their teaching by designing their instruction to meet students' needs, cultural characteristics, abilities, and interests (Mahan & Stachowski, 2001). An international teaching experience creates opportunities for new insights to develop, better teaching to accrue, and happy memories to be recalled (Mahan & Stachowski, 2001). These researchers also found that 73% of the changes that internationally experienced teacher candidates reported were personal in nature while 27% were professional. This indicates that the transformative nature of the experiences may be most prominent thereby affecting participants' core values and beliefs. Since the changes are so central to core beliefs and values, they may impact their professional practices. This finding also seems to emerge from other studies. Varying approaches to classroom discipline were the most common professional change. Mahon and Stachowski observed their students to be more self-assured, have greater poise, and be less "collegiate" in character, concluding that personal and professional changes and adaptations became inevitable processes as an outcome of the international experiences. However, various studies have shown that changes, while transformative, may be very differently realized, and some transformative outcomes may be more or less evident as the theoretical frameworks of the studies vary.

Some research has considered the longer-term impact of international teaching experiences on teachers' professional behaviour (Davidson and McCain, 2008; Willard-Holt, 2001; Wilson, 1993). This research has spoken of the long-term effect of students becoming more multicultural in their teaching (e.g., pursuing ESL certification) and empathetic in their classroom practice. Bachner and Zeuschel (2009) examined the outcomes of four decades of exchanges between the United States and Germany. They concluded that the results of such sojourns

are very complex, but that the impact of these activities was more substantial the greater the length of the stay (Bachner & Zeuschel, 2009; Davidson & McCain, 2008; Willard-Holt, 2001). Carlson spoke of stronger cultural interest and less of a domestic orientation, maturation in international students' personal and social lives, and of greater cooperation in their subsequent group activities (Carlson, Burn, Useem, & Yachimowicz, 1990).

Research has identified a wide range of potential impacts of these international teaching opportunities. However, much of the research does not address impacts that are evident when the cultural context of the international teaching experience dramatically contrasts with the teacher candidates' previous life experiences. In the practicum context, teacher candidates experienced new language, monetary systems, security issues, classroom resources, living conditions, family relationships, flora and fauna, health services, and professional interactions and standards. Much of the literature addresses individual placements in European cultures. Our study addresses practicum experiences in a group context in a developing country, which created a learning community among participants who lived, planned, and taught together. It is to this gap in the research that we wish to address our efforts through our own theoretical framework. By amalgamating the theories of reflective practice, conceptual change, and transformative learning, we developed an analytical framework for examining our participants' open-ended responses to two prompts. The resulting framework allowed us to examine responses by identifying participants' curriculum view, worldview, and sense of personal empowerment. Within this broad framework, we were able to identify several sub-themes relative to participants' perceptions of their own changed perspectives. The rich narrative (Sacks, 2010) of our candidates' responses provided data that informed the development of many sub-themes within broader categories of frameworks devised by previous researchers.

The framework used to analyze our candidates' responses represents the primary way in which this work extends the current scholarship. Teacher candidates from Ontario who taught in rural Kenya were challenged by coming face to face with the dichotomies of shifts in their views of these significant areas of their personal and professional identities. We will demonstrate how we used the participants' curriculum beliefs, worldviews, and sense of personal empowerment to frame their reflections.

## **METHODOLOGY**

Qualitative methods (Creswell, 2002; Creswell, 2009; Merriam, 2001) were used to examine teacher candidates' responses to two open ended questions. Responses were collected through surveys. The two questions were, "What difference has this trip made to your personal life?" and "What difference has this trip made to your professional life?"



None of the researchers had any professional connection to any participants following the practicum. For this reason, an electronic questionnaire approach was chosen. The survey was structured to allow for unlimited space to respond. By posing these questions electronically as open-ended and broad we were allowing for a full scope of responses and response lengths. The wording of both questions was designed to reflect the teacher candidates' continuous reference to the term "life changing" while the experience was in progress. As we had daily contact with the candidates during the international practicum, there were many opportunities for reflective conversations about individuals' perceptions of their experiences. That the candidates expressed differences in their views towards life and work prior to and after the international practicum experience was absolutely clear. This has also been documented elsewhere, notably in Johnstone's work (Johnstone & Corce, 2010).

The researchers' role as participants in the practicum experience as supervisors created an interesting dynamic in relation to the research. As researchers, we found that we each considered the practicum supervision experience to be life changing for us. This caused us to be interested in the impact on candidates who were younger, less well-travelled, and involved in professional practice in a new international context. One of the researchers had previous experience supervising another international practicum, but the context was in urban England.

The participants' reflections on their international practicum were analyzed using the techniques of general inductive approaches to qualitative research (Creswell, 2002; Creswell, 2009; Merriam, 2001; Thomas 2006). This approach requires researchers to question core meanings evident in the text, extract major themes or categories, and describe the most important themes. Using this approach, each participant's response was analyzed for themes. Once recurring themes were identified, responses were reanalyzed within the resultant framework. Using independent parallel coding (Thomas, 2006), typical narratives were selected to exemplify key ideas (Williams & Irurita, 1998) for both the analysis and discussion that follow.

Seventeen teacher candidates participated in this teaching practicum in rural Kenya, and they constituted the sample group. The candidates were between 22 and 28 years old, both male and female, and all in the final year of their B.Ed. program. This experience was outside their cultural background, as determined by the selection data provided to trip organizers. While many participants had travelled outside of Canada, none had travelled to a developing country. All participants were born in Canada, and only one was a first generation Canadian from parents who immigrated from the Middle-East.

Eleven teacher candidates responded to the written questionnaire nine months after the practicum. This time period was chosen for two purposes. The first reason was the opportunity to create distance between the pre-service prepara-

tion program with its international element and the participants' integration into the workforce as teachers or through other employment (i.e., the gap between January and September when many would have started new employment). The second purpose was to create a time distance from the experience to give participants time to reflect on their experiences. Those who did not respond, either did not answer the initial call for participation, or did not have forwarding email addresses.

By examining the reflections of the candidates we were able to focus on their perceptions of the sustained impact of their experiences. There was no set timeline for returning the questionnaires which were sent, but all responses that were received were returned with three weeks of solicitation. Some of the respondents are currently teaching in other countries, some are teaching in Canada, and some are working on alternative careers while applying to full-time teaching positions. Their reflections were analyzed for common themes and recurring ideas as identified by the researchers. Responses ranged between two and four pages in length.

Responses were sorted by frameworks developed by earlier researchers (Bryan & Sprague, 1997; Mundy & Manion, 2008) to determine trends and to code reflections. The Bryan & Sprague framework focused on examining seven impacts of international teaching experience. These impacts include initial hiring, retention in teaching, awareness of individual differences in students, attitudes toward a second language, curriculum choices, teaching flexibility, and teaching strategies that celebrate children's uniqueness. The alternate framework developed by Mundy and Manion was used for a second tier of analysis. This framework identified six components that characterize typical reflections about international experiences related to global education. These experiences are categorized as viewing the world as an interdependent system, commitment to basic human rights, valuing cultural diversity and intercultural understanding, belief in the power of individuals, commitment to child centred pedagogy, and commitment to planetary sustainability.

While neither of the previously-used frameworks was a complete match to our questions and participants' responses, we were able to use some elements from each framework. Conceptual change literature provided some direction about how to relate students' changes in practice to stated changes in beliefs, as both were evident in their responses. Conceptual change is based on constructivist theories. The premise of conceptual change relies on opportunities to examine personal beliefs as well as the change in those beliefs as a result of experience and time. Accommodation of new ideas is a critical component of conceptual change. Such accommodation was achieved in this study by requiring removed (in time) reflective responses that promoted deliberate cognitive processing (Dole & Sinatra, 1998; Gregoire, 2003). Deliberate processing about the impact of the experience was achieved by questioning participants many months after the

experience and structuring their responses to evoke both personal and professional beliefs and practices or intended practices (Mezirow & Taylor (2009). Specific responses were itemized and then coded to align with previous research (Bryan & Sprague, 1997; Dole & Sinatra, 1998; Gregoire, 2003; Mundy & Manion, 2008; Thomas, 2006). A framework specific to our study responses evolved as we examined and coded patterns as expected in qualitative research (Creswell, 2002; Merriam, 2001; Thomas, 2006). The approach to reporting that follows was drawn from the work of Williams and Irurita (1998), consisting of labeling the inductively derived categories, describing each category, and quoting from the raw data text to elaborate the meaning of the category and to show the type of text coded into the category. This sequence for coding data is used for each sample quote provided in the analysis section.

The opportunity to examine the two questions of our study allowed us to consider how teacher candidates perceived their personal beliefs to impact their personal and professional practices. The researchers sorted responses into more finely defined categories that reflect previous research, conceptual change theory, global education theory, and teacher candidates' expressed beliefs, including personal and professional practices.

## **ANALYSIS**

Teacher candidates' personal and professional beliefs and attitudes were expressed in their responses. Additionally, responses addressed many practices or intended practices in both respondents' personal and professional spheres. Re-sorting the elements of the Bryan and Sprague (1997) and Mundy and Manion (2008) frameworks allowed the researchers to reexamine the responses of teacher candidates and align common elements to express findings under three broader headings: Curriculum Beliefs, World View, and Personal Empowerment. These categories encapsulate the premise that teacher candidates' personal beliefs after the international practicum experience would align with their professional and personal practices both present and intended (Table 1). Quotes from participants' personal narratives are used in the following sections to exemplify recurring themes found throughout their responses. These quotes are typical of the narrative responses and therefore indicative of a broad perception among the participants.

It was evident from the structure of teacher candidates' responses to their Kenyan experiences that their existing view of the curriculum and their worldview created the sense of personal empowerment to influence change. This is consistent with conceptual change theory because accommodation through reflection clarified beliefs and the relationship between expressed beliefs and practices or intended practices. These findings are also consistent with the previous work of Hull (1974), Wilson (2001), and Mwebi and Brigham (2009).

TABLE 1. *Analysis framework to relate beliefs and attitudes to present and intended practice and previous research.*

Curriculum View	World View	Personal Empowerment
Commitment to child-centered pedagogy	Commitment to planetary sustainability	Belief in the power of individuals.
Awareness of individual differences in children	Viewing the world as an inter-dependent system	
Curriculum choices	Commitment to basic human rights	
Teaching strategies that celebrate children's uniqueness	Valuing cultural diversity and intercultural understanding	

Teacher candidates' *curriculum views* reflected their awareness of changes in beliefs and attitudes indicative of conceptual change (Gregoire, 2003). Curriculum views incorporate teacher candidates' perceptions of their commitment to child-centered pedagogy, awareness of individual differences in children, curriculum choices, and teaching strategies that celebrate children's differences. Candidates were aware of the need for specific types of curriculum choices to teach in a new environment. They showed awareness of the importance of modeling as a teaching strategy to optimize learning in a resource-poor classroom. The lack of resources in Kenya caused the candidates to stretch their understanding of potential teaching strategies. They became increasingly aware of the need to model in an energized and enthusiastic way to engage learners, especially in response to language differences.

I was able to see constructivism in action and learned that proper modeling is paramount. For instance, one day I created a multiplication game with dice. I went over the game instructions taking for granted that the students would know that to roll a die you must shake it in your hand and then toss. When the game was to start I handed the dice to one of the students and she just stared at me...lesson number one.

In this narrative, the pre-service teacher shows that she had become increasingly aware of the need to centre curriculum on the child, be aware of differences in children on an individual basis, and use teaching strategies that celebrate the uniqueness of each child. She discovered that the child's culture and her own teaching-strategy effectiveness are closely linked.

These teacher candidates were well trained in the use of technology (through a laptop program component) in the classroom environment and showed adaptability in classroom situations where technology was not available. Teacher candidates were aware of the need to adapt and create resources to meet the various needs of students and to adapt the resources to bridge language differences. They showed awareness of the language differences as a barrier to instruction, emphasizing the need to accommodate learners, and the need to

develop new strategies to address the gap. They were aware of the need to address different learning styles and particularly to include lesson components that addressed visual, kinesthetic, auditory, and verbal learning styles. They were aware of the richness and value of collective planning as a resource to expand teaching strategies to address different aspects of the curriculum. They valued a student centred, experiential learning environment and created instructional strategies to promote this approach.

Lessons that were engaging and that allowed students to be active participants propelled their interest in learning. One particular day we were learning about animals so I planned a read-aloud re-tell. I can't even begin to describe how absolutely enthralled the students were when they had the opportunity to use puppets for their retell. It was quite possibly one of the most rewarding days that I had.

This narrative demonstrates the pre-service teacher's curriculum views as evolving toward more child centred pedagogy but also demonstrates growing value for the need to teach with cultural diversity and intercultural understanding through her curriculum choices. The pre-service teacher is also aware of how her actions had power as she worked with others; in this case she demonstrated awareness of the power to influence the eagerness and engagement of her young students.

Responses indicated that the teacher candidates were aware of their own shift in thinking from focusing on their teaching as they worked with students to focusing on the students' learning. Teacher candidates were aware of the need to enrich their teaching by learning more about the Kenyan culture and their students' tribal history and the values and aspirations of the local community. Finally, teacher candidates consistently expressed awareness of the value of building strong relationships with their students by learning about their families and their plans for future education.

Teacher candidates' worldviews reflected their awareness of changes in beliefs and attitudes that indicated conceptual change. Worldviews include a commitment to planetary sustainability, viewing the world as an independent system, commitment to basic human rights, and valuing cultural diversity and intercultural understanding. Teacher candidates unanimously showed awareness of increased sensitivity to resource conservation, particularly related to water use. This awareness extended to the careful use of other resources that might normally be available in a classroom. A recurring theme was awareness that they had once taken many things for granted and were inclined to be more aware of their advantages and less likely to assume their availability.

Whether I've left a light on or spilled some water, I always think of those smiling young faces at Enelurai who were so happy yet lived on so little. Personally I know that my trip to Kenya was only the beginning of a lifelong journey...I now aim to bring awareness of these issues to those who have not seen it for themselves. I bring my photographs, my bracelets, my stories,

and a big smile with me wherever I go and it is amazing how many people will stop and listen.

This brief but richly emotive narrative demonstrates the teacher candidates' awareness of many aspects of their evolving worldview, including a commitment to planetary sustainability and their view of the world as an interdependent system. Their belief in their personal power to influence the views of others is evident in their optimism about the power of their stories.

Many respondents spoke about a new awareness of the disparity of opportunities available across nations. They expressed appreciation for their own strong education and awareness of the disparity between the educational opportunities available in Canada and the unappreciative attitude towards educational opportunities evident in their current students in both Canada and England. Many contrasted this with the overt appreciation expressed by Kenyan students and their parents who viewed the opportunity for education as a privilege. Teacher candidates expressed strong awareness of the basic unfairness of the medical care opportunities available in Kenya in contrast to those available in many parts of the world.

Many have so little...the clothes on their backs, the shoes on their feet (sometimes), some dirty drinking water, a pen and some paper, their families and each other, yet they are much happier than the majority of the population in other countries who have excessively more. They will walk six miles or more, cross a river, walk with their livestock, and fetch muddy water just to get to school. It has made me wonder...

Through this story and the contrast of cultural norms and socio-economic disparities it reveals, this teacher candidate makes their commitment to basic human rights evident in a narrative that also shows their respect for the cultural diversity that they experienced in this context.

Responses indicated a strong awareness of the value of relationships with their students. The teacher candidates were aware that their students were offering relationships in ways that are distinctly different from previous ways they had built teacher-student relationships. Connections were initiated by strong smiles that welcomed interaction, followed by student initiated greetings and questions. The overt curiosity of the students was consistently the starting point for an open and caring connection with their teachers. Teacher candidates were aware of the high level of happiness of their students and the contrast between the level of happiness and the extreme poverty. They expressed that their students saw happiness as a function of strong relationships and not as a function of material wealth.

Whenever I'm asked where I got my smile from, I say Kenya... because although I was able to smile, I never really used it until my visit. Such a small thing as a smile makes a tremendous difference in life. It represents happiness and love that others grow warm to.... A smile is a tool that opens

hearts and minds, a teacher's first task. This is what the local Kenyan people did for me; although they had never met me before they welcomed me with open arms and accepted me because I was there.

This teacher candidate expresses their new found belief in the power of the individual to influence others, while expressing awe and admiration for the spirit and resilience of a new culture, diversity within the culture, and the cultural values that support and enliven the culture.

Candidates learned that family values are central to the structure of rural Kenyan society, and they realized the extent to which the strength of the family affected the quality of the students' interactions with others.

The experience made me fall in love again; with them, with life, with my family and friends, and those close to me. It brought on a new appreciation for many things I didn't think of before ... rain, sun, clean water, and food.

This narrative demonstrates the profound impact on the pre-service teacher's beliefs, which manifested in a new sense of appreciation for their own life circumstances. By valuing the cultural diversity he experienced, the pre-service teacher has altered his worldview to see the world as an interdependent system where understanding of another culture has made him more appreciative of his own culture.

Teacher candidates were aware of alterations in beliefs and attitudes that indicated conceptual shifts related to personal empowerment of themselves as teachers and as ambassadors for change. Most candidates viewed the Kenyan experience as fostering intentions to become involved with many more international teaching and volunteer efforts.

An adjustment in their perspective of themselves as change agents was evident. The teacher candidates now see themselves as a nucleus that has the power and motivation to make changes that can ripple across to others.

My life is richer because of my experience in Kenya. I feel in my heart the voices of the people there who asked us for nothing and gave us so much happiness. My life is happier because when I was in Kenya I experienced true authentic happiness. I saw firsthand what it was like to have so little and still wake up every morning enthusiastic about life.... The children enabled me to experience what it was like to love people you have never met before.

This quote exemplifies the profound impact on an individual's sense that their experience was somehow enlightening in a way that has the potential to influence future action. The personal empowerment of the teacher candidates is expressed by them as their ability to really understand the nature of happiness. Both their worldview and sense of personal empowerment were evidently influenced by the emotional responses and reflections to some experiences.

The teacher candidates consistently expressed the power to influence change in any circumstances and the intention to pursue volunteer work with an

international scope. They consistently expressed their desire to extend their new understanding of poverty related issues to those in their immediate social spheres, including family and friends.

...people hear of the devastating world that many people are living specifically in central Africa but by seeing it through your own eyes you can convey that message with more meaning, emotion, and compassion that I believe is well received by those around you. Going to Kenya and working with [the NGO] has become something that I will never forget and hopefully I will continue to work with them. As teachers we have the power to influence others and to continue to work in direct ways with the organization. I cannot wait until the day that I can arrange my very own trip with a group of students and once again embark on a Kenyan adventure and share it with young minds and instill the passion in them that was instilled in me.

This teacher candidate recognizes the personal empowerment he developed through this experience as a form of passion. He expresses the strong intent to use that passion to influence others. His recognition that he can “have the power to influence others” is indicative of the oft-repeated phrase that this experience would change each person’s personal and professional outlook in profound ways.

However, the responses from teacher candidates were not as consistently positive in outlook as the previous excerpts indicate. Many indicated frustration with the inability of their family and friends to understand the depth and breadth of the issues facing the people of Kenya, and some indicated awareness that their own understanding was directly related to experience. Many felt that experiencing the culture, with its historical, social, and economic differences, firsthand was essential to understanding the challenges faced by the people in the culture. A sense of re-entry shock and re-acculturation challenge was common in pre-service teachers’ narratives. The dichotomy evident in the participants’ observations about their own normal daily lives and what they experienced in Kenya formed the basis for much inner searching for meaning; this theme will be explored further in the discussion section of this paper.

Personal values were profoundly affected by the practicum experience. Teacher candidates gave strong indication of the impact of working toward redefining how they conceptualize their own happiness as a state less connected to material wealth than previously.

It really made me think about the way a lot of us live our lives...we take so much for granted and bombard ourselves with unnecessary novelties. It often seems that despite everything that we acquire and own it is never enough and we are never truly happy.

They indicated a personal understanding of the concept of sustainability as it relates to their own lives. Their commitment to making a difference for others was evident in their expressed intentions for action. Their commitment to social justice as a topic for their own classroom practice was evident in all



responses. Their intention to live more consciously as they continue their own development was in strong evidence. Changes in the teacher candidates' beliefs were causing them to consider changes in their personal and professional actions.

The development of teacher candidates' sense of global mindedness was evident in every response. Responses indicated an awareness that represents deeper understanding and identity with the world community (Grove, 1980). The opportunity for teacher candidates to teach in rural Kenyan schools and to have structured ways to reflect on their experiences have increased awareness of the impact of their experiences on their views of curriculum, the world, and their sense of personal empowerment within their expanded view of their areas of influence. The emotive power of many of the teacher candidates' reflections resonate with the concept that such experiences "tug(s) at the heart" (Wilson, 2001). Specifically, our study shows that these tugs at the heart were evidenced through changes in curriculum views, worldviews, and personal senses of empowerment.

## DISCUSSION

Previous research has shown that there is value in international experiences. Conceptual change theory has traced the historic evolution of an individual's perceptions before and after experiences as a product of reflection on dissonant experiences and accommodation in response to new information. Previous researchers (Bryan & Sprague, 1997; Dole & Sinatra, 1998; Gregoire, 2003; Mundy & Manion, 2008) provided frameworks and criteria for analyzing students' international experiences. Using each of these filters, the researchers examined and sorted teacher candidates' reflective responses to opened ended prompts and determined which of the responses indicated evidence of growth in their views of curriculum, the world, and their personal efficacy as a change agent.

Teacher candidates had prior knowledge of teaching theory and practice in Canadian classroom contexts. In the resource-poor context of Kenyan classrooms, they had intensified opportunities to connect theory with instructional practice. The lack of resources caused teacher candidates to consider alternative ways of teaching. The necessity to create resources and the opportunity to discuss their plans for approaching every lesson in a rich collaborative environment supported by knowledgeable faculty advisors allowed teacher candidates to reconceptualize their approach in order to focus on how students would learn rather than retaining a focus solely on how they would teach. This allowed them to gain new insights into the theoretical use of active learning, student-centred approaches, modeling, and the role of visual, kinesthetic, and tactile resources. They saw the need for differentiation of classroom resources as a necessity for learning.

Adjustments in teacher candidates' worldviews were evident through their reflections in both personal and professional examples. Candidates consistently expressed awareness that their post-trip beliefs were vastly altered by their experiences. They consistently spoke of an altered view of what constitutes happiness. Post-experience reflections indicate a view of happiness as being reflective of strong, invested relationships rather than reflective of material wealth. Candidates viewed resource acquisition and use differently as a result of their experiences. They no longer assumed that materials would be readily available and were more prepared to develop and adapt materials to ensure effective learning for their students. Adjusted worldviews reflected increased attention to social justice and sustainability concepts in both personal and professional applications.

After this experience, teacher candidates saw themselves as new ambassadors for social change with the beliefs, attitudes and skills to affect change through personal action. Their confidence was based on practicum successes and beliefs about their own competence to be ambassadors for sustainable social change. They expressed strongly that new knowledge about global issues will be the basis for new actions for themselves, both personally and professionally. Because teacher candidates saw things differently, they expressed their intentions to do things differently.

This study is limited in that it analyzed written narrative data collected from a small cohort. The data are emotively strong and many comments cited here were typical across participants. The location of the experience, the size of the participant group, and the very close living conditions during the experience (in mobile camps, tents, with shared facilities and common eating areas and meals) created a very intimate environment. As teacher candidates worked in teaching dyads in each classroom, they also became aware of each other's professional practices during the three weeks they spent teaching in the rural Kenyan schools. This intimacy may have influenced the common wording that became part of the reflective practice discussions during the experience and the written narratives that were provided in response to the research prompts.

While this University sends two groups of teacher candidates to Kenya's rural schools to teach each year, and has done so for the past eight years, the experiences and their immediate and longer term impacts are only recently being investigated. The structure of this study is directly related to the fact that researchers also participated in the experience and were involved in participants' discussions on-site about their observations and insights. The repetition of the term "life-changing" in these conversations during the three-week practicum led researchers to interrogate the longevity and the interpretation of this concept as participants moved on after the Kenyan practicum.

This study shows that, at some remove from the experience, participants still recognize the range of impacts the experience had on their professional

identity, career goals, and intentions about how they will teach. It is evident from their narratives that they have made shifts in their curriculum views toward more child-centred practices. They have made shifts in their worldviews toward more inclusive, compassionate, interdependent, and respectful understanding of another culture. These outcomes cannot be undervalued. However, their longevity as personal and professional perspectives requires further investigation. It will be interesting to revisit this same cohort later in their careers to determine the possible trajectories they attribute to their three weeks in rural Kenya.

## CONCLUSION

Teacher candidates identified clear links that related expressions of beliefs and attitudes to current or intended practices. These links were evident in both personal and professional arenas. Although previous research models provided some categories for coding teacher candidate responses, in this study it was helpful to consider responses within the broader categories of curriculum views, worldviews and perceptions of personal empowerment. The coding and data sorting process that was used allowed researchers to examine links between views indicative of beliefs and attitudes and the related practices and intended practices. Teacher candidates consistently demonstrated personal appreciation and recognition of the strength of the impact the experience of teaching in rural Kenya has. Increased awareness of the efficacy of child-centred practices for instruction is anticipated to influence the professional practice of these teacher candidates. For candidates, their expressed commitment to pursue global initiatives and social justice issues in their classroom is directly linked to the power of their experiences in Kenya. Many of their positive views of this experience are expressed in effusive language.

The sense of disconnectedness from family and friends who had not experienced what the teacher candidates had experienced was evident in several reflections. This powerful sense of some teacher candidates being very disturbed about their inability to make family and friends share their new understanding is an area that requires further investigation.

After about a week or so [after] returning to Canada I was very reserved, quiet and did not want to engage with too many people, only because I felt like I had experienced such a rich world and life that I felt as though everyone here was living blindly and they are content with what they knew and didn't know. I felt as though they did not want to hear or know about another world, a better world in my opinion, so I stayed quiet and to myself. I was having an extremely hard time with bridging the gap and managing my own emotions and beliefs. I tried to stay quiet, but I found when I would open my mouth, especially around my parents and my best friend, they would get angry or upset with my views and attitude. I became very frustrated with others' inability to see things in a different light. I understand and respect the opinions of others, but the unwillingness and stubbornness to listen

to something different and possibly view things in a different light made/ makes me extremely angry. I found this amongst many of my Canadian and American friends and family.

Opportunities to share experiences as a group in more formal and structured contexts immediately following an international practicum in a developing country context may be necessary to support teacher candidates' processing of their experiences and to bridge their sharing of experiences with family and friends. This additional opportunity for processing experiences could support teacher candidates in understanding the communication challenges they may face with reentry into their own culture. Such debriefing could take many forms, including presentations to others who had not experienced their international practicum, focus group research formats, sharing sessions that relate to retelling their experiences, and instruction about reentry psychology. It may also be beneficial to have experienced faculty advisors who are familiar with the host country and its culture to supervise such an international practica. This would prepare participants for the profound emotional impact of their experiences more fully.

This study has provided initial data and a conceptual framework for examining teacher candidates' reflections about international practica. Future research will examine the long-term impact of this experience on both professional and personal practice in relation to issues around sustainability and social justice and instructional practice as these teacher candidates begin their professional careers. It will be informative to examine the longevity of impacts as they relate to participants' ideas about poverty, race, worldview, diversity, personal beliefs, and commitments to social action several years after the experience they saw as transformative at the time. Additionally, international volunteer or employment histories will be tracked to determine the longitudinal data related to their interaction with international agencies. Many of the teacher candidates have continued their personal involvement with the NGO as volunteers. It will be indicative of the long-term impact of their practicum experiences if this involvement is sustained over the longer term.

Personal oral histories using additional questionnaires taken at the three and five year marks may illustrate further the impact of this practicum, or may indicate the receding impact of this experience as other demands of daily life impinge on time and focus. Qualitative data could be collected in relation to some of the logistical information about teacher hiring, job retention, international teaching experience, job satisfaction, and international involvement. This may expand our understanding of the long-term impact of this powerful placement experience.

The convergence of teacher candidates' curriculum views, their worldviews and the resultant impact on their sense of empowerment is reflected in this powerful quotation:

Kenya gave me the confidence to apply for positions in developing countries and I believe that I will be successful when I am in a challenging situation.... [This experience] gave me the confidence to follow my path to make a meaningful difference in the world.

There is no doubt that teacher candidates, as reflected in the data collected for this study, felt that they were strongly influenced by the experience of teaching in a developing country during this three-week practicum. More longitudinal data is needed to determine the direction and sustainability of this impact both personally and professionally over time.

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NANCY MAYNES is an Associate Professor at Nipissing University Schulich School of Education in North Bay, Ontario. She is the author of three textbooks related to education through Pearson Canada. Research interests include teacher education and professional growth, modeling as an instructional approach, and service learning. Nancy Maynes can be reached at [nancym@nipissingu.ca](mailto:nancym@nipissingu.ca)

JOHN ALLISON is an Associate Professor in the Schulich School of Education at Nipissing University, North Bay, Canada. He teaches Educational Foundations and International Teaching to pre-service teacher candidates. He is a historian and has a doctorate in the History of Education from the University of Toronto and a Master of Science in International Relations from the University of Bristol. His research interests include the history of education, education diplomacy, global governance in education, and best practices in higher education teaching. John Allison can be reached at [johna@nipissingu.ca](mailto:johna@nipissingu.ca)

LYNN JULIEN-SCHULTZ is an Assistant Professor at Nipissing University Schulich School of Education in North Bay, Ontario. She is coauthor of several journal articles related to teacher education, modeling as an instructional strategy, and international practica. Lynn Julien-Shultz can be reached at [lynnj@nipissingu.ca](mailto:lynnj@nipissingu.ca)

NANCY MAYNES est professeur agrégée à la Schulich School of Education de l'Université Nipissing située à North Bay en Ontario, au Canada. Elle est l'auteure de trois manuels traitant d'éducation et publiés chez Pearson Canada. Ses intérêts de recherche portent sur la formation des enseignants et le développement professionnel, la modélisation comme approche d'enseignement et l'apprentissage en milieu de travail. [nancym@nipissingu.ca](mailto:nancym@nipissingu.ca)

JOHN ALLISON est professeur agrégé à la Schulich School of Education de l'Université Nipissing située à North Bay en Ontario, au Canada. Il enseigne les cours Educational Foundations et International Teaching aux futurs maîtres poursuivant leur formation initiale en enseignement. Historien, il détient un diplôme de doctorat en histoire de l'éducation de l'Université de Toronto et une maîtrise en sciences des relations internationales de l'Université de Bristol. Ses intérêts de recherche comprennent l'histoire de l'éducation, la diplomatie en éducation, la gouvernance globale en éducation et les meilleures pratiques en enseignement supérieur de l'éducation. [johna@nipissingu.ca](mailto:johna@nipissingu.ca)

LYNN JULIEN-SCHULTZ est professeur agrégée à la Schulich School of Education de l'Université Nipissing, située à North Bay en Ontario, au Canada. Elle est co-auteure de plusieurs articles traitant de la formation des enseignants, de la modélisation comme stratégie d'enseignement et des stages internationaux. [lynnj@nipissingu.ca](mailto:lynnj@nipissingu.ca)