

**Overseas Student Teaching and National Identity:  
Why Go Somewhere You Feel Completely Comfortable?**

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## Background

One of the major goals of teacher education programs is to prepare globally competent teachers who hold inspiring dreams for the future and who contribute to the betterment of our world and planet (Cushner & Brennan, 2007). This study presents the emerging perceptions of national identity held by preservice teachers who completed their student teaching overseas. To help them become better global citizens and teachers in this constantly changing and increasingly diverse world, each preservice teacher in a unique international setting reflected on what it means to be an American by answering Crèvecoeur's question, "What is an American?" In addition, each preservice teacher was asked to define the national identity of the host country.

National identity has become a hotly debated issue in many countries, especially in the West where many nations now include large populations that do not share a common historical experience. As Stuurman and Grever (2007) suggest, teachers in these nations will have to deal with the heterogeneous culture their students bring to school (pp. 10-11). And, as Putnam (2007) has suggested, it is one of the most important challenges, yet also one of the most significant opportunities that modern societies face. An increase in ethnic heterogeneity is perhaps "the most certain prediction we can make about almost any modern society" (p. 137).

In many countries, increased globalization is shifting the balance of power away from the nation-state. Many argue that confining students to a national framework is no longer adequate (Golmohamad, 2009; Grever & Stuurman, 2007; Henrichs, 2007; Merry,

2009; Rosenau, 2002; Tutiaux-Guillon, 2007). Instead they suggest that education should foster independent thinking and that teachers should use an inclusive deliberative process rather than promote unquestioning loyalty (Hand & Pearce, 2009). Especially in the western world, as immigrant nations such as England, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Ireland, Australia, and New Zealand include increasingly diverse populations, fear of the "other" has led many countries to reach back into the past to emphasize a common ancestry as they struggle to maintain a national identity (Andrews, McGlynn, & Mycock, 2009; Devine, Kenny, & Macneela, 2008; English, Hayton, & Kenny, 2009; Haynes, 2009; Kunovich, 2009; Parvin, 2009; Roberts, 2009).

Many believe that national identity continues to be a significant phenomenon and challenges the very notion of an emerging global citizenship. They argue that the nation state is not disappearing but rather is reshaped as nations seek to redefine their past in order to create a new identity for the future (English, Hayton, & Kenny, 2009; Giddens, 2000). Antonich (2009) argues that quantitative evidence suggests that national identity remains the primary form of territorial identity and that globalization does not "water down" the sentiment of national belonging but rather serves to strengthen it. He believes that international mobility reinforces the idea of distinctive national identity (p. 292). Distinguishing between a "thin" cosmopolitan and a "thick" national identity, he suggests that the latter can become either "regressive", i.e. inward-looking and reactionary, or "progressive" as rootedness allows for communication with the "other", not based on fear but rather on a strong

sense of self (p. 294). Global engagement can well enhance local participation. Therefore, nationalism and cosmopolitanism need not to be in conflict. They can complement each other (Golmohamad, 2009; Mayo, Gaventa, & Rooke, 2009; Noddings, 2005).

Much of the debate about national identity in the western world resembles the culture wars that have been fought in the United States about who should decide what is taught in the schools. Some have argued in favor of a core curriculum for all students while others have suggested the need for a more open-ended approach (Doppen & Yeager, 1998; Hirsch, 1996; Journell, 2009; Nash, Crabtree, & Dunn, 1997). The ongoing debates about national identity, however, are not confined to the western world. For example, an increasingly multicultural Germany seeks to redefine its identity in light of its troubled past and reunification (Henrichs, 2007) and South Africa faces similar issues as it seeks to overcome a history of apartheid through reconciliation and a focus on democratic citizenship education based on the ideals of democracy and social justice (Rassool, 2007; Waghid, 2009). Likewise Japan, which has a relatively homogeneous population, faces a troubled past. Having sought to redefine its post-war national identity as an international society committed to preserving peace, it continues to be divided between “anti-nationalists” and “patriotic enthusiasts” (Ide, 2009). Similarly, China has embarked upon a campaign to redefine its national identity from a “victor narrative” to that of a “victimization narrative” that blames the west for its history of suffering (Wang, 2008).

### Overseas Student Teaching

Kushner (2004) has observed that increased globalization has led to a homogenization of the travel experience of many people as they venture only into rather similar and familiar environments. As such, many travellers never deeply engage in the culture of the country they visit nor do they experience its national identity, let alone their own. However, Kushner also reminds us that overseas student teaching mirrors the original concept of travel as a learning experience, not unlike the “grand tour” of Europe many wealthy travellers undertook in previous centuries.

Because overseas student teaching typically involves an extended period of time, these “travellers” become immersed in intercultural learning. Bennett (1993) developed a Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity that provides a framework for understanding individual development and awareness along a continuum of six stages from ethnocentrism to ethnorelativism. The *denial* stage, which refers to the inability to see cultural differences, is followed by the *defense* stage which is characterized by the ability to recognize differences but adhering to the superiority of one’s own culture. Next is the *minimization* stage in which people tend to minimize differences by believing that all humans are essentially the same. In the *acceptance* stage individuals begin to analyse cultural differences which lead them into the *adaptation* stage when they become competent in communicating across cultures. In the final *integration* stage they have multiple frames of reference and are able to move relatively easily between different cultural groups.

Another model that is helpful in understanding the experiences of

overseas student teachers is the U-curve hypothesis which suggests that people experience four phases throughout their adjustment (see Kushner, 2004). In the *honeymoon* phase everything is new and exciting. In the next phase, *hostility*, people often become frustrated or angry with aspects of the different culture. In the *humor* phase they learn more culturally appropriate behaviours and are able to laugh at some of own behaviors. Finally, in the *home* stage they become well adjusted to the new culture and are able to comfortably move back and forth between their own and new culture.

### Participants

To determine the impact of an overseas student teaching experience on preservice teachers' perceptions of national identity, this study analysed the experiences of 11 undergraduate education majors from a mid-size university in the mid-West who student taught overseas between June 2008 and March 2009. To protect student anonymity, each participant and the school at which he or she student taught was assigned a pseudonym (see Appendix A).

Each preservice teacher in this study participated in the Consortium for Overseas Student Teaching [COST] program. The COST program is limited to 15 member universities that serve as sending sites. Since its inception in 1973, each year COST has placed preservice teachers overseas in American-sponsored schools. The program provides its participants with the opportunity to student teach in American classroom settings within the context of a new country, a new culture and a new way of life. Most students who participate in the program live in the homes of local families, often with

children, gaining a unique opportunity to immerse themselves in the culture of the country in which they student teach. While they regularly communicate with the COST program coordinator at their sending site, it is the overseas university supervisors, school directors and cooperating teachers who are the key elements of the COST program.

To prepare for their overseas student teaching, each participant was required to complete both a five-week practicum in an American classroom working with students and a course in non-western cultures. In addition, they were required to attend several meetings in which they studied the history, culture, political structure, educational systems and media of the country in which they hoped to receive their placements. As part of this preparation, they were encouraged to explore their own notions of national identity. To promote reflection during their overseas student teaching experience, each participant was required to submit five reflective essays to the program coordinator at the sending site (see Appendix B). In the first four reflections the participants answered a series of questions focused on their arrival, the community in which the school was located, the classroom setting and curriculum, and intercultural adjustment (questions were based on Wilson and Flournoy, 2007). The final culminating reflection asked them to answer Crèvecoeur's question "What's an American?" and to answer that same question for the inhabitants of the country in which they student taught.

All 11 participants were Caucasian, in their early twenties and, except for one, female. Only one of the participants was an elementary preservice teacher. Five participants were middle school preservice teachers who each had two

subject area concentrations, with the exception of one who completed coursework in all four areas of concentration. Three participants were preparing to teach high school, respectively in social studies, math and science. Finally, two participants were Spanish education majors preparing to teach K-12. Three participants student taught in South Africa, three in Ireland, two in Australia, and one each in Mexico, Costa Rica and Ecuador.

### Data Analysis

Data sources for this study consisted of the five reflective essays each COST participant submitted to the program coordinator at the sending site. To analyze the essays, I chose to use Dana and Silva's (2003) four steps for inquiry. First, I read each participant's essays to form a detailed *description*. Secondly, I began the *sense-making* process in which I developed a number of categories that described aspects of national identity. I then undertook an *interpretation* of the data that showed more directly how the participants viewed various aspects of national identity. Throughout the second and third stage of my analysis, I used the constant comparative method to determine common themes within and between the essays. Finally, I looked at the *implications* of this study for future practice and research.

### Findings

Several significant thematic findings related to the participants' perception of national identity emerged from analyzing the reflective essays. These themes included observations about lifestyle, socioeconomic disparity, diversity, politics, religion, patriotism and perspectives on American and host country identities.

### Lifestyle

The perception of a different pace of life in the host country stood out immediately and intensely. Seven of the 11 student teachers used the same "laid back" language to describe the slower pace of life they encountered. Although this characterization notably applied to Ireland, it did to Australia, South Africa and Costa Rica as well. Shannon described Irish culture as "more laidback and friendly than that of the United States." While the "laid back ways of the Irish drove [her] crazy a great deal of time," Molly asserted, "there is a great deal to be said for relaxing and not getting so stressed about every aspect of teaching." Shannon observed that the laid back lifestyle also translated to her school experience as the "teachers come and go freely throughout the day, whereas back home the teacher is expected to be at school at all times, even before and after the day starts." Not only are the Irish "more laid back than people in the United States," according to Marissa, they "are also a lot warmer and more welcoming." Jessie posited that "Australians are in general a laid-back, easy-going people who simply love to enjoy life, whereas Connor asserted that life in Tasmania was even "a little more laid back" than that on the mainland. In South Africa "everything is *so* laid back" that Kendall and Nicole learned quickly what is was like to be "on 'African' time." Likewise, Liz argued that Costa Ricans embrace a similar laid back "pura vida" lifestyle.

Several times the student teachers contrasted this laid back lifestyle with the fast pace of life in America. For example, according to Marissa, "Americans ... are always rushing. Even when we are in a hurry we need to go

faster in order to feel that we have accomplished something. There are not enough hours in the day to complete everything that needs to be done.” Likewise, Shannon admitted that she “never realized how punctual and dependable [she was]” and “how stressed Americans tend to be [as] we are constantly rushing from place to place, making sure we are caught up with the new technology, or being so competitive to make a good impression that we tend to lose sight of what is really important in life.”

#### *Disparity*

Seven of the 11 student teachers made direct observations about disparate economic conditions in their host country. Four student teachers reported personal experiences with economic disparity. Candace found the “disparity in the lifestyle of black and white people [in South Africa] astounding.” Noting “a lot of wealth among the white population” she lamented that “black people live in ‘townships’ ... where there usually is no electricity or running water” and the “shacks are ... built out of scraps of metal, wood and cardboard [that] seem barely able to stand.” Contemplating whether such disparities exist in the United States as well, she realized that just as there are “haves and have-nots in Third World countries ... there are people as bad off at home.”

Rosalie made a similar observation in Mexico noting that her “large school that continues to expand” was built less than a decade ago in a part of the city that was “fairly poor economically” and that “driving to [the] school [was] difficult because you’re forced to pass through a pueblo that lacks money, high standing, and where people sell food on the streets for a living.” She thought that people

who found out that she was from America would “just think that [she had] it all,” which made her feel bad and challenged her “to be thankful for what [she had] rather than [feel] guilt over [her privilege].”

In Costa Rica, Liz found herself in a school in a part of the city that is home to many foreign embassies. Hence “many incredibly wealthy and well travelled” students who toted around personal computers came back after the beginning of the school year because they had attended the Olympics in Beijing, and were transported to school by personal drivers.” Thinking back to her field experience in a school at home where “some students could not even pull together enough clean clothes for a week,” Liz hoped to get the opportunity to visit a “local” school because “everyone says that they are so incredibly poor and ill equipped to educate in this day and age and that all families that can afford to send their children to this *for profit* school do.”

In Ecuador, Marla found that “one interesting part of [her] host culture” is that “the socioeconomic class system ... is extremely defined, and a lot of classism seems to persist. Walking around the city her “host grandma” pointed out “a lower class” indigenous woman walking on all fours with shoes on both her hands and feet.” Witnessing this “disparity between the upper-class [blancos] in the city and the indigenous people really gave [her] a new understanding of global poverty.”

#### *Diversity*

Only four student teachers explicitly reported their thoughts about race and ethnicity. Jessie observed that her host city was a residence for immigrants with “many cultures ... from indigenous

people to Europeans, to Asians, to South Africans, to North and South Americans, to Australians.” Connor found teaching a “Maths for Life” class to recent, mostly African, immigrants a cultural experience he much enjoyed because “from time to time we talk about our different countries we are from and what the daily norms are”.

Describing South Africa’s culture as “extremely interesting,” Candace explained that, based on skin color, there are three races: whites, blacks and coloreds or “what we in the US would call ‘mixed’”. She also noted that while white South Africans refer to “the black people as ‘blacks’ or ‘Africans’, they don’t refer to themselves as ‘Africans’ even though most of them have lived in Africa their entire lives with generations before them. Shannon noted that America, unlike Ireland, is “full of different cultures, races and opinions” and that, although she never particularly thought of herself as from America, rather than from a specific geographic area, she now had come to see all of America “as home.” Marla noted similar racial and ethnic distinctions in Ecuador between “blancos, or white people [of] mixed European/Latin American descent,” and “the indigenous [who] have pure heritage from the native tribes.”

In her observations, however, about racial and ethnic diversity, Candace moved beyond mere observation and articulated a strong personal perspective. She was especially troubled by the position of blacks in South Africa. She noted that they “have all the low-paying jobs that generally serve the white people. She struggled with having a domestic worker, by the name of Virginia, who “came in everyday to clean and do all our laundry” and whose

“real African name was too difficult to pronounce.” She was surprised by the “ingrained racism”. While she thought her “host family [was] lovely and [went] out of its way to make sure [her] experience [was] worthwhile [she] often saw glimmers of past prejudices.” She particularly felt that the United States had “made great strides in the right direction” and that “America has come a long way” in comparison to South Africa. However, contrary to Candace, Rosalie, who had a similar experience with a domestic worker in the home of her host family, suggested that this woman “still managed to be filled with joy in the midst of her struggles ... of never knowing where her next meal would come from ... when [in the past] she [used to] sell items on the streets of Mexico City to support herself and her daughter. Fortunately, she now “lived a very comfortable life.”

#### *Politics*

Especially during the presidential election season in United States, the student teachers found students and adults in their host country extremely eager to talk about politics in America. However, these discussions were a mixture of pain and pleasure. While people in the host country were often very interested in American politics they were also often quick to criticize the United States.

The student teachers often encountered perspectives of America based on stereotypes acquired through media such as television, movies, and newspapers. Molly suggested that her Irish “students feel like America is this fabulous land where you can see plenty of celebrities just walking down the street.” Similarly, Candace reported that “the biggest misconception” her students

in South Africa had was that “we walk down the street and see celebrities every day” and that they don’t understand how vast the US is” and that she would “have to drive for two straight days to get to Hollywood.” Likewise, in Australia Jessie found her students thought she “knew every American celebrity because [she] live[d] there.” She argued that, “it is unbelievable how much U.S. media [Australians] get and how much the schools teach about the U.S.” and that her “students [knew] more about America than [she did]. Yet, their “views of Americans are distorted.”

Molly was astounded that the “Irish people have no filter on what to say or ask,” including about “whom I voted for in the last election.” Interestingly, Marissa observed that the Irish were quick to discuss American politics but “the second you bring up theirs you may face a very uncomfortable silence” as “few are willing to talk about it,” except in “whispers when everyone else is distracted.”

Six of the eight student teachers were in their host country during the American fall election cycle and Obama’s inauguration. Like Jessie in Australia, Shannon was impressed with the level of “interest in American politics [among] young Irish children.” As the election grew closer, the Irish were “becoming more vocal.” She was “surprised” by how supportive they were of Obama, reporting that “after the election it seemed that most of Europe was happy” with the election results and that it was “interesting how many different teachers came up to [her] and started conversations.” The entire experience gave her “a greater respect and newfound pride in [her] country.” Marissa reported that whenever an Irish person identified her as American, “the

first thing they [told] her [was] how wonderful Obama is” and “how he is going to bring everyone out of this recession.” Jessie reported that “she had been consistently asked whether or not [she] voted for Obama” and that the “Australians think he’s just the greatest thing that’s happened to America.” Marla reported that while some believe Americans should get out, *¡Gringos fuera!*, she had “yet to meet an Ecuadorian who ... expressed anything negative about our current president or government.” In South Africa, Candace found that “some parts of being American have been fun.” Wearing her Obama shirt all day on Inauguration Day, she got “many compliments about the shirt.” People were “excited to talk to her about it,” and the Obama stickers she handed out to people were such “a huge hit all the teachers at the school have them now and ... just love them.” Obama was “all the rage,” people were “wearing Obama shirts all the time,” and there was even a barbershop with a sign advertising “an Obama haircut.”

### *Religion*

Religion was also part of the cultural experience for some of the student teachers. When Kendall and Nicole went to church in South Africa they found that unlike church “at home start[ing] and end[ing] within the hour ... at a precise time” it “started late and lasted two hours with no thought of time.” In Australia, Jessie was struck to be in a “culture that is not highly religious [which] made [her] realize how important religion is to [her].” Rosalie found that Mexicans are “united in their [Catholic] beliefs” but that “there is a lot more tolerance in the United States for religious differences because people simply assume that you believe in



Christianity.” In Ireland, Molly found that public schools have a “Catholic ethos,” offer religion classes and have “occasional masses throughout the year.” She found this interesting but was “pleased to see that ... while the class is focused on Catholicism, [the students] are learning about other religions as well. Perhaps Marissa became most immersed in the experience as “each day ... started off with the students saying a morning prayer” and even though she did “not know much about teaching religion” her cooperating teacher put her “in charge of working with the students [to create] art projects to decorate the church for the students’ Communion ceremony.”

#### *Patriotism*

Nearly all student teachers reported evidence of patriotism in their host country, predominantly focused on national pride and history. According to Rosalie, her school “still value[d] Mexican pride and lessons that directly relate to their culture.” Each Wednesday the school held “honors”, a flag ceremony in which all 5<sup>th</sup> grade students saluted the flag, and sang the national anthem and school song, which was “done with a lot more seriousness and ... respect [than] when we all rise for the Pledge of Allegiance.” In Ecuador, Marla likewise noted “a strong sense of national pride and solidarity despite a history of corruption and conquest, political instability and frequent dissatisfaction with the government.” She particularly noted the Día del Civismo, a national holiday, when during a “huge school ceremony” the students “parade the Ecuadorian flag and each member of the senior class kneels to kiss the flag.”

Liz was amazed by the fact that although her Costa Rican students came from all over the world, they perceived “being a native ‘Tico’ ... a matter of pride.” As one student told her, “My mom is from Nicaragua and my dad is from Guatemala but I’m 100% Tico.” Molly perceived a similar “strong sense of Irish pride” in her host country, “They seem to love this country, and all of its history [of which] there is so much everywhere.” Similarly, Marissa was amazed that “most people in Ireland can trace their family’s history back at least 300 years and probably own the same land now as back then, [whereas she could] not go back more than two generations without counting at least four different countries [her] family had come from.” Finally, Candace alluded to South Africa’s years of turmoil and its “rich history of oppression and victory over it” in shaping its national identity.

#### *American Identity*

Although, according to Jessie, Australians perceive America as “very patriotic country,” the only student teacher to express personal pride in America was Shannon. “Seeing the [presidential] election from an outsider’s perspective gave [her] a greater respect and newfound pride.” Interestingly, the student teachers almost exclusively reported negative stereotypes that focused on Americans as being ignorant about the world, arrogant, superficial, loud, and materialistic. While there were times when these stereotypes were “understandable,” there were other times when they were “hurtful” and made them feel “sad.”

Jessie thought that “most Australians respect Americans as being equals in the global society.” Rosalie found that Mexicans “value American culture and

all that our country offers” and that she “actually connect[ed] better with the people here than the majority of people in my country.” However, there were also times when “she didn’t enjoy the negative stereotypes.”

Reflecting on attitudes towards women in their host country and comparing these to those in the United States, several student teachers expressed an appreciation of the status of women in America. In Ecuador, Marla found that people like American women because they are “promiscuous.” Candace found that sexism was “still prevalent” in South Africa as “women are expected to be at home with dinner on the table when the man gets home from work.” At her all-boys school in Ireland, Shannon came to realize that part of the reason she struggled with discipline was because “the boys tend to respect their male teachers more than their female ones, both in and outside of the classroom.” Echoing others, Marla found that American women are perceived as independent, which “is an indicator of the progressive nature of our country [and] its vastly less chauvinistic attitude.”

In several instances the student teachers admitted they themselves knew little about the world. Kendall admitted that she was “guilty” of being an “example of the common stereotypical American.” According to Jessie, Australian “students and adults ... are concerned with the whole world [and] very aware of global news” and that “it is a shame that Americans are not the same way about the rest of the world.” In other instances they were shocked, as Shannon was, when a television show featured “a stereotyped Irish fellow dancing on the burning World Trade Center” after the 9/11 attacks.

Reflecting on the causes of these negative stereotypes the student teachers offered several explanations. For example, while Jessie wrote that, “people in Australia know probably more about the United States than I do, it’s unbelievable how much U.S. media they get and how much the schools teach about the U.S.” Yet, when the time came to return to the U.S., she wrote that she had become so “comfortable with the Australian way of doing things that ... it was a shame ... she [had] to turn around, and become an American again.” Shannon found that the media, and therefore the teachers, often are the culprits of American stereotypes. She felt that the Irish “tend to forget that America is rather large ... They do not understand our diversity and think all Americans are the same [and] that we all think and act the same.”

While they struggled with the many negative American stereotypes they encountered, some also suggested they found it difficult to define the national identity of their host country. Jessie thought that “Australians don’t truly understand what it’s like to be an American, but equally so, she [did] not truly understand what it’s like to be an Australian.” She wrote that “being an “American” [was] still unclear to her [as] people in Ireland often told [her] how lucky [she] was to be an American,” yet at the same time “put [her] down for it.” Rosalie “struggled to come up with an educated opinion of what [she] believe[d] an American to be based upon [her] experience in [Mexico] because the extent to which she immersed herself in its culture made her “lose [her] perception of [her own] nationality quite a bit ... making it difficult ... to continually take [her] American nationality into account each

and every day.” Molly was “not sure that [she was] comfortable defining an American as that concept alone can be a very broad definition.”

#### *Host Country Identity*

The student teachers typically described the identity of the inhabitants of their host country in terms of the people they personally encountered. They used terms such as “warm” and “friendly” to describe people as diverse as the Irish, Mexicans, Ecuadorians, Australians and South Africans. Shannon, Molly and Marissa all suggested the Irish were a proud people, religious, and family oriented. Marissa specifically observed that “their heritage is the most important thing to them. Whether it’s their religion, their families, or simply traditional Irish music or folklore, Irish people know their country’s story.” In addition, Molly found that the Irish “do love their alcohol,” with which Marissa appeared to agree when she wrote that “drinking is an extracurricular activity the Irish people like to practice.”

Rosalie described Mexicans as “always filled with joy” and extremely loyal to their family, community and country. She also found, however, that they were very “united in their religious beliefs,” and that they were less accepting of “personal life decisions” than people in the United States on issues such as gender orientation. Marla suggested that Ecuadorians have an “unabashedly deep sense of pride” that is rooted in their “exquisite and unparalleled natural environment, the preservation of the indigenous culture, and [their] ability to overcome oppression and adversity throughout history.” She described them as a “very resilient, happy, triumphant, and

passionate people who are strengthened not only by victory but also by defeat, and *this* [sic] is what they celebrate.”

Jessie acknowledged that although she “would generally assume that someone over here is atheist unless they told me otherwise,” the Australians she met were some of the “nicest, warmest and most outgoing people” that she ever met. Although Australians are “incredibly active and healthy,” ... in the end though ... they have many of the same things and customs as Americans.” In South Africa, Candace likewise found herself “so welcomed” that when it was time to return to the United States, “it broke [her] heart to have to leave.” She described South Africans as “genuine, caring and invested in their country, regardless of how frustrated they feel about it at times.” Realizing that she “was around white people during most of [her] experience,” she nonetheless described South Africans as a beautiful people with a diverse makeup ... a rich history of oppression and victory over it.”

#### **Conclusions**

The overseas student teaching experience took these preservice teachers out of the “U.S. bubble where all [they] knew or heard about was what was going on in [their] own country, [and] rarely [ever heard anything] about what was going on in the rest of the world unless there was a war or major terrorist attack.” Many were surprised, like Shannon and Jessie, at how interested “the rest of the world was in America” and that there were times when it seemed like their “students knew more about America than [they themselves] did.”

Although, they unanimously wrote that this experience broadened their global awareness, the question remains

to what extent these “travellers” became immersed in intercultural learning. What were their perceptions of national identity? As they reflected on what it meant to be American and what characterized the national identity of their host country, did they become better global citizens and teachers?

The most significant conclusion that can be drawn from the findings is that these student teachers were immersed in an intercultural experience to such an extent that they failed to articulate a clear perspective on American national identity. While, for example, Jessie wrote that she “learned more about others and [her]self as an American living in Australia than [she had] learned in [her] whole life,” none of the student teachers articulated what being American meant to him or her personally. Clearly, the intensity of context in which they found themselves absorbed, prevented them from articulating a clear sense of American national identity. When attempting to do so, they did so largely in response to the often negative American stereotypes they encountered in their host country

Their descriptions of the national identity of their host country likewise lacked depth and, despite occasional allusions to negative attributes, focused on positive *surface* attributes such as laid back, friendly and patriotic. In addition, when reporting on issues related to socioeconomic disparity, diversity, politics and religion, their comments were observational rather than analytical. The only notable exception was Candace. Her dissonant experience, “being in another culture with political, racial and socioeconomic issues, [gave her] even greater inspiration for social justice education.”

Although the preservice teachers in this study were encouraged to study the history, culture, political structure, educational systems and media of their host country, their reflective essays focused narrowly on personal encounters and surface culture. Reconsidering Bennett’s (1993) Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity suggests nonetheless that the preservice teachers in this study began to analyze cultural differences [*acceptance stage*] and started to become competent in communicating across cultures [*adaptation stage*]. Based on the U-curve hypothesis (Kushner, 2004), the findings also suggest that these student teachers typically experienced the excitement of a *honeymoon* along with some of the characteristic frustrations of the *hostility* stage.

In summary, the overseas student teaching experience helped these preservice teachers expand their personal horizons on issues of national identity and increase their awareness of a global world beyond that of their own country. Global intercultural understanding must be an integral part of preparing teachers for the world of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Consequently, we must continue to strive for finding better ways to prepare tomorrow’s teachers by engaging them in new and global environments in which they might not feel completely comfortable. Improving tomorrow’s teachers global awareness will hopefully better prepare them to locally “help young people develop the ability to make informed and reasoned decisions for the public good as citizens of a culturally diverse, democratic society in an *interdependent* world” (NCSS, 1994).

Appendix A  
 Participants

<b>Term</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Program</b>	<b>Concentration</b>	<b>City</b>	<b>Country</b>	<b>School</b>
Summer 2008	Kendall	MS	Language Arts, Math	Port Elizabeth	South Africa	Mandela HS
	Nicole	MS	Math, Social Studies	Port Elizabeth	South Africa	Zuma HS
	Connor	HS	Social Studies	Hobart, Tasmania	Australia	Cook HS
Fall 2008	Shannon	HS	Math	Killarney	Ireland	St. Patrick HS
Winter 2009	Candace	MS	Language Arts, Math, Science, Social Studies	Port Elizabeth	South Africa	Cape HS
	Rosalie	K-12	Spanish	Querétaro	Mexico	Juárez School
	Marla	K-12	Spanish	Quito	Ecuador	Bolivar School
	Jessie	MS	Math, Science	Perth	Australia	Wallaby Primary
	Bryn	HS	Science	Dublin	Ireland	Dublin School
	Liz	MS	Math, Science	Escazú	Costa Rica	Arias School
Spring 2009	Marissa	ES	All	Sneem	Ireland	St. Brendan Primary

Appendix B  
Reflection Assignment

Week 1-3

1. What have you learned so far about your host culture?
2. How does this relate to your expectations about the culture before your arrival?
3. In what ways is the school different from schools where you completed your field placements and practicum at home?

Week 4-6

1. What are you learning from your cooperating teacher that is helping you grow professionally?
2. What are you learning about “being American” as you view it from another vantage point?
3. What are you learning from your host family or other living arrangements you may have made?
4. What are you learning from your participation in the community in which you are teaching?

Week 7-8

1. What have you done (or are you doing) to introduce your students and others to your “home culture”?
2. Are you teaching any content that relates specifically to the host culture? If so, what?
3. How is the curriculum that is being offered at your school different from that at home?
4. How do the teachers and students, classroom discipline, teacher-student relationships, and school culture differ from that at home?

Week 9-10

1. What aspects of teaching in the foreign culture are proving to be the most challenging?
2. How are you addressing these challenges?
3. How have you grown personally and professionally from completing this experience?
4. Has the experience broadened your global awareness? If so, how?
5. How are you going to apply what you have learned from teaching in another culture in your practice?
6. Did you find the support and guidance you received during the experience helpful? In what ways?

Final Reflection

In 1782, Michel Guillaume Jean de Crèvecoeur, naturalized as John Hector St. John, published a volume of narrative essays entitled *Letters from an American Farmer* in which he posed the question, “What’s an American?”

No later than one week after you finish your student teaching abroad, please submit a thoughtful response, 5-6 pages in length, to the following two questions:

- Now that you have finished your student teaching abroad experience, what did you learn about yourself as an American? What did you learn about others' perspectives of what it is that makes someone American? In other words, how do you answer Crèvecoeur's question, "What is an American?"
- Now that you have finished your student teaching abroad experience, what did you learn about the people and culture of the country in which you student taught? How do you answer Crèvecoeur's question for its inhabitants? In other words, how do you answer Crèvecoeur's question, "What is a[n] \_\_\_\_\_ [e.g. Irishman, Costa Rican, Mexican, Ecuadorian, Australian, South African]?"

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