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## Preparing North American Preservice Teachers for Global Perspectives: An International Teaching Practicum Experience in Africa

*Given the economic, political, and social conditions in the world today and the increased diversity in Canadian classrooms, schools require teachers who have a strong sense of self-awareness and understanding of global issues. This article is based on empirical research involving preservice teachers from an Atlantic Canadian university. The preservice teachers did six weeks of teaching practicum in Africa. We draw on the theories of Africentricity and transformative learning to inform our analysis. Our findings suggest that preservice teachers who did their practicum in Africa increased their self-awareness, and enhanced their personal efficacy and understanding of cross-cultural, diversity, and globalization issues, which has informed their subsequent teaching practice in public school systems. We conclude with recommendations for teacher education programs.*

*Compte tenu des conditions économiques, politiques et sociales actuelles à l'échelle de la planète, et de la diversité accrue dans les salles de classe au Canada, les écoles ont besoin d'enseignants avec une bonne connaissance de soi et une conscience des enjeux mondiaux. Cet article repose sur une recherche empirique auprès de stagiaires dans une université du Canada atlantique. Les stagiaires ont complété un stage de six semaines en Afrique. Nous puisons dans les théories sur l'afrocentrisme et l'apprentissage transformateur pour alimenter notre analyse. Nos résultats donnent à penser que les stagiaires ayant complété un stage en Afrique en sont sortis avec une meilleure connaissance de soi, une efficacité personnelle accrue et plus de connaissances sur les enjeux liés à la transculturalité, la diversité et la mondialisation, ce qui a influencé leurs pratiques pédagogiques subséquentes dans les systèmes scolaires publics. Nous concluons en offrant des recommandations pour des programmes de formation d'enseignants.*

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[Some people] only know about Africa from watching World Vision.  
(Kemunto, Canadian preservice teacher)

[Since coming back to Atlantic Canada] I see the world as a bigger place, and I pay more attention to the news and I ask questions about the news.  
(Kwamboka, Canadian preservice teacher)

*Introduction: From North America to Africa*

“In current times, the need for a more racially, linguistically, culturally, and ethnically diverse teaching profession has been reasonably well documented, if not well implemented in terms of policy and programming for teacher education and professional development” (Walsh & Brigham, 2007, p. 11).

Despite this need, teacher education programs in Canada have been slow in responding as most preservice teachers continue to be relatively homogeneous in terms of race, class, and sex (i.e., white, middle-class, and female) even while the public school student population becomes more diverse, especially in urban centers (Walsh & Brigham). Therefore, “it is imperative that [teacher] training programs provide for more than intellectualization about cross-cultural issues” (Bell, 2000, p. 11), particularly as global phenomena influence and shape our lives every day.

In 2007 preservice teachers enrolled in a teacher education program in a public university in Atlantic Canada were given an opportunity to do a six-week practicum placement in Africa. Atlantic Canada is a region that attracts and retains fewer immigrants than other regions in Canada. The urban centers in Atlantic Canada are not comparable in size to the major urban centers such as Vancouver, Toronto, Montreal, Edmonton, Calgary, Winnipeg, and Saskatoon and do not attract a large number of immigrants. In Nova Scotia, visible minorities represent just 4% of the province’s population (Statistics Canada, 2009). Halifax, the capital city, has the highest proportion of Canadian-born racially visible groups in the country (Miller, 2008). Of the group that identified as Black, most (91.7%) were Canadian-born. With few immigrants in recent years, Atlantic Canada is a region with a relatively more homogeneous population compared with other regions in Canada, yet it also has a rich history of African-Canadian settlements that dates back to the 1700s. For example, during the Loyalist period (1775-1783), over 3,000 free Blacks or former slaves came to Nova Scotia (Pachai & Bishop, 2006). Brigham (2007) reminds us that this history includes a theme of resistance as educators/activists challenged the oppression experienced in the education system (segregated schools were dismantled in 1960 (Black Learners Advisory Committee [BLAC], 1994)); in churches; and in accessing housing, land, employment, theater seats, cemetery plots, and in some areas, clean water and sewage systems. In 1994 the BLAC released its *Report on Education* with several recommendations to improve education for African Canadians that are still being acted on (Brigham, 2007). With this context in mind, it was felt that an alternative practicum in Africa would provide cross-cultural experiences that are essential in teacher education programs (Merryfield, Jarchow, & Pickert, 1997). We believe that if teachers are to work successfully with an increasingly racially, linguistically, culturally, and ethnically diverse student population and teach for global justice in the 21st century, teacher education programs must make a serious commitment to educating preservice teachers about the world and its people,

differing perspectives, global interdependence, globalization processes, and to developing ways to infuse global perspectives into the curriculum (hidden and formal) so as to promote social justice, respect, and equity for all no matter where we are located on the planet. A practicum in Africa is one way of providing a cross-cultural experience. Although the focus of our discussion in this article is on this international practicum, we acknowledge that it is but one possibility for providing teachers with opportunities to develop critical perspectives on global issues and that such experiences are also not always possible for many preservice teachers (given the expense of traveling, time in planning, etc.). Nor do we suggest that the burden to educate preservice teachers be taken up solely by non-white, non-Canadian, non-middle-class, non-European descendants. Rather, we assert that preservice teachers, teachers, and others in schools, teacher education programs, and elsewhere have a collective responsibility to ensure that knowledge systems in teacher education are expanded.

Merryfield et al. (1997) suggest three main components of cross-cultural experience in teacher education programs. In these three components, teachers with cross-cultural experiences will be:

1. "able to work more effectively with [a diverse range of] people [including those] who are [perceived as] different from themselves";
2. "more likely to perceive the power and potential of being connected to another part of the world and are also more likely to find ways in their daily instruction to teach local/global interconnectedness and perspective consciousness in their students";
3. "more likely to appreciate and use cross-cultural experiential education as an instructional strategy in their teaching if they have positive experiences with it during their own education." (p. 10)

We believe that these components are critical and hence explore them in this article through our research questions.

#### *Research Questions*

We address the following questions: How has the cross-cultural experience of preservice teachers in Africa affected them personally and professionally? How has this experience informed their understanding and practice of global education? How was the preservice teachers' and the field experience supervisor's learning from this experience in Africa transformative? How is their learning reflective of Africentricity? We refer to the location as Africa without naming the country, and all names used for research participants are pseudonyms to protect their anonymity.

#### *Participants*

In order to complete a six-week practicum placement in Africa, each student had to raise his or her own funding. In all, 13 students and one faculty member attended. The 13 students were all white, English- and French-speaking with no previous African cultural experience. Of the 13 students, eight taught in elementary and five taught in secondary schools. The field experience supervisor was a full-time faculty member with previous work experience in Africa. As we were interested in learning how their practicum experience informed their classroom teaching, we interviewed only those who had found employ-

ment and had taught full time for a full year in the school system. Therefore, for the purpose of this article, we draw on interview data from four preservice teachers who became employed as teachers and the field experience supervisor.

#### *Method of Investigation*

Four full-time teachers who had done their practicum in Africa were interviewed about how the international practicum experience had affected them personally and professionally. All the interviews were conducted face to face, through e-mail correspondence, and by focus groups. Each interview was about two hours in length. The interviews were audiotape-recorded and transcribed. All the transcripts were analyzed for themes. We both conducted separate thematic analyses on the transcripts, which resulted in the formulation of several overlapping related themes. This double analysis provided valuable insights, which we then discussed between ourselves in the collaborative writing of this article. We both have extensive cross-cultural/international experience as teachers in school systems and in postsecondary institutions. These experiences contributed to the theory-building that forms the framework of this article.

#### *Theoretic Framework*

To help us examine how the cross-cultural practicum experience in Africa has affected the research participants, we refer to Transformative Learning Theory (Mezirow, 1997). According to Mezirow, our meaning perspectives are often acquired uncritically, and although they give us meaning and help us to organize the meaning of our experiences, they also distort our thoughts and perceptions. A perspective transformation entails a more fully developed frame of reference in which one becomes more critically self-reflective and critical of one's meaning schemes and previously unexamined assumptions. What kind of learning brings about transformation? Mezirow suggests that it begins with a personal or social crisis (a disorienting dilemma) or an accumulation of transformed meaning schemes. Meaning schemes or "habits of mind" (which are the broad abstract habitual ways of thinking, feeling, and acting influenced by our assumptions) are brought into question and scrutinized. Because the cross-cultural experience of preservice teachers in Africa has the potential to act as a disorienting dilemma, we feel that this understanding of learning is helpful in analyzing the interview data. O'Sullivan (2003) elaborates on transformative learning and suggests that social justice is a necessary part of transformation. He states,

Transformative learning involves experiencing a deep, structural shift in the basic premises of thought, feelings, and actions. It is a shift of consciousness that dramatically and irreversibly alters our way of being in the world. Such a shift involves our understanding of ourselves and our self-locations: our relationships with other humans and with the natural world; our understanding of relations of power in interlocking structures of class, race and gender; our body awareness, our visions of alternative approaches to living; and our sense of possibilities for social justice and peace and personal joy. (p. 326)

Tied to Transformative Learning Theory is the theoretical and philosophical perspective of Africentricity. Africentricity offers an alternative world view to the dominant Eurocentric one. Merriweather-Hunn (2004) explains that Eurocentricity "is intimately connected to values ... such as materialism and outward focus. Material wealth, social status, and power over others are the embodiment of success in Eurocentrism" (p. 67). Africentricity provides a new lens so "no longer are we looking whitely through a tunnel lit with the artificial beams of Europe" (Asante, 2003, p. 3). An Africentric perspective provides an analysis and interpretation of daily life from the perspective of African people as subjects rather than objects on the fringes of world experiences (Asante, 1998; Ashanti, 2003; Hilliard, 1998; Wilson, 1998). African experiences and the history of all peoples of African descent are validated, as are other experiences and histories. Brigham (2007) highlights the point that Africentricity is not a conceptual system that is exclusively Black or African; rather, it is about "journey[ing] toward wholeness which requires seeing the world ... in its full spectrum" (Ntutela, 1995, p. 70). The *centric* in Africentricity is to recognize that everyone is at the center of his or her experience (Aptheker, 1989). We feel that this perspective is important in helping us understand the participants' experiences in Africa, which has the potential to develop a critique of, and challenge, Eurocentric perspectives.

#### *Participants' Reflections*

The participants talked about learning from their cross-cultural experience in a way that reflected a transformation: not merely a change, but a shift in perspectives. They referred to learning that came about as the result of an "immersion" in a new culture; a learning they described as "profound" and "life-changing." They spoke of self-examination and critically assessing their previously held assumptions about themselves, teaching, learning, Africa, and Africans. For example, in this quote, Kemunto talks about a transformation in how she sees herself (her identity) and how she is perceived by others.

Immersing myself in cultures different than my own automatically exposed me to experiences and knowledge that changed my personal identity as well as my opinions and perspectives of schooling, and community. My identity encompasses not only my Latin American experience but also my African experience. As a result, I have a different consciousness of local and global issues. I also feel sometimes like I am seen differently, by the community, my students, and the staff. I am seen as "someone who has been to Africa." I struggle with what that actually means and how it has changed me or makes me different from "someone who has not been to Africa," but I know it does.

Moraa also talked about the cross-cultural experience as life-changing. She explains the uncertainty that this has brought for her.

To tell you the truth, everything has changed and sometimes I wonder if I ever fully came back. Not a day goes by without me thinking of Africa, the people, and the experience I had. I realize that I have only spent a short time there, however sometimes I feel a sense of longing for "home." ... I'm not sure how this happens as I have lived in the same community in [Atlantic Canada] for 24 years of my life, but it has. Sometimes things are just unexplainable and I believe this is one of them.

She elaborates on how this critical self-awareness was brought about in part by how she was perceived by others in Africa, which she felt made her more critically self-reflective and also challenged some of her previously unexamined assumptions.

Nothing really could have prepared me for the life changing experience.... I was thrown into a society in which I did not fit in ... not because they [Africans] didn't accept me, but because I was the minority. I have been the majority my entire life, and I finally had the experience of being the "other." On everyday occurrences such as walking down the street, sitting outside during our recess break from school or going to church, people stared and automatically gathered around us.

Nyaboke relates,

The kids were excited to see us and people pointed at us because we were the first white people they saw or they had never seen that many white people ... they wanted to touch our hair, our skin.... I have learned how differently you can be treated just because of the color of your skin.

Kemunto's experience of being a white minority in Africa was that of "standing out," "not fitting in," or "being the other," which is echoed in her comments.

What I experienced culturally in Africa was how it felt to be part of the minority instead of the majority. I know what it is like to feel like an outsider and I have seen how others live, learn, and survive, which helps me appreciate difference and diversity here at home. I know what it feels like to be viewed as an outsider.

Nyaboke shared her experience about a dilemma that comes from a feeling of dislocation in both Canada and in Africa and a splitting in her habitual expectations.

Once you are immersed in another culture, as we were, when you come home you don't fit in yours anymore nor in the foreign culture but you want to fit in both or mould them together to make one but they are separate beings in you.

These narratives support Cushner and Mahon (2002) who noted that many students in their study who had taught abroad found out "new things about themselves, thus adding a perspective or a depth into their lives" (p. 52). Yet is this change merely a *change* or is it a *transformation*? Is it "a shift of consciousness that dramatically and irreversibly alters our way of being in the world" (O'Sullivan, 2003, p. 326)? The participants suggest such a transformation.

### *Diversity*

Although the participants talked of never being the same again, of seeing themselves differently, and being perceived differently, they also noted specific ways that they acted on their new understandings and developed a "sense of possibilities for social justice," particularly in their classrooms. This commitment to take action based on new learning for a more socially just society is, we believe, indicative of transformative learning. For example, Kemunto talked about the need to challenge simplistic understandings of diversity.

While in Africa, I also learned to understand that even if everyone seems to be similar and if there does not appear to be much diversity in the classroom, that there can be a lot of diversity that cannot be seen just with the eyes.... Culture is made up of both visible and invisible factors. This is also true for my classroom here in [Atlantic Canada]. If you look around my classroom, you may not see much diversity but once you get to know the students there is actually a lot of diversity.

She adds,

I am conscious of diversity, and try to approach as many lessons as I can from a global perspective. I have a different understanding when I am working with exchange students about what it must feel like to be in a foreign country.

*Taken-for-Granted Privilege*

Nyaboke raises questions about Canada's economic privilege versus Africa's cultural privilege. She critiques Canadian students' unquestioned privilege in relation to the African students' strong community ties. She compares her observations about relationships in Africa with relationships in Canada. As an example she declares,

I get frustrated as I have many students who do not realize their privilege ... They do not even feel they are privileged. The taken-for-grantedness by some of my students is something I am trying to help my students realize and it is a daily frustration for me ... As much as [Africans] do not have, they have a lot more on the other side. They have strong relationship with each other ... they are able to connect with fellow students, families, teachers and communities better than we do. Here we do not connect very well with each other, we connect on material things.

Nyaboke observes,

In Africa I liked their generosity ... I loved the way people greeted you. Everyone shook your hand ... everyone greeted each other and took time to speak to each other. This is something we do not do in our society.... They have a stronger community than we have here. If they adopt the Western culture they might lose their strong sense of community.

Kwamboka also raises questions about some of her Atlantic Canadian students' sense of entitlement, which she contrasts with African youth's commitment to service to their school and community. She gives this example.

[I remember] the day we stayed late at school and it rained ... When the rain was over they ... cleaned the school. Here you really cannot get students to clean a desk that they had written on! It would be a battle.

Participants compared students' attitudes and behaviors in Africa and Atlantic Canada, which made them question what they perceived as students' sense of entitlement. Kwamboka stated, "No matter where we went in Africa the kids are really serious [about learning] ... They know how important education is to change the situation." She adds that Canadian students "who are rude or not working hard" can have an influence on international students who may have a more positive attitude toward schooling but whose "behavior and work slip" when they interact with Canadian students.

### *Opening Eyes*

The participants talked about not only shifting their own perspectives, but the desire to help others “open their eyes.” They found ways to challenge stereotypes of Africa and Africans and help others recognize the importance of centering Africans as subjects rather than relegating them as objects on the fringes of world experiences. Kwamboka offers an example of how the attitudes of students with regard to traveling to other countries need to be challenged if people are really going to shift their understandings of Africa, other places, and people around the world.

I see it with some girls whose attitudes have changed since they heard about my experience. Before they had heard of people traveling and only focused on the [fear of] getting sick. If you don't know what is going on in the world you are only concerned with yourself. To change the world people need to travel and open their eyes.

Kemunto adds,

I have had the opportunity to share my experiences with some of the community groups where I live and it is amazing to see how my presentation has sparked interest and even touched the hearts of community groups in my area, who only know about Africa from watching World Vision.

This finding is consistent with those of other researchers (Cushner & Mahon, 2002), who have noted that international experience shifts participants' views about how they see themselves and others and begin to develop empathy toward students. For example, Cushner and Mahon noted that “as a result of an impactful international experience, individuals begin to question their stereotypes of others and aspects of their own culture, which had gone before unexamined” (p. 49). When participants raise questions and engage others in dialogue about their experiences such as why and how Canadian students and others in Canada develop a sense of entitlement and assumed unquestioned privilege, they are recognizing that education is political and requires global understanding.

### *Globalizing the Curriculum*

As a way to further their desire to open others' eyes, the participants talk of how they are integrating their African knowledge and experiences into the school curriculum and their teaching practice. They give examples of how they are engaging their students through infusing African resources into school curriculum that promotes a global connection with Africa in terms of environmental, social, and political areas. Mora elaborates,

I teach a global classroom, and it is due to my experiences such as Africa that makes this possible. My students are aware of children's situations all over the world. It not only gives me real life experiences to bring into my social studies and language arts curriculum, it also helps with classroom management and teaching about perspectives. When I plan lessons, dealing with global issues, my students are completely intrigued and have a great thirst to take in all the knowledge I can give. They are constantly asking to learn more and some of the best work I have received this year was from this area of teaching.



Nyaboke uses African examples in her social studies classes and is able to help students make comparisons in the local and African environments.

I integrate my African experience in my teaching. I use African experiences at different moments. For example when I was teaching about habitat, because when we were in Africa we did class work on local animals and now I have used the same class work to elicit local examples from my students. I asked my students to do the same for the Canadian context.... showed them there are differences. It is like I can share with them something they have never experienced.

Nyaboke provides an additional illustration about understanding the complexity of culture.

In my class this year, my students have learned about different cultural groups, such as the Maasai using [my] first hand evidence. Once we had read and researched about the cultural group I then showed them my pictures and videos. They were unbelievably impressed and connections were made. They have also learned to speak some Swahili, and shared their learnings and knowledge with the rest of the school. If I did not travel to Africa, this would not have happened.

Nyaboke expounds on how her teaching and sharing of her African experiences is more than a mere transference of stories, but is an important way for her to connect with her students, to bring them closer to her. Her experience is deeply personal and emotionally charged as the stories she shares are like revealing her inner identity, which inspires her students. She explains:

When I am sharing a story with my student, it is not like I'm sharing about ... somebody else but it is a part of me. [I'm] showing part of me. That African experience I have in me. When I'm sharing that part of my African experience, they feel like I am being open to them. They feel I'm opening even more to them. [I am sharing] part of me from inside me ... [not from] the outside. It is only then they are seeing in[side] me. I have a close relationship with my students.

Kemunto also talks about enriching her subjects through international comparisons, highlighting cultural, political, and economic issues in global contexts. She explains:

While teaching grade 8 and 9 social studies, there are many units where I could easily incorporate my international experiences. In grade 8 we spent the first unit uncovering and defining our personal identity ... When defining Canadian identity I was able to help students understand by highlighting what other countries' identities might include. I have incorporated my experiences the most while teaching grade 9 as we studied a whole unit on culture. If I did not have these international experiences I would not [have been] able to enrich this unit [on culture] with personal experiences and primary source materials from different cultures. We also study economics and technology, which are units that also allow me to incorporate my experience to enrich the curriculum and expose my students to different perspectives. I have also brought what happened this political year in Africa into my classroom when discussing current events. I could not even imagine what it would be like to teach these units without these international experiences.

The participants' perspectives reflect an understanding that the "world is fast becoming one common society—a 'global village'—with the recognition that "global education should be part of the curriculum of every K-12 school" (Hendrix, 1998, p. 305). Their practical application of new learnings and perspectives into their teaching demonstrates the richness they can bring to the school curriculum.

### *Africentric Transformation*

One of our main findings from the data is that an initiative such as this African practicum has the potential to be transformative for preservice teachers and therefore has great potential to inspire preservice teachers to take action in their classrooms in all subjects to globalize the curriculum, which in turn can motivate students to strive consciously to understand other perspectives and possibly lead to students' transformative learning. However, in analyzing the data, we turn to Africentricity to help us further understand transformation.

An Africentric perspective requires the questioning of location (Asante, 2007). Asante (2004) declares, "Africans have been moved away from the locus of social, political, economic, philosophical, and economic terms for half a millennium" (p. 17). In other words, the African person and African experience are left out of the usual Eurocentric paradigm that is standard in most Canadian classrooms. Whereas whites are at the center of most perspective positions (Asante, 2007), non-white students are left on the outside; they are "actively decentered, marginalized, made ... non-person[s]" (p. 80). To center an Africentric perspective, which includes, for example, centering other perspectives such as those of Aboriginal peoples is a beginning to challenging Eurocentric perspectives. However, by drawing on Africentricity as a theoretical and philosophical perspective, we can suggest that the experiences of the participants, although perhaps transformative, at least as far as we can know from the data (recognizing that we cannot peer into the soul of each participant), is not necessarily Africentric. This is not to say that the participants have not had their Eurocentric perspective challenged; rather, that they have perhaps only begun the educational hard work of decentering Eurocentric perspectives and challenging Eurocentric knowledge hegemony. Providing African examples and drawing on impassioned experiences in their practicum in Africa may well inspire a need to gain a deeper understanding of "historical realities, geographies and consciousness" (p. 60) and a more critical analysis of such concepts as colonialism, neo-colonialism, hegemony, globalization, power, marginalization or oppression, and so forth. To be Africentric is not to accommodate particular isolated stories of Africa into a particular lesson as a one-time example while leaving unchallenged all the rest of the curriculum. To do so is merely to adjust marginalized groups such as Africa/African people to Europeans'/North Americans' image, thereby reproducing Eurocentricity. To become Africentric requires knowledge and consciousness. It is actively and continually to challenge Eurocentric curriculum. It is to critique history, including whom we define as heroes and heroines; it is to examine geo-politics and the political economy. It is to ask hard questions and become more conscious of what we take for granted, what we assume to be normal in school and in the everyday. It is to recognize the social construction of knowledge and critique who is benefiting from certain constructions and who is not. Most important, it

is about understanding structures that result in certain groups being marginalized. It is to work in solidarity to struggle for social justice for all groups without reinforcing a victim dogma or white guilt (Dei, 1994). It is not to resort to binaries and stereotypes such as the *badly behaved Canadian child* as opposed to the *studious international student*. It is not to romanticize certain aspects of cultures without contextualizing them. To be Africentric is not about attempting to replace Eurocentricity with Africentricity; rather, Africentricity poses the challenge for “a model ... in which pluralism exists without hierarchy, and respect for cultural origins, achievements, and prospects are freely granted” (Council on African Canadian Education, 2006, para 2).

### Conclusion

This research points to the need for a radical reexamination of preservice curriculum that incorporates global dimensions and cultural diversity. Teachers who influence the next generation of students must have a strong sense of self-awareness, understanding of global interdependence, and critical perspectives on global issues. They must be attuned to social justice, human rights, and discrimination and embrace alternative visions for sustainable life-styles and planetary health. Learning approaches must involve emotion, creativity, and critical thinking; and support cooperation, participation, and democracy. Insights such as these were typical topics raised by the participants, who challenged themselves to reach across borders, learn from their cross-cultural experiences, and see themselves and their own culture in a different light.

This study supports the view that the preservice teachers can learn a significant amount of knowledge that affects them personally, professionally and globally (Cushner & Mahon, 2002). We assert that it is imperative that opportunities be provided to preservice teachers to be immersed in cross-cultural contexts that can enable them to become global teachers (Cushner & Mahon). We also claim that an international practicum such as this can be a transformative experience for preservice teachers that can affect how and what they teach.

We also assert that to globalize the curriculum is actively to decolonize the notion that Eurocentric perspectives are the only perspectives of value and importance. To take this endeavor seriously, an Africentric model that centers non-Eurocentric knowledge and perspectives must be infused into teacher education programs and into the school curriculum if education and society are to be transformed to be more socially just. “In the face of North America’s ugly historical and present treatment of Aboriginal peoples, those of African descent, and others in minority and marginalized groups a mere nod toward other perspectives will not do” (Brigham, 2007, p. 81). One such non-Eurocentric perspective is that of Indigenous peoples who have been subjected to and resisted Eurocentricity for hundreds of years. Battiste and Henderson (2005) remind us, “reclaiming and revitalizing Indigenous heritage and knowledge is a vital part of any process of decolonization” (p. 13). We suggest that a cross-cultural experience that is embedded in an Africentric paradigm enables preservice teachers to raise questions that can be taken up with persistence and intellectual rigor that can lead to the transformation of society.

We caution that any cross-cultural experience must consider the implications for the host community. How might the host community/ies be prepared for overseas preservice teachers? How will their lives be affected in the short

term and in the long term by these overseas preservice teachers? How are the African students and cooperating African teachers affected? We assert that although the international experience may be educational for the overseas preservice teachers, an endeavor such as this requires serious contemplation of these additional questions: What is the learning gained by those in the host community? and What is the rationale of international practicum experience? How should preservice teachers be prepared and educated about the communities in which they will serve and about broader social, political, and cultural issues in general?

#### *Recommendations*

Based on our findings, we recommend that for an initiative such as this, care must be taken to involve a field experience supervisor and group leader who are considered a so-called insiders (who have insights, knowledge, experience, and relationships in the host community) with whom preservice teachers can regularly talk and ask frank questions in a reliably consistently safe environment before, during, and after the practicum. For example, the field supervisor explains how he provided guidance.

It helped because I knew the local language, the people, and their cultural norms. I guided and advised appropriately on mannerism, dressing, greeting, food, how to conduct themselves on safety matters; things which matter for a foreigner ... And [I stressed the] institutional expectations. They were not there as tourists. As teachers, they needed to behave professionally.

Predeparture intellectual and theoretical preparation, as well as consistently revisiting such intellectual and theoretical development during and after the practicum are recommended as critical opportunities to develop critical reflection. The field experience supervisor states,

When I was conceptualizing [this African practicum] I was attentive to making sure the students went there being open-minded and so that way they could learn and immerse themselves into the community.

In a variety of ways, preservice teachers in international cross-cultural contexts must be actively encouraged and challenged to think critically about the deeper historical and socio/geopolitical global issues; to be open to and receptive of other perspectives, stories, and questions; and to query values and norms (their own and those of their host country). We agree with Razack (1998) who proclaims, "as long as we see ourselves as not implicated in relations of power, as innocent, we cannot begin to walk the path of social justice and to thread our way through the complexities of power relations" (p. 22).

Further, we suggest that a useful tool for developing critical thinking and analysis may be journaling. The participants in this study maintained a reflective journal that began two months before their departure and continued during their international practicum. The concept of the journal was explained as a "powerful way for individuals to give accounts of their experience" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 102). Over a two-month period before leaving for Africa the preservice students met weekly with the field experience supervisor to get acquainted with one another, cook traditional African meals, discuss readings on global education, learn about some of the cultures of Africa, and

plan lessons. During their international practicum experience, the preservice students documented their reflections on their daily experiences, their interactions during the day, and the group debriefing sessions at the end of the day in order to bring to conscious awareness actions and reactions that might otherwise have gone unnoticed.

We also recommend that the host communities be involved as full partners in the development and design of such an initiative. As much as possible community members should be involved and their input and feedback actively solicited and considered at all stages. With new technologies, innovative ways can be found that would allow for international dialogue between the Canadian university, the participants, cooperating teachers and school students, and other community members before, during, and after practicum experiences.

Finally, we recommend that Africentricity be infused in teacher education programs and in the school curriculum. For we agree that,

It has great counter-hegemonic potential but for the educator and students it is not easy work and it cannot be a mere additive to, or a tiny decontextualized sliver of, the Eurocentric pie usually served up as a one course meal in adult [especially, teacher] education programs. (Brigham, 2007, p. 83)

An example of how this may be done is provided by Brigham where two cohorts of lifelong learning educators in Nova Scotia are engaged in a two year part-time master of education degree that is rooted in an educational Africentric paradigm.

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