LEARNING TO TEACH, TEACHING TO LEARN: THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF INTERNATIONAL TEACHING ASSISTANTS AT A MIDWESTERN UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

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This study was undertaken to develop a deeper understanding of the lived experience of a select group of international teaching assistants and was specifically designed to explore the processes that these individuals engaged in while learning to teach at a Mid-western, regional, comprehensive university. Naturalistic inquiry governed the overall methodological philosophy for the inquiry and a qualitative multi-case study approach was used to collect, analyze, and interpret data. Data collection included document analysis, classroom observations of teaching sessions, and individualized interviews. Analysis of data involved thematic coding and meta-analysis.

Research findings indicated that: (1) international teaching assistants’ preconceived expectations about their role as a teacher were incongruent with the reality of their actual experience, (2) learning to teach occurred by participating in acts of teaching, (3) classroom behaviors were influenced by personal, idiosyncratic beliefs about teaching and learning that were frequently in conflict with what was valued by undergraduates, faculty advisors, and university administrators, (4) teaching knowledge was constructed through a process of integrating new information with what was already known, and (5) the process of learning to teach was complicated by the necessity of integrating multiple intersecting roles.
By deploying protocols of qualitative research for analyses of the international teaching assistant experience at the site institution, there were two sets of recommendations. The first set called for practical measures that would reduce the tensions associated with acclimatization to institutions of higher learning. The second set of recommendations called for further research that: (1) situated the complexity of the international teaching assistant problem in the context of the constraints and challenges of the larger system of higher education within the United States, (2) encouraged revisiting the theoretical framework for international teaching assistant research, (3) encouraged critically exploring the pedagogical principles that undergird United States higher education, and, (4) recommended examining the sometimes unstated philosophical/epistemological worldviews that are at the root of it all in light of the experiences of international teaching assistants.
DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my sons, Cameron L. Holland and Kalin M. Holland,

who bring me immeasurable joy.

You are my light, my life, and my inspiration. It is an honor and a privilege to have taken

this journey, and so many others, with you. Thank you for dreaming this dream with me.

D.E.F.W.C.Y.A.

This manuscript is also dedicated to the memory of my father, Louie F. Bates.
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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION AND STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

International students elect to pursue post-baccalaureate degrees in the United States for a variety of reasons. Often representing the “intellectual and social elite of their countries” (Hull, 1978, p. 3), Bulthuis (1986) concluded that these sojourners pursued additional studies in the United States to earn “an advanced degree from a U.S. institution, to take advantage of available scholarship funds, to escape unsettled political or economic conditions, and to learn about the United States” (p. 20). Likewise, Du Bois (1956) and Pruitt (1978) maintained that international students traveled to the United States to study because of curiosity, out of a desire to learn new skills, to acquire technical training, for immigration in the future, and most importantly because “scholars and students . . . travel to the intellectually dominant countries in search of knowledge” (Pruitt, 1978, p. 144). Additionally, many college and university mission and vision statements espouse an educational philosophy that encourages egalitarianism, open access, equal opportunity, and internationalization. These ideals are especially appealing to international students imbued with a spirit of adventure. However, the institutions at which these students are admitted are quite often not adequately prepared to receive and integrate them resulting in administrators and faculty members “scrambling to accommodate this diversity” (Stefani, 1997, p. 349) as the nature of teaching and the face of higher education changes.

The Growth in International Graduate Students as Teaching Assistants

With declining enrollments by domestic graduate students in various academic programs, international students are being actively recruited to fill graduate level classes (Fleisher, Hashimoto, & Weinberg, 2002; Open Doors, 2007; Sarkisian, 2006; Sarkodie-
Mensah, 1998). These students bring to the classroom social, political, or economic perspectives about “their home countries and thus widen the . . . U.S. students’ perspectives on the world” (Ladd & Ruby, 1999, p. 363). Rising enrollment rates for international graduate students, particularly in areas such as computer science and mathematics, engineering, and the physical sciences, have resulted in a concomitant increase in members of this student population being appointed as graduate teaching assistants. In exchange for financial aid in the form of tuition reimbursement and a modest stipend, university administrators and students receive the assistance of an individual who designs and teaches lower division courses (Marincovich, Prostko, & Stout, 1998). Quite frequently, these graduate students have responsibility for providing instruction in lower division prerequisite introductory courses resulting in increased points of contact between undergraduate domestic students and international teaching assistants.

**Points of Contact**

Adelman’s (1990) national study on the number of undergraduate students enrolled in courses likely to be taught by international teaching assistants provided insight about both the types of institutions and academic disciplines where international teaching assistants and undergraduate students interact. Firstly, interactions between domestic undergraduate students and international teaching assistants were most likely to occur at doctoral or comprehensive universities. Secondly, international teaching assistants were more likely to teach required prerequisite or gate-keeping courses designed to limit the number of students entering many technical and scientific fields.
Lastly, in these same fields international teaching assistants taught approximately one-third of the undergraduate courses. Increased “points of contact” (Smith, Bryd, Nelson, Barrett, Constantides, 1992, p. 3) between international teaching assistants and domestic undergraduates in the classroom have generated serious concerns about international teaching assistants’ language proficiency, cultural competency, and subsequent teaching ability and the effect these perceived deficiencies have on student learning (Bauer, 1991; Briggs & Hofer, 1991; Fox & Gay, 1994; Hougland, 1989; Jacobs & Friedman, 1988; Marvasti, 2005; Park, 2004; Plakans, 1997; Rubin & Smith, 1989). Dissatisfaction has been “most acute when international teaching assistants from a non-native English speaking or non-Western backgrounds teach basic required courses that are used for screening entrance into business, scientific, and technical fields of study” (Smith et al., 1992, p. 4).

Consequently, one of the responses to concerns about quality in classroom instruction has been the implementation of training and preparation programs to assist international teaching assistants in developing the needed skills for current teaching responsibilities and future faculty teaching. However, training programs to improve teaching performance are a relatively recent phenomena and implementation has been in response to critics opposed to teaching assistants in general and international teaching assistants in particular. Furthermore, these programs have focused primarily on improving proficiency in United States English speaking ability. In spite of the overemphasis on language pronunciation in training programs, international teaching assistant teaching effectiveness and self-efficacy improved with a combination of experience and preparation.
The International Teaching Assistant Experience

One of the problems associated with using the descriptor international student to describe sojourners enrolled in colleges and universities in the United States is the heterogeneous nature of this student population. DuBois (1956) maintained “to treat a great variety of [international] students as a single category is a human and scientific monstrosity . . . those who come to this country to pursue their education are of an infinite variety of nationalities, temperaments, and backgrounds” (p. 35). Additionally, Bulthuis (1986) indicated the term international student “masks important distinctions based on such matters as country of origin, age, sponsorship, field of study, personal goals in studying abroad, and job opportunities at home” (p. 22) and of course language. The point of these reservations about the descriptor, “international student,” is that heterogeneity is a general characteristic of this student population. Notwithstanding this however there is a shared experience among international teaching assistants of being both foreigners and newcomers to higher education in the United States. For the purposes of this discussion the descriptor international student or international teaching assistant will be used not as a pejorative term, but as a term of convenience. Secondly, the term will be used with the understanding that generalizations made concerning the experiences of sojourners in the United States may not apply to every student in the category, international teaching assistants.

In an attempt to gain a deeper understanding of the intercultural interactions between international teaching assistants and undergraduate students, scholars have made a concerted effort to develop a body of literature to explain this phenomenon. However, much of the early research about international teaching assistants has tended to operate
from a problems or deficit framework. Consequently, during the 1970s and 1980s in response to strident criticisms about international teaching assistants, studies primarily focused on perceived difficulties in language comprehension and pronunciation (Bailey, 1982; Blakely, 1989; Fiske, 1985; Fleisher, 2002; Gottschak, 1985; Heller, 1985a; Heller, 1985b; McMillen, 1986; Secter, 1987). As a result, practitioners and administrators implemented training programs with United States English language proficiency at the core. Most of these programs were developed in response to legislative mandate and were limited in scope to include just those issues and criteria named in law, chiefly acquiring full fluency in the English language (Smith et al., 1992).

Despite implementation of language proficiency requirements, criticism concerning international teaching assistants continued, prompting closer examination of the teaching assistant experience. Constantinides (1987) and Fisher (1985) advocated “rethinking the foreign TA problem” in an attempt to develop a deeper understanding of the experiences of this student population. Nyquist and Wulff, (1996), Sarkodie-Mensah, (1998), Sigsbee, Speck, & Maylath, (1997) cautioned that singling out a lack of proficiency in United States English pronunciation and comprehension as the major problem for international teaching assistants was problematic for several reasons. Programs designed to improve English pronunciation were met with resistance. Participants wanted to improve their English speaking abilities without being forced to disguise the fact they spoke the language differently. Sigsbee, Speck, Maylath, (1997) revealed that this resistance stemmed from the fact that “some students and some cultures restrict the desirable level of fluency in English for cultural identity rather than pragmatic reasons” (p. 14). International students, desirous of returning to their home countries,
perceived fluency in United States English as adopting U.S. cultural values and believed that re-immersion in their home country would be more challenging if they strayed too far from their national or cultural identity. Moreover, these same students perceived U.S. English language proficiency as associated with becoming too “Americanized,” an outcome viewed unfavorably.

Assuming a different position to explain the less than satisfactory intercultural interactions between undergraduates and international teaching assistants, Sarkodie-Mensah (1998) argued that training programs designed to increase United States English fluency had less to do with a lack of linguistic prowess on the part of international teaching assistants but more to do with assumptions that U.S. undergraduates hold about language and about the culturally different, assumptions coupled with a lack of understanding of how non-Americans speak (Sarkodie-Mensah, 1998). These voluntary minorities (Ogbu, 1997), fearing Americanization, often viewed training programs that focused on language skills and those that were culturally specific as being counterproductive to their long-term goals. Rendon’s (1992) work with students of color within the United States affirms this international student perspective, contending that colleges and universities were designed so that students who were most likely to succeed in the academy were those who could “successfully disconnect from the past and turn their loyalty to the conventions and practices of the academy” (p. 284). International teaching assistants whose value systems, language, familial expectations, and cultural differences diverge from those of the United States resist this disconnection.
Concentric Circles: the Role of the International Teaching Assistant

Althen (1991) challenged prevailing notions about the international teaching assistant experience by exploring the “culturally-influenced roles” (p. 350) of the international teaching assistant on a university campus within the United States. These roles influence classroom performance. Althen (1991) described these roles as a set of concentric circles with each circle representing a facet of the complexity experienced by international teaching assistants as they struggle to understand their host environment. At the core of this set of circles is the international teaching assistant as a foreigner:

In the process of adjusting to the local culture, international teaching assistants are foreigners vis-à-vis not just their students, but also their fellow graduate students, their own teachers, other teachers in the department, prospective friends, neighbors, and everyone else in the community (p. 350).

Consequently, international teaching assistants face significant challenges as they attempt to adapt to their host country and the world of higher education while learning and teaching in a language and in a culture that is not their own. Chen and Starosta (1998) defined this process as intercultural adaptation, the method by which sojourners attempt to comprehend and adjust to a new cultural environment. Like most sojourners, international teaching assistants are attempting to understand their new surroundings in an effort to modify their behaviors and predict the behaviors of others. Althen (1991) continued by asserting that the circle surrounding the self included those individuals in the student’s immediate personal sphere such as family members. Many times these individuals experienced their own adaptive challenges and were dependent on the international teaching assistant for help and support. The international teaching assistant
often became the cultural and language interpreter who aided other family members in mediating their new environment.

Following the circle of the self and the personal sphere is the circle of the classroom. In this circle the international teaching assistant is a “multi-cultural composition . . . [involving] a variety of stereotypes, language differences, learning styles, world views, and other culturally-influenced factors” (p. 351). Within this circle the international teaching assistants is in the conflicting role of both student and instructor. As a graduate student, the international teaching assistant must acclimatize to the new higher education environment which is often complicated by inexperience with United States classroom pedagogical methods, barriers as a result of English language comprehension and pronunciation, and unfamiliarity with classroom culture and expectations.

Likewise, in their role as teaching assistants, international graduate students must acquire the skills and competencies necessary to assume the responsibilities of instructor in the undergraduate classroom. Implicit and explicit classroom expectations and classroom culture in the American college and university classroom often differ significantly from the experience of most international students. For example, in most college and university classroom settings outside of the United States, the relationship between student and faculty member is very formal, the professor is an authority figure, examinations are summative, and class participation evidenced through queries and discussion is discouraged. Hence, teaching is rooted in the culture of a society (Hofstede, 1986). Subsequent circles, continued Althen (1991) include the “ITA’s [international teaching assistant] academic department, the institution, the community, the region of the
United States in which the community is located and the larger culture of the United States itself” (p. 351). Banks and Banks (1999) conceptualized these multiple concentric circles as “microcultures” imbedded within the shared core or “macroculture” of the United States.

In the case of international teaching assistants and undergraduate students, cultural misunderstanding and conflicts occur within these microcultures when “the values, norms, and characteristics of the mainstream (macroculture) are frequently mediated by, as well as interpreted and expressed differently within various microcultures” (p. 7). Consequently, one of the challenges facing higher education scholars is to understand how international teaching assistants “make meaning” of the values, norms, and characteristics of the macroculture and then implement that knowledge in the college classroom.

*The Graduate Teaching Assistantship as Apprenticeship*

For many students the graduate teaching assistantship is a “means of employment and financial support while students are completing graduate degrees” (Staton & Darling, 1989, p. 16). However, for those seeking a career as a faculty member the assistantship serves as a point of entry to the academic profession. This “internship or training period” (p. 16) or “apprenticeship” (Nowlis, Clark, & Rock, 1968, p. 7), provides a unique opportunity for inculcation in the attitudes, beliefs, culture, and values necessary for an effective transition from the role of graduate student to the role of faculty member.

Researchers, Hagstrom (1965), Lambert and Tice (1993), Nowlis, Clark, and Rock (1968), and Staton and Darling (1989) posited that this apprenticeship period was the primary mechanism through which graduate teaching assistants learn to become
teachers. The teaching assistant socialization process, according to Staton and Darling (1989), is characterized by several key components. First, the role is multifaceted in that the teaching assistant is simultaneously student and teacher and that “these two components are distinct, perhaps even disparate, and yet teaching assistants are expected to integrate them and enact each one with skill and expertise” (p. 15). Secondly, the teaching assistant role is complex in that striking a balance between the demands of a teaching load, studying, advising, and completing course work is time consuming and difficult, yet analogous to the teaching and research demands of a faculty member.

Finally, the teaching assistant role is a transitory one serving as an entry point for graduate students seeking careers as faculty members. During this transitory period teaching assistants begin the socialization process of acquiring “skills, knowledge, and a structure of values, attitudes, and ways of thinking and feeling” (Clark & Corcoran, 1986, p. 30) indicative of the faculty member role and the culture of higher education. However, for international teaching assistants, the role is further complicated by the fact that they are often learning and teaching in a language and culture that is not their own (Nyquist, Abbott, Wulff, & Sprague, 1991) and “are native speakers of languages other than English and who come from non-U.S. . . . cultural and educational traditions” (Smith et al., 1992, p. 2). Conceptually, then, the question emerges: How do teaching assistants who are native speakers of a language other than U.S. English and who have experienced educational and cultural traditions other than those in the United States make meaning of this apprenticeship experience?
Guiding Questions and Intent of the Study

Borrowing from the world of business and human services, researchers and administrators concerned with improving international teaching assistant training programs, the international graduate student experiences, and teaching in the undergraduate classroom, advocate reframing as a tool for identifying and clarifying issues associated with the experience of international teaching assistants. Spees and Spees (1986) defined reframing as “focusing on an issue from several perspectives and exploring the relationships of the main issue with secondary issues from a variety of positions” (p. 10). Because these multiple perspectives and various perceptions of reality reflect various stakeholders in higher education and subsequently influence decision making and policy adoption “these various ways of framing issues, with concurrent expectations, must be thought out” (p. 10) and explored to develop a deeper understanding of the experience of sojourners learning to teach in a language and culture that is both foreign and complex. Reframing the international teaching assistant classroom experience, then, begins with the knowledge that “these students face the challenge not only of entering the American way of life, but also of coming to terms with the role of student and teacher and the expectations attached to these roles within the American university system” (Ross & Krider, 1992, p. 279).

Consequently, because of the complexity of the international teaching assistant role -- that of sojourner, graduate student, learner, and teacher -- higher education scholars have begun to sharpen their focus on the international teaching assistant experience in an attempt to understand the classroom intercultural interactions between foreign-born international teaching assistants and United States undergraduates. The goal
of this focus is an attempt to “meet the needs [of this student population] that are still in the process of being understood” (Smith et al. 1992, p. 1). Therefore, what is needed is an awareness of how international teaching assistants as sojourners and newcomers to the academy perceive and acquire cultural knowledge and how they reconcile multiple microcultures with the macroculture of higher education to become effective teachers. An effective means of developing a deeper understanding and creating knowledge about the international teaching assistant experience is to explore this phenomenon from the actors’ interpretations and perspectives.

Thus, the purpose of this study is to discover and come to a deeper understanding of how international teaching assistants who are non-native speakers of United States English learn to teach undergraduate students on a United States university campus. To accomplish this objective this study will be guided by the following questions: How do international teaching assistants who are native speakers of languages other than U. S. English learn to teach in an undergraduate classroom at a postsecondary institution? How do international teaching assistants acquire knowledge and make meaning of institutional values, attitudes, beliefs, and role expectations? How do international teaching assistants construct an identity as teacher? What informs this construction? How is this construction implemented in the classroom setting?

For the purposes of this inquiry, a qualitative methodology within the constructivist paradigm (Guba & Lincoln, 1989) will be used to develop new knowledge and broaden the current understanding of the processes employed by this student population in order to “come to terms with the role of student and teacher and the
expectations attached to these roles within the American university system” (Ross & Krider, 1992, p. 279).

Significance of the Study

The importance and value of this study about how international teaching assistants make meaning of the teaching assistantship is supported by three principal factors: (1) the lack of comprehension about international teaching assistants learning to teach and learning pedagogical skills, (2) failure to investigate the multiplicity of roles international teaching assistants play, and (3) the conspicuous absence of the perspectives of international teaching assistants in the literature.

Although a significant body of literature about international teaching assistants exists, there is a serious gap in understanding how international teaching assistants as newcomers to the academy -- native speakers of languages other than English and educated in cultural practices and traditions other than that of the United States -- learn to become teachers in an undergraduate classroom in the United States. Since the teaching assistant position is considered an apprenticeship and is often a precursor to a faculty position, emphasis on the recruitment, retention, training, development, and socialization of a “new academic generation” (Finkelstein, Seal, & Schuster, 1995) is vital in creating an environment within the classroom conducive to both learning and teaching.

The second important reason for this study is that scholars have failed to examine the multiple intersecting roles of the international graduate student population, that of an “outsider within” (Collins, 1986) the academy, both learner and teacher, and that of the influence of these intersections on teaching in an undergraduate classroom. An in-depth exploration of these intersections will provide a better understanding of the
undergraduate classroom as a setting for teaching and learning while discovering the skills and abilities that international teaching assistants need to become effective teachers. Additionally, the relationship between international teaching assistants as both newcomers and outsiders within higher education and their socialization as a cultural process are worthy of serious consideration. Staton and Darling (1989) posited that the teaching assistantship is the primary mechanism through which graduate students experience socialization and cultural acquisition and subsequently acquire the skills, attitudes, and knowledge base to become teachers. Moreover, Kuh and Hall (1993) argued that culture functions as a socializing agent and through its properties “newcomers are taught how to behave and what is valued by their institution (p. 11). In their work on faculty socialization Tierney and Rhoads (1993) discussed “socialization as a cultural process” (p. 1) maintaining that culture acquisition is a necessity to “exist in a given society” (p. 6). Furthermore, Banks and Banks (1997) in their work on the nature and meaning of culture in education contended:

In a sense, everything in education relates to culture-to its acquisition, its transmission, and its invention. Culture is in us and all around us, just as the air we breathe. It is personal, familial, communal, institutional, and societal in its scope and distribution (p. 33).

Additionally, this study is significant in that it demystifies what occurs in the classroom between international teaching assistants and undergraduate students. As indicated previously, increased points of contact between international teaching assistants and undergraduate students resulted in concerns about the teaching effectiveness and language proficiency of this graduate student population. Moreover, since teaching is an
activity that occurs in relative privacy, what occurs in the classroom is shrouded in mystery. An examination of the teaching assistant experience, from the perspective of international teaching assistants, provides new knowledge for faculty members, administrators, and even other international teaching assistants concerned about improving the quality of college teaching thereby improving the quality of learning in the undergraduate classroom.

Lastly, much of the existing literature about the international teaching assistant experience focuses on concerns about language comprehension, transition and acculturation issues, and provides strategies to develop training programs. The perspectives of a wide range of constituents: legislators, college administrators, and undergraduate students are well documented. The perspective that is missing; however, is that of the individuals most intimately involved in the experience of teaching, the international teaching assistant. Thus, what is known about the international teaching assistant experience is fragmented and one-dimensional. This study seeks to give voice to international teaching assistants, providing an opportunity to record their perspective and to reframe the international teaching assistant problem.

Organization of the Study

The study is organized in the following manner. In Chapter II, literature relating to the experience of international teaching assistants learning to teach is discussed. To that end the chapter is designed in response to the question—what is already known about how international teaching assistants learn to teach. A discussion of the rationale for framing the study using a constructivist paradigm, procedures for the inquiry, the process of data analysis, and an outline of measures to ensure trustworthiness can be found in
Chapter III. Located in Chapter IV are the general constructions or findings of the study. This chapter is designed to introduce the participants involved in this exploratory journey and to communicate the broad themes that emerged from the process of data analysis. Chapter V, an extension of Chapter IV, provides several propositions about the lived experience of international teaching assistants learning to teach and a discussion of the research findings. Additionally, provided in this chapter is a discussion outlining the significance of these propositions and their relationship to the research questions. Chapter VI provides a discussion about the implications of the research findings for future practice, outlines recommendations for future research, and provides concluding comments.
CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of this chapter is to review literature about international teaching assistants and the process of learning to teach. It is important to note that although a fairly comprehensive body of literature has been produced in the last three decades about international graduate students little is known about the process employed by international teachings assistants as they learn to teach. It is also important to note that much of the research conducted on this student population is what Merriam (1998) called “think pieces” (p. 50). These studies, empirical in nature, provide the “theoretical or conceptual writing” (p. 49 – 50) about this graduate student population. The think pieces concerned with the experience of international teaching assistants have primarily focused on challenges associated with acculturation, explored perceived deficiencies in language proficiency and teaching ability, and reported changes in college and university policies stemming from legislative mandates.

A significantly smaller body of literature on the experience of international teaching assistants learning to teach is data-based research. Researchers conducting these studies have collected and analyzed data related to this graduate student population, but as mentioned previously these findings have operated from a deficiency framework—reporting what international teaching assistants lack. Moreover, this research has been conducted from the perspective of various constituent groups: legislators, college administrators, undergraduate students, parents, and the public in general. Little research, at this juncture, has been conducted from the perspective of the international teaching assistant. Thus, the voice of this student population is missing from the discussion on the experience of international teaching assistants.
This study, as indicated in Chapter I, reframes what has often been referred to in the literature as the ‘teaching assistant problem’ by advancing additional explanations for consideration concerning what occurs in the undergraduate classroom between students and international teaching assistants. In an effort to correct this dearth in the literature and to re-frame what is known about the international teaching assistant experience, this chapter is organized into four broad areas. The first area of focus provides a historical overview of the emergence of graduate teaching assistantships within the United States. In the second focus area, an overview of international students’ participation in graduate education in the United States is outlined. The third focus area is an examination of training programs and the content of these college teaching preparation programs. Finally, the last focus area provides an overview of training programs and teacher preparation programs developed and implemented for international teaching assistants. The chapter is concluded with a summary of current literature and includes a discussion on what this inquiry adds to the body of literature.

Emergence of Teaching Assistantships

Historians of higher education have suggested that during the early days of graduate education the teaching function of the university and the research function were distinctly separate. In fact, Geiger (1993) maintained that many faculty members regarded teaching undergraduate students a deterrent to the pursuit of a research agenda. This perspective would eventually result in the development of practices that essentially created a hierarchy between senior and junior faculty members. According to Geiger (1993), senior faculty members could be emancipated from undergraduate instruction, while instructors and assistant professors were primarily responsible for teaching
introductory courses. Several institutions experimented with research professorships and specialized teaching posts; however, these endeavors proved to be controversial, costly, and encouraged a “tacit policy of actively discriminating between assignments for teaching men and research men” (Hawkins, 1960, p. 72).

An additional practice that was implemented to aid faculty members with teaching and research was the graduate teaching fellow. A precursor to the modern day graduate assistantship, graduate teaching fellowships were first created at Harvard University after the institution received a donation to encourage research practices (Berelson, 1960; Geiger, 1993). Teaching fellowships provided a practical incentive, both then and now, for the pursuit of advanced education and provided practical training for future teacher-scholars. In exchange for a small stipend, graduate students were required to teach undergraduate courses on a part-time basis enabling faculty members to pursue research endeavors (Berelson, 1960; DuBois, 1956; Geiger, 1993; Rudolph, 1962/1990; Storr, 1953; Walters, 1965).

Since their inception at Harvard and Johns Hopkins University the practice of providing graduate teaching fellowships or as they are known today, teaching assistantships, created tension in the academy. Although quite common in Europe, little similarity existed between those positions and the newly created fellowships in the United States. Under the Germanic organizational model, the preeminence of research and creation of knowledge was evident since graduate students were expected to “be dedicated exclusively to study” (Geiger, 1993, p. 245). Critics of early teaching fellowships accused Harvard of instituting a “sweating system” (p. 245), which essentially would overburden graduate students. Others objected to providing financial
encouragement as an incentive for graduate education, insisting that opportunities for advanced learning were motivation enough. Johns Hopkins University was accused of hiring graduate students to fill empty classrooms and ensure success of the experiment of creating a research institution. Still others committed to undergraduate education expressed concern about the quality of teaching and learning taking place within the confines of college classroom. Proponents of graduate teaching fellowships; however, proposed that these teaching arrangements accomplished several purposes. The fellowships provided financial support for continued education and advanced learning. Additionally, they served as an opportunity for would-be-faculty members to train under a senior faculty member, and provided teaching relief for faculty of the “much-resented burden of teaching introductory courses” (Geiger, 1993, p. 245).

Lewis (1997) indicated that the model governing teaching assistantships during its early years resembled an apprenticeship. Roles and responsibilities were narrowly defined and the graduate student worked closely with a faculty member. Lewis (1997) continued by reporting that the primary function of the teaching assistant was to assist “. . . professors in a specific course, primarily by grading and preparing class materials. Seldom if ever, did these graduate teaching assistants have direct contact with undergraduate students” (p. 1). However, as enrollment increased, administrators began to move away from this model for pragmatic reasons.

Higher education historian, Pruitt (1978) dates the practice of international scholars and students studying at higher education institutions in the United States to the colonial college period. Appreciable numbers of individuals attending postsecondary institutions within the United States from countries other than Europe began to appear
following World War II. Prior to this time period, Veysey (1965) indicated that higher education in the United States was for all intents and purposes an intellectual colony of Europe. Essentially, “the United States did not emerge as a major center of foreign study for international scholars and students until after World War II, when higher education in the United States expanded rapidly and dramatically improved its quality” (Altbach, Kelly, & Lulat, 1985, p. 4). However, with the expansion of higher education in the United States following the war, efforts were made to attract international students and scholars interested in studying in the United States, particularly from countries where English was not the native language (Du Bois, 1956; Nelson, 1991; Smith Bryd, Nelson, Barret, and Constantinides, 1992) in an attempt to encourage an “interchange of learning and of scholars” (Du Bois, 1956, p. 165).

In addition to postsecondary institutions experiencing growth in the international student population following World War II, veterans returning home also began enrolling in classes in record numbers. Thelin (2004) indicated that between 1943 and 1946, “many colleges and universities experienced a doubling in enrollments” (p. 264). Administrators responded to postwar enrollment by constructing new buildings and increasing laboratory and class sizes. The boom of the World War II era would eventually give way to a second explosion in college and university enrollments as the children of World War II veterans began attending college during the 1960s and 1970s. Lewis (1997) indicated that during the 1960s and 1970s the model of the teaching assistantship as an apprenticeship began to change. The individualized, interpersonal relationship between a faculty member and graduate student was no longer feasible in meeting the needs of undergraduate students. More students necessitated larger classes supplemented by “small discussion or
laboratory sessions led by teaching assistants. Nyquist, Abbott, Wulff, & Sprague (1991) outlined the duties that teaching assistants assumed: a number of instructional duties that were typically completed by a faculty member; tasks such as creating and grading homework and examinations, holding office hours, lecturing, and teaching class.

Expansion of the International Teaching Assistantship

According to Open Doors 2006, the annual report published by the Institute of International Education (IIE), for most of the past 50 years enrollment numbers for international students studying in the United States have continued to grow. The 2005/2006 academic year marked the seventh consecutive year that the United States hosted over half a million international students or 3.9 percent of the total of all college and university students (Open Doors, 2006). Almost half of these students were pursuing a graduate degree. As international graduate student enrollment has increased, the number of domestic graduate students studying for advanced degrees has decreased. For example, in a 2006 study conducted by The Council of Graduate Schools, international graduate students represented 53 percent of total non-U.S. citizen graduate enrollment in the biological sciences, engineering, and physical sciences. Moreover, “only 16 percent of U.S. citizens were enrolled in these disciplines” (2006, p. 9). Additionally, international students represented 48 percent of the total enrollment in engineering while domestic students accounted for 53 percent of the total enrollment in education, business, and health sciences combined (2006, p. 9).

Growing undergraduate student populations resulting in larger classes and supplemental laboratory and study sessions and declining admission numbers of domestic
graduate students in some fields has created assistantship opportunities for international graduate students. For example, in 1999, Open Doors reported the following:

Over the past 20 years, the numbers of United States citizens receiving doctorates in mathematics has decreased by 50 percent. Most of the doctoral degrees in mathematics awarded by U.S. universities went to citizens of other countries. Also, the number of foreign applicants for graduate students in engineering is greater than the number of U.S. applicants (p. 8).

Domestic students often function as teaching assistants in the undergraduate classroom particularly at research and doctoral granting institutions; such is also the case for international graduate students. As a component of their teaching responsibilities, these graduate students often teach large first-year introductory courses (Smith, Bryd, Nelson, Barrett, & Constantinides, 1992). Consequently, the points of contact between international teaching assistants and undergraduate students have significantly increased. These increasing points of contact, as necessary as they are, have not been without conflict.

Although international students reflect a significantly small percentage of the total student population within the United States, perceptions among undergraduate students and other stakeholders in higher education is that international teaching assistants are having a considerable; albeit, negative affect on undergraduate education. Many of the complaints expressed by these stakeholders focused on international teaching assistants’ perceived deficiencies in communication and teaching skills and the concern for quality in the undergraduate collegiate experience. These complaints from faculty members, undergraduate students, parents of currently enrolled students, and the general public
were most “acute when international teaching assistants from non-native English speaking or non-Western backgrounds teach basic required courses that are used for screening entrance into business, scientific, and technical fields of study” (Smith, Bryd, Nelson, Barrett, & Constantinides, 1992, p. 4).

According to Smith, et al., (1992) these stakeholders clamored for changes in university policy concerning international graduate student teaching prompting heightened interest in research to determine the consequences of using international teaching assistants. A study conducted by Jacobs and Friedman (1988) examined the academic achievement of undergraduate students taught by international teaching assistants compared with that of domestic teaching assistants. The authors found no appreciable differences between the academic achievements of undergraduate students taught by either international or domestic teaching assistants. Yet, concerns about this student population’s ability to teach continue to persist. The concerns over quality in classroom instruction prompted implementation of training and preparation programs to assist international teaching assistants in developing the needed skills to assume teaching responsibilities and future faculty roles.

Teaching Preparation Programs Overview

Gaff and Lambert (1996) indicated that the prevailing assumptions about college teaching was that once graduate students were immersed in their particular field of study and acquired a certain degree of knowledge “. . . she/he can teach it” irrespective of the “type of institution or qualities of the student body” (p. 41). However, determining the most effective means to prepare college and university teachers have been an area of concern for several decades. Lewis (1997), and Nyquist, Abbott, and Wulff (1989)
determined that discussions about providing training for graduate students interested in becoming college teachers began appearing in the literature during the 1930s. Even as early as the late 1940s, concerns over adequate preparation of graduate students for roles as college teachers surfaced when conference attendees voiced their apprehension about this issue declaring, “the role of the graduate school was to produce learned scholars, in the hope that they might also become accomplished teachers” (Nyquist, Abbott & Wulff, 1989, p. 8). As student enrollment numbers increased during the 1960s and 1970s and colleges and universities expanded course offerings and increased class size, a concomitant increase in graduate teaching assistants also occurred (Lewis, 1997). Larger classes were created to accommodate this growth and teaching assistants were employed to assist faculty with teaching related responsibilities.

Over the past thirty years, university administrators, responding to criticism of the use of international teaching assistants, implemented some type of training program with language proficiency at its core. Initially, the core curriculum used for training international teaching assistants differed little from that of domestic students with one significant exception. In response to strident criticism about employing teaching assistants whose previous educational training, language, and cultural foundations differed from the undergraduates they were teaching, institutions implemented training programs with an emphasis on improving language proficiency and cultural awareness. Critics of these programs maintained that curricular effectiveness was limited since language proficiency was but one element of effectual teaching. Another criticism of this particular curricular design is that these programs were limited in scope to include just those issues and criteria named in the law; full fluency in U.S. English (Smith, Bryd,
Nelson, Barrett, & Constantinides, 1992). These training models were implemented to fulfill requirements legislated by law but were not informed by research findings or an analysis of institutional structure, needs, or available resources.

Nyquist and Wulff, (1996); Sarkodie-Mensah, (1998); Sigsbee, Speck, and Maylath, (1997) posited that singling out a lack of proficiency in U.S. English pronunciation and comprehension as the major problem for international teaching assistants was problematic and shortsighted. Training programs designed to focus on strengthening language proficiency often encourage foreign accent reduction. International graduate students were strongly encouraged to modify speech patterns to conform to a conventional standard. According to Sigsbee, et. al. (1997) training with this objective as a component was less effective because “… students and some cultures restrict the desirable level of fluency in English for cultural identity rather than pragmatic reasons” (p. 14). These researchers contended that international students desirous of returning to their home countries correlated accent reduction with adopting U.S. cultural values and found this unacceptable for meeting their long-term goals. Additionally, Sarkodie-Mensah (1998) maintained that training programs designed to increase fluency in United States English had less to do with a lack of linguistic prowess on the part of international teaching assistants and more to do with the assumptions that domestic undergraduate students hold about language and about those who are culturally different.

Ogbu (1997) provided an additional explanation for the reason that international teaching assistants resisted these training programs. These voluntary minorities (Ogbu, 1997) fearing Americanization often viewed training programs that focused on language skills and were culturally specific as being counterproductive should they decide to return
to their home countries. Rendon’s (1992) research with domestic students of color reflected conclusions drawn by international teaching assistant scholars, thus, affirming Ogbu’s perspective. Rendon (1992) maintained that colleges and universities were designed so that students who were most likely to succeed were those that could “successfully disconnect from the past and turn their loyalty to the conventions and practices of the academy” (p. 284). International teaching assistants whose value systems, family expectations, and cultural differences diverged from those of the United States actively resisted this disconnection. The challenge, then, for training program administrators according to Bullivant (1993) was to design programs to help international teaching assistants who were socialized in their home countries to act, think, and communicate differently than the students in their classrooms, to develop a new set of skills in order to survive and thrive in their teaching roles. Thus, Banks and Banks (1999) maintained that training programs should afford international teaching assistants the opportunity to “acquire the knowledge, attitudes, and skills needed to function effectively in each cultural setting. [The international teaching assistant] should also be competent to function within and across other microcultures in their [host] society, within the national microculture, and within the world community” (p. 8).

Other researchers examining different aspects of international teaching assistant training indicated that a lack of program effectiveness was the result of enduring tensions within colleges and universities that regard the research function of the university more highly than teaching (Smith, Bryd, Nelson, Barrett, & Constantinides, 1992). The tension over the value, resources, and status afforded graduate education at the expense of
undergraduate education is reflected in the use of international teaching assistants and reflected by the following:

If undergraduate education is the central responsibility of a university, then regular faculty should be teaching undergraduates rather than focusing attention on graduate courses and research activities. Graduate students, especially those from overseas, should not be the teachers of undergraduates (p. 11).

The argument over who should be teaching undergraduate courses leads to a related argument over the merits of research as opposed to teaching. This consequently also raises questions about the primary purpose of the college and university mission. Many pursuing a doctoral degree will earn their livelihood as educators and thus will spend a significant period of their career teaching. Yet, graduate programs place little emphasis on training teaching assistants as future teachers. As indicated earlier, “the design and objectives of . . . training programs do not attend to important facets of learning, socialization, and professional development,” (Korinek, Howard, and Bridges, 1999, p. 344) for teaching assistants in general. Moreover, little information or training is provided concerning preparation involving teaching pedagogy, classroom culture, understanding U.S. college student behavior, models of teaching and student learning, intercultural interactions, or assessment and evaluation.

Summary of the Literature

There were four major issues in the literature concerning international teaching assistants. Firstly, increasing enrollment figures and fewer faculty members created conditions that support the use of international teaching assistants to teach undergraduate students. Although a commonplace practice, university administrators, faculty members,
undergraduate students, and other stakeholders have been unable to agree on the benefit, or lack thereof, in employing this international graduate student population and their domestic cohort members as teachers. Consequently, little consistency exists in determining the needs of these novice teachers and in designing curricular components to meet these specific needs. Secondly, the literature on international teaching assistants operates from a deficit framework. Frequently, researchers used phrases such as the ‘teaching assistant problem’ as a springboard for discussing the needs of these teaching assistants. Thirdly, existing preparation programs often focused on improving language proficiency while neglecting other needs such as training on instructional aids and teaching techniques or student learning or goal setting. Finally, the practice of using international teaching assistants has served as a backdrop for broader issues about the value of undergraduate education as opposed to graduate education a problematic that raises the more fundamental issue of the tension between the research mission of the university and its teaching function.
CHAPTER III: PROCEDURES FOR THE INQUIRY

Lincoln and Guba (1985) posited that the researcher’s responses to fundamental, yet interconnected questions about the nature of reality, about the relationship between researcher and participants in the inquiry, the role values play in the inquiry, and how the inquirer should seek out knowledge, contribute to an understanding of the philosophical underpinnings of the inquiry. Responses to these questions also aid in defining the essence of the research paradigm. Moreover, responses to these particular questions provide “a framework (theory, ontology) that specifies a set of questions (epistemology) that are then examined (methodology, analysis) in specific ways” (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p. 11). For the purposes of this inquiry, qualitative research methods embedded within the constructivist framework provided the methodological framework for the study. In the following sections, the underlying assumptions associated with the constructivist paradigm and characteristics of qualitative research methods that were employed in this inquiry are discussed.

Assumptions of the Constructivist Paradigm

Research conducted within the constructivist paradigm, often referred to as naturalistic inquiry (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), qualitative research, postpositivist or postmodern perspective (Quantz, 1992), hermeneutic research (Guba & Lincoln, 1989), or interpretative approach (Smith, 1983), functions within “a set of overarching and interconnected assumptions about the nature of reality and the construction of knowledge” (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994, p. 4). These assumptions shape the researcher’s behavior, perspective, and approach to inquiry. Ultimately, these assumptions influence the interpretation of findings and subsequent policy creation and
implementation (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). In discussing these assumptions and their resulting behaviors, Ely, Anzul, Friedman, Garner, Steinmetz (1991) observed that individuals working within the naturalistic or constructivist paradigm consequently function within a set of flexible axioms encompassing both varied and shifting realities, realities influencing both the researcher and the researched.

The first axiom within the constructivist paradigm, then, is that of ontological relativism (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) which concedes that multiple and socially constructed realities exist and that these constructions are “devised by individuals as they attempt to make sense of their experiences, which . . . are always interactive in nature” (p. 86). Thus, constructions and realities are alterable and complex as the individuals involved in the inquiry: the researcher, participants, and eventually those interpreting the study, comprehend the meaning of events and interactions in the research situation (Creswell, 1994). In discussing the goal of research within a relativist ontological position, Erlandson, Harris, Skipper and Allen (1993) asserted that the intent of inquiry is to develop a deep understanding of the insider’s construction of reality—the emic perspective. One of the assumptions of this study, then, is that the manner in which international teaching assistants, as outsiders within the academy, construct reality about their role as teaching assistant is dependent upon their previous educational experience and their interactions with faculty members and undergraduate students. An exploration of these constructions is necessary to develop a holistic perspective about the international teaching assistant experience.

The second axiom within the constructivist paradigm, that of subjectivist epistemology, addresses the relationship of the inquirer to those participating in the
According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), “the inquirer and ‘object’ of inquiry interact to influence one another; knower and known are inseparable” (p. 37).

Consequently, the researcher and the study participants adopt postures not of detachment and distance but rather of linkage and interactivity as co-creators in the construction of knowledge. This is a posture which has implications particularly with regard to the role that values play in any inquiry. Integral to the constructivist paradigm is an assumption concerning axiology to which all inquiry, even empirical inquiry, is value-bound, influenced as it is by the ideals, ethics, axioms, and assumptions of the inquirer regardless of the methodology undergirding such inquiry (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The role of the qualitative researcher, then, is to recognize that values are inherent in the inquiry process. Consequently, an “explicit account of values” (p. 174) influencing the study, data collection, analysis, and the final product should be recognized and declared. Chapter VI contains an account of the values influencing this study.

Having assumed relativist ontology and a subjectivist epistemology it stands to reason that the methodological position, an additional assumption of naturalistic inquiry, would reflect congruency in the intent of inquiry within the constructivist paradigm. Creswell (1994) observed that this intent involved a process for “understanding a social or human problem, based on building a complex, holistic picture, formed with words, reporting detailed views of informants, and conducted in a natural setting” (pp. 1-2). Accordingly, the methodology must be hermeneutic in nature and carried out in such a way that will illustrate and expose constructions to the scalpel of criticism which often results in the emergence of more sophisticated constructions. This hermeneutic methodology is at once pragmatic and dialectic as it serves to forge a more concise
understanding of observed interactions (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). It is equally important; however, to develop alternative theories and research that consider the complexities associated with the multiple roles of international teaching assistants. This goes along with the task of generating new knowledge about how this student population makes meaning of the assistantship experience. In creating knowledge from the perspective and interpretation of the individual involved, Creswell (1998) argued that:

Knowledge is within the meanings people make of it; knowledge is gained through people talking about their meanings; knowledge is laced with personal biases and values; knowledge is written in a personal, up-close way; and knowledge evolves, emerges, and is inextricably tied to the context in which it is studied. (p. 19)

From the foregoing, it is clear that the underlying assumptions of the constructivist paradigm concede that realities are multiple and shifting, that the relationship between the researcher and participant is bi-directional, and that values are inherent in the inquiry process. These axioms have implications for conducting this inquiry and influenced data collection, data analysis, and the final product. In the following section, procedures for conducting this inquiry and the characteristics of the qualitative research methods employed in this investigation are provided.

Site Selection

Investigation shaped by the naturalistic tradition of inquiry dictates selecting a site or sites where individuals experiencing “the phenomenon being explored . . . can articulate their conscious experiences” (Creswell, 1998, p. 111). Adelman’s (1990) national study of undergraduate students enrolled in courses likely to be taught by
international teaching assistants indicated that points of contact between international teaching assistants and domestic undergraduate students significantly increased at research or comprehensive institutions. Courses taught by international teaching assistants included required or prerequisite entry-level classes most specifically in business and the scientific and technical fields. For the purposes of this inquiry, the site selected was a doctoral degree granting institution where a significant number of international graduate students were appointed as teaching assistants. The site selected for the study was fairly typical of doctoral degree granting institutions throughout the United States. In reference to site selection, Patton (1990) indicated “when the typical site sampling strategy is used the site is specifically selected because it is not in any major way atypical, extreme, deviant, or intensely unusual” (p. 173). In the following section, rationale for selecting this particular site is outlined.

Site Institution Profile

The institution selected for this study was a public, doctoral/research intensive university located in the Midwestern portion of the United States. At the time research for the study was conducted, approximately 19,000 students were enrolled on the university’s main campus (Office of Institutional Research, www/xxxxxx.eduoffice/ir/factbook/student/headcount-en/college/total.htm). Graduate students accounted for approximately seven percent of the total university enrollment. International graduate students accounted for approximately 15 percent of the total graduate student enrollment and over 225 of these individuals were appointed as teaching assistants (Office of Institutional Research, http://www/xxxxxx.edu/ /offices/ir/factbook/student/ headcount-en/college/total.htm). The institution had a history
of providing teacher training and preparation for undergraduate students. This was evidenced by the institution’s requirement that all teaching assistants enroll in the *Instruction in Higher Education* [italics added] course offered through the Graduate College. The course was designed to instruct teaching assistants in “fundamental concepts in educational philosophy, classroom management, and professional ethics for college-level classes” (Graduate College Catalog, 2006-2007, p. 128).

The undergraduate students electing to attend the selected institution were primarily first-generation students with little experience or exposure to individuals who were ethnically or culturally different. These students arrived on campus with a set of assumptions and expectations about teaching and learning, which influenced interpersonal interactions within the classroom. Studies conducted by Althen (1991), Bailey (1984), Bernhardt (1987), Davis (1991), Sadow and Maxwell (1983), and Sarkodie-Mensah (1991/1998) concluded that these assumptions and expectations were culturally constructed. Consequently, tensions between culturally different teaching assistants and undergraduate students increased as both groups brought differing cultural perspectives to the classroom setting often resulting in conflict. In keeping with the purposes of this inquiry--develop a deeper understanding of the teaching experience of international teaching assistants as they learn to teach in a language and culture that is not their own--it was appropriate then to select a setting that would provide an exploration of the international teaching assistant’s “lifeworld” (Van Manen, 1990, p. 9) as it was experienced.

Thirdly, the institution participated in two endeavors that allegedly promoted internationalization. Its general education requirements for the bachelor’s degree called
for the completion of an international perspective course (Undergraduate Catalog, 2006-2007). These courses were designed to provide undergraduate students with an awareness of perspectives that exist beyond the boundaries of the United States with a view to encouraging students to be open-minded in appreciation of diverse viewpoints. In addition to the international perspective course, the selected site was a place where faculty members, administrators, and students were encouraged to participate in international educational exchange programs. These exchanges suggested receptiveness on the part of university administrators to bring “. . . increasing numbers of non-U.S. citizens. . . into positions of influence through their teaching” (Smith et al. 1992, p. 11).

The final justification for selecting the institution of choice had to do with convenient organizational structures for gaining access to individuals within the selected institution with expertise about the international teaching assistant experience. As a member of the academic community where the study was conducted, I had numerous discussions with gatekeepers from the Center for International Programs and the Graduate College about the focus of the study. Administrators within these offices not only offered the services of their offices (i.e., mailing lists, electronic databases, information about national organizations, etc.) but also provided names of additional informants on campus who had expertise in the area of international graduate student teaching experience.

Participant Selection

The goal of participant selection in the qualitative research paradigm is not probability sampling which focuses on randomly selecting a large, statistically representative sample to permit generalizations to a larger population, but rather non-
probability sampling which “focuses in depth on relatively small samples” selected purposefully (Patton, 1990, p. 169). Such sample construction allows for “capturing and describing central themes” (p. 172) from heterogeneous participants most likely to have experienced the phenomenon under investigation. Since the purpose of this inquiry was to understand and explicate how international teaching assistants made meaning of the teaching assistantship, participants were chosen based on an ability to provide in-depth “information-rich cases” (p.169). Therefore, sampling was purposeful (Patton, 1990) or purposive (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Participants were recruited based on their ability to provide information-rich cases and thick descriptions (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) about the graduate teaching assistant experience. Participant selection was conducted in several phases. The first phase, the discovery phase, involved determining a preliminary pool of prospective participants.

During the first phase it was necessary to create a viable pool of prospective participants most likely to provide the information-rich cases and thick description desired for the study. To begin the sampling process, prospective participants were identified through The Graduate College. College staff provided the names and e-mail addresses of graduate students coded as international students and falling into one of two Graduate Assistant Assignment Categories. Graduate assistants receiving institutional support and classified as having in-class student contact were categorized either as Instruction Primary or Instruction Secondary. Instruction Primary was defined as a graduate student teaching her/his “own class under appropriate faculty supervision” (The Graduate College Handout, 2007). Instruction Secondary was defined as a graduate student teaching recitation or laboratory sections of lecture classes. Responsibilities
included classroom instruction, tutoring, grading, and helping students during office hours. Because of the focus of the study, these definitions were used to narrow the scope of the prospective participant pool, to eliminate from consideration those graduate assistants who were serving as administrative assistants, research assistants, or those awarded non-service fellowships. The discovery phase yielded names of 320 individuals classified as international graduate students with the designation of either primary or secondary teaching assistant.

After these potential participants were identified, *A Call for Participants* form was issued requesting self-nominations or peer nominations for participation in the study. A packet of information was provided containing the following information:

1. Call for Participants Form (Appendix A)
2. Participant Information Profile Form (Appendix B)
3. Lay Summary (Appendix C), and
4. Participant Informed Consent Form (Appendix D).

The Participant Information Profile was designed to collect contact information from prospective participants. Return of the form indicated a willingness to participate in the research study. Failure to return the form indicated an unwillingness to participate in the study. Data gathered from the Information Profile was used to select a diverse pool of participants. The lay summary served a threefold purpose. The summary provided information to the prospective participants about me as an individual and researcher. Secondly, the summary explained the purpose of the research and the rationale for conducting the study. Lastly, the summary outlined the participant’s role in the research.

The second phase of participant selection was based on the principles of
criterion-based sampling (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993) or criterion sampling (Patton, 1990) requiring the use of a predetermined set of criteria and selecting cases based on their ability to meet the criteria. The following criteria were then developed for initial selection purposes:

a. a participant must have been enrolled as a graduate student at the selected institution,
b. a participant must have been awarded an appointment as a teaching assistant as defined by the Graduate College,
c. a participant was responsible for teaching undergraduate students,
d. nationality,
e. gender,
f. academic discipline,
g. length of time teaching, and
h. teaching responsibility

As indicated earlier, sample construction within the qualitative paradigm is focused on identifying themes or patterns from relatively small, yet heterogeneous, individual cases. However, as Patton (1990) indicated, “a great deal of heterogeneity can be a problem because individual cases are so different from each other” (p. 172). Paying heed to this insight, and in the effort to maximize variation in a small sample, participants for this study were selected with an eye to diverse characteristics in the midst of shared commonalities, the shared commonalities being that of international graduate student, teaching assistant, and non-native speaker of English. Thus, “any common patterns that emerge from great variation are of particular interest and value in capturing the core
experiences and central, shared aspects or impacts . . . ” (p. 172) of the teaching assistantship experience. Maximum variation sampling began with the Participant Information Profile. Use of this form served several purposes. Return of the form indicated the respondent’s initial willingness to participate in the study. The form also provided contact information about individual respondents. Other information such as gender, nationality, assistantship appointment, academic discipline, and teaching responsibility permitted identification of a variety of characteristics for selecting participants sharing the experience of being an international graduate student and teaching assistant.

Seven participants were involved and completed the study. At the beginning of the study, five participants were selected to participate. One of the initial five participants withdrew from the study. Three additional participants were included in the study later in the data collection process. Distinguishing characteristics of these individuals included (a) a respondent who participated in a high school study abroad program to the United States and began her stint as a teaching assistant in the College of Education with three days notice; (b) a participant who earned both a bachelor’s and master’s degree from the site institution, returned home and then re-enrolled at the site institution to begin his doctoral work; (c) an international teaching assistant who indicated that talking about his experience “might affect change for the better” in his teaching and within the department; (d) an individual with only a few weeks teaching experience when the study began; and (f) an international teaching assistant with 20 years of teaching experience in his home country and approximately 17 semesters (including both summer sessions) teaching at the site institution. After participating in three interview sessions and allowing me to observe
his classroom teaching on two occasions, the fifth participant elected to withdraw from
the study citing multiple reasons for doing so.

Those selected to participate in the study were mailed a letter of confirmation
both through regular mail and electronic mail (Appendix E). Additionally, each
respondent was contacted individually to schedule the preliminary interview. The
preliminary interview was designed to discuss the purpose of the study, to respond to
respondents’ questions and concerns, and to negotiate consent for participation.
Participants were provided a consent form to review prior to the preliminary interview
(Appendix D). Individuals not initially selected for inclusion in the study were provided a
letter of appreciation for their willingness to participate and were notified that their
names and contact information would be placed in an alternate pool for future
consideration (Appendix F).

The final purposeful sampling strategy used to select participants for the study
was snowball or chain sampling. Patton indicated that snowball or chain sampling is used
to locate individuals with the ability to provide additional perspectives, which “will
illuminate the questions under study” (p. 169). For this study, initially selected
participants were asked to recommend additional teaching assistants able to contribute to
an in-depth understanding of the international teaching assistantship experience. This
technique yielded three additional participants.

The sixth and seventh participants were invited to participate following
recommendations from other participants. One participant was described as a “brilliant
mind in a challenging and difficult field that attracted a number of male students; yet her
teaching methods were often called into question.” (FN¹) The referring participant indicated that the pleasure she derived in teaching was often negated by her students challenging her right to be in the classroom. Another respondent, an international graduate student, who expressed keen interest in the study’s purpose but was unable to participate, recommended the final participant describing him as “someone who had worked hard to improve his teaching, even enrolling in accent reduction courses” (FN) and as a person who would be an asset to the study.

Selecting the number of individuals to participate in the study was critical to this methodology. Consequently, consideration was given to several factors: the number of participants desired and, most importantly, determining the number of participants who actually had the information rich cases needed to develop an understanding of the assistantship experience. Since the sample size in qualitative research is relatively small, yet selected with the intent of finding participants likely to yield the desired information, Patton’s (1990) assertions about sample size were quite appropriate in responding to these questions. Sample size is primarily dependent on what the researcher is seeking to discover from conducting the study, what the risks are in conducting the study, what is beneficial, what is trustworthy and what is feasible within the parameters of time and financial resources (p. 184).

As indicated earlier, the nature of the qualitative research design is emergent therefore it is difficult to establish “a priori specification of the sample” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 201). However, the primary criterion to discontinue sampling is

¹ The FN notation represents fieldnotes or fieldlog. These notations were recorded following phone conversations, classroom or other observations, member-checking opportunities, or following participants’ interviews. These notations may also reflect personal observations as I attempted to make sense of the teaching assistant experience during the process of data analysis or while crafting the final report.
“informational redundancy” (p. 202). Upon reaching this point in the process “sampling is terminated when no new information is forthcoming from newly sampled units” (p. 202). Following the introductory interview, the first and second round of interviews, the first round of classroom observations, and initial data analysis, it was determined, in concert with the peer reviewer/debriefer (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) that expansion of the participant pool would not yield any new information, eliminating the need for additional participants. A peer reviewer/debriefer, is defined as a “disinterested peer” (p. 308) serving as “an experienced protagonist doing his or her best to play the devil’s advocate” (p. 308). Moreover, the peer review/debriefer assists in providing feedback to refine the inquiry. Consequently, then, in concert with the peer reviewer/debriefer the decision was made that the criteria for informational redundancy had been satisfied.

Data Collection and Data Analysis

Miles and Huberman (1984) argued that data collection and data analysis were most effective when conducted simultaneously. This process allows the researcher to “cycle back and forth between thinking about the existing data and generating strategies for collecting new—often better quality—data . . . so the ideal model for data collection and analysis is one that interweaves them from the beginning” (p. 49). The data collection and data analysis model proposed by Miles and Huberman acknowledge the interactive, cyclical nature of the qualitative research process. Following the Miles and Huberman model, data collection and data analysis for this study were conducted concurrently. Bogdan and Biklen (1992), Glesne (1999), and Merriman (1998) have also suggested that data analysis should begin as soon as data is generated and continue through the multiple cycles of data gathering. This has also been followed in this study. Because the
Participant Information Profile represented the beginning of the data collection process, analysis began at that point. Furthermore, analysis continued during the use of other data-gathering techniques: participant observation, participant interviews, and document collection. In the sections to follow, these data-gathering techniques are discussed in greater detail. Additionally, this section concludes with a discussion of “ways to augment the trustworthiness of research” (Glesne, 1999, p. 32) as well as describing how these practices were implemented during the course of this inquiry.

A key component of qualitative research methodology is that an understanding of the human experience is best accomplished through an investigation of the human phenomenon in its naturalistic setting (Erlandson et al., 1993; Glesne, 1999; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Marshall & Rossman, 1995; Van Manen, 1990). Accordingly, Maykut and Morehouse (1994) purported that “in order to understand any human phenomenon we must investigate it as part of the context within which it lies” (p. 68). At the time of this study, to my knowledge, there had not been a holistic study conducted of how international teaching assistants as foreigners and newcomers to the academy perceive and acquire cultural knowledge and how they reconcile multiple microcultures with the macroculture of higher education in order to become effective teachers. Thus, in responding to the query: “What is this . . . kind of experience like?” (Van Manen, 1990, p. 9) multiple sources of data needed to be examined. To achieve this end, people, the social settings where they worked and interacted, and documents that aided in understanding these social settings and interactions provided the major data sources for this study.
In addition to determining the most appropriate data sources, consideration was given to the most complementary data-gathering techniques to study the phenomenon in question. Data-gathering techniques frequently used in qualitative inquiry include participant observation, personal interviewing, and the collection of documents (Ely, Anzul, Friedman, Garner, Steinmetz, 1991; Glesne, 1999; Merriam, 1998). The use of multiple data-gathering techniques has strengthened the study’s design while making provision for cross-checking information and developing a more complete picture of the phenomenon under investigation. In the following section, a description of each data source and data-gathering technique used in the study is provided.

Observation

Observation was one of the primary data-gathering sources utilized during this study. Marshall and Rossman (1989) defined observation as “the systematic description of events, behaviors, and artifacts in the social setting chosen for study” (p. 79). This systematic description provides the researcher with a means to directly experience firsthand the internal workings of the human phenomena in its natural setting and “to understand the research setting, its participants, and their behavior” (Glesne, 1999, p. 45) as the phenomenon unfolds. Glesne (1999) also contended that it is quite appropriate to use observation as a data-gathering source when little is known about the phenomena under investigation. During an occasion such as this, observations would be used as a springboard for informing interview questions, discovering additional areas of investigation, as well as aiding positive researcher/participant relationships.

In discussing the complexity of observing human phenomena, Polanyi (1958)
advanced the concept of indwelling defined literally as “to live within.” In the case of qualitative inquiry, Polanyi reasoned that through indwelling researchers developed an understanding of the phenomenon under investigation as a result of prolonged immersion in its complexities. Furthermore, in a discussion of the goal of observational research and the role of the researcher, Guba and Lincoln (1981) provided an illustration, which aptly illuminates the concept of indwelling.

[Observation] . . . maximizes the inquirer’s ability to grasp motives, beliefs, concerns, interests, unconscious behaviors, customs, and the like; observation . . . allows the inquirer to see the world as his [or her] subjects see it; to live in their time frames, to capture the phenomenon in and on its own terms, and to grasp the culture in its own natural, ongoing environment; observation . . . provides the inquirer with access to the emotional reactions of the group introspectively—that is, in a real sense it permits the observer to build on tacit knowledge, both his [and her] own and that of members of the group (p. 193).

During the course of this inquiry, observations were conducted using a posture of indwelling in an attempt to understand the life experience of international teaching assistants while, as much as possible, suspending my own ways of viewing the world.

Process

Erlandson et al. (1993), Lincoln and Guba (1985), Merriam (1998), and Patton (1990) recognized that the process of participant-observation ranged across a continuum with the participant-observer role falling at any point along this continuum comprising the non-interactional observer, the observer as participant, the participant as observer, the full participant and the observational inquirer. All these categories of inquirers may enter
into different roles at different times during the data collection process (Glesne, 1999). The distinguishing factor between these roles is the degree to which the observational inquirer participates in the phenomenon under investigation since the observer’s initial placement on the continuum is dependent on the question under examination, the context of the particular study, and the inquirer’s theoretical perspective (Glesne, 1999).

Since the purpose of this inquiry was to understand and explicate how international teaching assistants make meaning of their assistantship experience, extended periods of time observing study participants in the classroom and other settings was needed. During the preliminary introduction introductory meeting, each participant was provided with a second copy of the informed consent form. The purpose and intent of the study was discussed, and the participant’s role was clarified. Classroom observation sessions and interview times were also scheduled.

Observation sessions were conducted with five of the seven participants on two separate occasions. Two participants, interviewed during the summer sessions, were not teaching at that particular time. One participant left the country shortly after interviews were conducted to begin research for her dissertation and the other returned to his home country for a lengthy visit before beginning doctoral work at another institution. Sessions ranged in length from approximately one to three hours. Brief meetings were held with each participant before and after each observation to discuss the purpose, format, and content of the class meetings. The brief meeting after the session provided an opportunity for member-checking and to clarify my perceptions of events during the observation.

In addition to classroom observations, other opportunities existed to gather as much information as possible about the experiences of the international teaching
assistants. One participant, active in multiple cultural events across campus, extended an invitation to witness his performance in a play. Another participant extended an invitation to participate in festivities for Chinese New Year. Invitations were also extended and accepted to participate in church activities, international film festivals, and university training sessions. These activities were beneficial in providing a holistic perspective of the international teaching assistant experience.

Recording Observational Data.

Bogdan and Biklen (1992) contended that field-notes were the “mainstay of qualitative research” (p. 107) and that “in participant observation . . . all the data are considered to be field-notes” (p. 107). In keeping with the genre of qualitative research, data collected through observational research was recorded as part of an ongoing field log that I maintained throughout the course of this inquiry. In discussing the importance of the log, Ely, Anzul, Friedman, Garner, Steinmetz (1991) argued that the “log is the repository of all the data that have been gathered through observation . . . and contains the data upon which the analysis is begun and carried forward” (p. 69). Furthermore, the log contains a chronological record of what the researcher learns as well as insights as to how this learning takes place (Ely, Anzul, Friedman, Garner, Steinmetz, 1991). Thus, field-notes were recorded that were both descriptive and reflective in nature.

Descriptive notes were used in an “attempt to capture a word-picture of the setting, people, actions, and conversations as observed” (Ely et al, 1991, p. 119). Elaborating on the metaphor of field-notes as word-picture, Maykut and Morehouse (1994) argued that “the participant observer’s primary task is to record what happened without inferring feelings to the participants . . . and without inferring why or how
something happened (p. 73). Equally as important however, is the “researcher’s interpretation of events” (p. 73). Therefore, reflective notes were used in an attempt to capture and record my internal dialogue, thoughts, feelings, ideas, and perceptions that occurred during the process of observing. Emphasis was placed on keeping extensive, accurate, and detailed notes with an understanding that field-notes undergird qualitative inquiry and provide an audit trail to enhance the study’s quality and credibility. An observational protocol for recording observations is provided in Appendix H.

**Personal Interviews**

Another data-gathering source for the purposes of this inquiry was personal interviews. Bogdan and Biklen (1982) defined an interview as “... a purposeful conversation usually between two people (but sometimes involving more) that is directed by one in order to get information” (p. 135). There are multiple goals for conducting interviews. Patton (1990) indicated that the primary purpose of interviews as a data collection source is to “access the perspective of the person being interviewed ... to find out from them those things [the researcher] cannot directly observe” (p. 278). Personal interviews, as a data-gathering source, dovetail nicely with observations.

Eliciting the participant’s perspective during the interview process allows the participant and the researcher to move back and forth in time between constructions of the present and reconstructions of the past to projections about the future (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Thus, the interview as a purposeful conversation affords the researcher an opportunity to engage the participant in a rich discussion of the cultural and social attributes of the environment. This shared interaction leads to a deeper understanding of the phenomena under investigation.
Process.

Much like observation, interview formats for qualitative inquiry range across a continuum from one that is highly structured to a relatively unstructured counterpart. According to Maykut and Morehouse (1994) “the structure of the interview has to do primarily with the extent to which the questions to be asked of the interviewee are developed prior to the interview” (p. 81). Along this continuum Merriam (1998) and Patton (1990) have identified three basic approaches to collecting qualitative data through personal interviews. These three approaches, the informal conversational approach, the general interview guide approach, and the standardized open-ended interview, serve different purposes and require different procedures for preparation. However, “each format . . . shares a critical commonality: The questions are open-ended and designed to reveal what is important to understand about the phenomenon under study” (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994, p. 81).

The format used in this study was a combination of interview types ranging from highly structured to unstructured. Firstly, a standardized open-ended interview approach was used to ask certain questions of all participants such as nationality, courses taught, highest educational level obtained, current field of study, length of time teaching, and gender.

Secondly, a general interview guide or semi-structured interview was deemed appropriate for several reasons. This approach provided the necessary flexibility for an exploration of participants’ construction of their unique world. Development of an interview guide (Appendix G) helped make interviewing more “systematic and
Moreover, the interview guide permitted the exploration of emerging topics or subjects as they arose while adopting a posture of openness and sensitivity during the person-to-person interaction. Lastly, an informal conversational approach was used at appropriate times such as before and after observation sessions or following participation in a cultural activity. In this approach questions emerged from events that were occurring naturally in the setting. Questions, then, were contextual and immediate and were often used to learn what should be asked during subsequent interviews (Merriam, 1998).

Patton (1990) identified several types of questions used in qualitative interviews: (a) experience and behavior questions designed to elicit descriptions of what participants do or have done; (b) opinion and values questions geared at understanding participants’ cognitive and interpretive process; (c) feeling questions aimed at understanding participants’ emotional responses to their experiences and thoughts; (d) knowledge questions designed to determine what participants consider to be factual; (e) sensory questions aimed at discerning what participants have seen, heard, touched, tasted, and smelled which will aid in rich description of the setting; and (f) background and demographic questions aimed at identifying participants’ individual characteristics. Using a combination of these types of questions, an interview protocol was developed for use during the initial interviews. This protocol is provided in Appendix G.

Of the eight original participants, seven individuals were interviewed twice. Four of these seven participants were interviewed three times. One participant was interviewed only once prior to leaving the country. Second and third interviews were used to confirm preliminary findings and interpretations from first interviews but were also used to
continue exploration of the teaching assistant experience. Both second and third round interviews were conducted over a period of 19 months. Each first round interview ranged in length from 45 minutes to approximately two and one half hours. Each second and third round interview ranged in length from approximately two hours to four hours.

Prior to the beginning of each interview, time was spent discussing and clarifying the purpose and intent of the study, discussing the participant’s role in the research study, and re-negotiating consent to conduct the study. The hierarchical and intrusive nature of questioning with the intent of eliciting a response dictated re-negotiating consent prior to each interview interaction.

*Recording Interview Data.*

In discussing the most accurate and reliable means of recording data gathered through qualitative interviews, qualitative researchers Lincoln and Guba (1985), Maykut and Morehouse (1994), Merriam (1998), and Patton (1990), advocated devising “some method for recording the verbatim responses of people being interviewed” (Patton, 1990, p. 348). Patton stressed that no matter what style of interviewing is used, and no matter how carefully one words interview questions, little is accomplished if the interviewees’ words are lost (p. 347). It stands to reason then, that the most accurate and non-intrusive means of capturing data verbatim would be to mechanically audio record participant interviews. Thus, 15 of the 19 structured interviews were tape-recorded. Verbatim transcriptions of the taped data were created. Copies were provided to each participant for review and to check for accuracy. One participant suggested minor changes in word selection and sentence structure. All participants, with one exception, requested that their
word choices, sentence structure, use of tenses, and use of pronouns be corrected when transcript portions were included in the completed study (see later discussion).

In addition to audio taping these interpersonal interactions, detailed notes were taken in an attempt to capture the humanness of the participant particularly focusing on idiosyncratic facial expressions, hand gestures, and body language. These notes were included in the field notes. Patton (1990) indicated that note taking during the qualitative interview process, even though an audio recorder was being used, accomplished at least four purposes: (a) the interviewer remained attentive to the respondent; (b) new questions could be developed from these field notes; (c) accurate, descriptive, and thorough notes helped to facilitate data analysis later on; and (d) note taking provided nonverbal feedback to the participant that the conversation was “sufficiently important to have been written down” (p. 349).

Participants were made fully aware of intentions to audio-tape the interview sessions. Information supplied in the Call for Participants and the consent form outlined intentions to mechanically record these interpersonal interactions. Nevertheless, participants were afforded the option of declining to be audio-taped during sessions. Field notes then became the primary source of recording interview data for the participant electing not to have sessions mechanically recorded. At the request of the participant, one interview was not recorded; however, detailed notes were taken during the conversation. Following the interview these notes were transcribed and presented to the participant to determine their accuracy.

As mentioned earlier, considerable thought was given to the number of observations and interviews necessary to accomplish the purposes of this inquiry. Lincoln
and Guba (1985) posited that once there is no new information forthcoming, informational redundancy has been reached and at this point there is little need to continue the interviewing process. Following multiple interviews, observation sessions, informal conversations with the participants, and the initial data analysis, it was determined that little new information was forthcoming. At this point interviews and observations were discontinued.

Upon completion of each interview, the audio-taped sessions were transcribed verbatim. This transcribed data was the primary source for data analysis. Each participant was provided a copy of the transcriptions for review. Participants were asked to review the document for clarity and accuracy in reporting their words and capturing their perspectives. Moreover, participants were asked to note any sections not to be used for direct quotations.

**Document Analysis**

Document analysis was the final source of data collection for this investigation. Merriam (1998) defined the word document in qualitative inquiry as an “umbrella term to refer to a wide range of written, visual, and physical material relevant to the study at hand” (p. 112). The term document, for this study, pertained to publications produced and distributed by the site institution for the purposes of attracting, recruiting, and disseminating information to international teaching assistants as well as materials generated by international teaching assistants such as course syllabi, course calendars, and BlackBoard\(^2\) web information. According to Bogdan and Biklen (1992) examination of forms of communication produced for public consumption is critical in understanding the institution’s official perspective on the phenomena at hand, in this case the teaching

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\(^2\) The site institution’s online course delivery and management system.
assistant role. For this particular student population, these written forms of communication often serve as an introduction to the culture of the institution and to higher education in the United States. Examination of this written material served a threefold purpose: (a) it provided additional information for the purpose of understanding the phenomenon under investigation; (b) it provided insights into attitudes, beliefs, values, etc. that are not observable; and (c) it revealed additional questions appropriate for further investigation either through observations or interviews.

Process.

Patton (1990) stressed the role of negotiation with participants to gain access to documents used in qualitative inquiry. However, as mentioned above, documents to be used for this investigation are those that were readily available for public consumption. Therefore, negotiation with participants for access to this written information was not necessary. Documents that served as sources of data, included:

a. The university mission statement,

b. Recruitment materials issued to prospective international students,

c. The Graduate College course catalog and website,

d. Orientation/training materials from the Graduate College

e. Orientation/training materials from the Center for International Programs,

f. College or academic department orientation/training materials,

g. University web pages,

h. Participant generated materials.

Notes from critical reflections concerning information gleaned from these documents were compiled and noted in the field log. When appropriate, excerpts of these
documents were included in an audit trail along with notes complied from observational data, interview transcripts, and descriptive and reflective notes. These notes were an integral data source during the cyclical process of data analysis.

*The Human Instrument*

Development of a nonhuman instrument capable of capturing the multiple constructions, which reflect the complexity of the human experience, is essentially an impossible task. Consequently, Erlandson et al. (1993), Lincoln and Guba (1985), Maykut and Morehouse (1994) maintained that the primary instrument for collecting and analyzing qualitative data is a human one. The rationale for this primacy is based on a number of factors. At the core of naturalistic inquiry is the investigation of the human experience. According to Maykut and Morehouse (1994) this human experience is multifaceted and much “too complex to be captured by a static one-dimensional [nonhuman] instrument” (p. 27). Therefore, Lincoln and Guba (1985) reasoned that an individual, as a human instrument, is the only mechanism capable of responsiveness and sufficiently adaptable to comprehend these experiences.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) specified characteristics, which “uniquely qualify the human as the instrument of choice for naturalistic inquiry” (p. 193). The human instrument has the ability to process data immediately. Through “processual immediacy” (p. 194) the qualitative inquirer is able to collect data, cull meanings from the data, and develop tentative conclusions about the data simultaneously. Unlike a nonhuman instrument, only the human instrument has the capability of requesting explanations when clarification is needed and is able to provide participants with immediate feedback (p. 194). Indwelling, defined as “being at one with the persons under investigation . . . or
understanding the person’s point of view from an empathic rather than a sympathetic position” (p. 25), can only be accomplished with a human instrument. Moreover, indwelling is necessary to know and understand individuals in a particular environment as much as it is humanly possible to know and understand others.

In discussing these advantages of the human instrument as a method for qualitative inquiry, Lincoln and Guba (1985) pointed out that “they are meaningless if the human instrument is not also trustworthy” (p. 194). According to Ely et al (1991) this trustworthiness is not just about the researcher following processes from conception to completion that is fair and reflective of the participant’s actual experiences; the researcher “must [also] be grounded in ethical principles. . . . Trustworthiness is, thus, more than a set of procedures . . . it is a personal belief system” (p. 93) shaping inquiry procedures, design, and the finished product.

Data Analysis

The following sections provide an explanation of the techniques used to prepare the data for analysis, manage the data, and the techniques used for data analysis.

Pre-analysis Preparation

Returning for a moment to earlier discussions on the human-as-instrument, Maykut and Morehouse (1994) advocated that an initial step in the process of data analysis had to do with the researcher being critically aware of the influence of her/his “own biases and preconceptions” (p. 123) while attempting to understand bias on the part of others. According to Glesne (1998) the researcher’s biases, viewpoints, and assumptions—the subjective lens, “. . . is always a part of the research from deciding on the research topic to selecting frames of interpretation . . . once recognized, [subjectivity]
can be monitored for more trustworthy research . . . and can contribute to research” (p. 105).

For the purposes of this particular inquiry then, an examination of personal biases and preconceptions used to explain the international teaching assistant experience was necessary. Appendix I provided an opportunity to begin this reflective process by accounting for what Peshkin (1988) refers to as “one’s subjectivity . . . [that fits] like a garment that cannot be removed. It is insistently present in both the research and nonresearch aspects of our life” (p. 17). Thus, a written disclosure of perspectives and viewpoints that could interfere with an accurate portrayal and interpretation of the participant’s experience was created. Moreover, this reflective account encouraged exploration of the intersection that exists between decisions to conduct and carryout the inquiry with the inquirer’s own lived experiences.

Since the primary instrument used for data collection in this study was human and therefore fallible, and the basic, raw data were words, it was necessary to refine the data prior to beginning data analysis. A critical step in beginning data analysis according to Miles and Huberman (1984) involves preparation of the raw data into a form that is “intelligible to anyone” (p. 50). For this inquiry then, transcribed audio taped recordings of interviews and fieldnotes generated through observations, document analysis, and personal reflections were converted into word-processed documents.

**Data Management**

The design employed for the process of data analysis was based on Creswell’s (1998) general contour for analyzing data, the data analysis spiral. The spiral serves as a framework for conceptualizing the inductive process of analysis and indicates a method
that requires moving in analytic circles rather than using a fixed linear approach. One enters with data of text or images (e.g., photographs, videotapes) and exits with an account or a narrative. In between, the researcher touches on several facets of analysis and circles around and around (p. 142) indicating that the analysis process is not fixed and static and movement in and out of these “circles” throughout the analysis process is necessary.

The first loop in the spiral was data management. For this study, data management began with assembling and sorting interview transcriptions, fieldnotes, and notes from observations. Each line of data was numbered and each page of data was coded, meaning that each page of typed text was clearly labeled to identify and include the date the activity transpired, participant, type and source of data (transcription, fieldnotes or log, observation), and the number of the data set. Once coding was completed, data pages were photocopied. The original units of data served as a permanent resource database.

*Reading and Memoing.*

The second loop in the data analysis spiral involved reading and memoing. Agar (1980) suggested that in this phase of the analysis that the researcher read the data several times in its entirety. Immersion in the details helps the researcher to explore the database and to obtain a holistic picture of what the data are saying. While reading, the researcher should begin making notations in the margins of fieldnotes and transcripts. Creswell (1998) refers to this process as memoing and stressed its importance in developing key concepts in preparation for the third loop in the data analysis spiral, description, classification, and interpretation. Each page of numbered and coded data was read
multiple times in an attempt to make meaning, make sense, of the information contained within the pages. Margin notations were written to segregate small sections of the data from the larger data set.

**Description, Classification, Interpretation**

The third loop of the analysis spiral is what Creswell described as the heart of qualitative data analysis, category formation. The first step in the categorization process, was to unitize the data by looking for meaning in the “. . . words and actions of the participants” (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994, p. 128). This process required determining meaning in smaller units or passages of data that would eventually be assembled into “larger categories of meaning” (p.128). These smaller units, according to Lincoln and Guba (1985), should have two characteristics. First the unit should be heuristic, that is, “aimed at some understanding” (p. 345) and second, “it must be the smallest piece of information about something that can stand by itself, that is, it must be interpretable in the absence of any additional information other than a broad understanding of the context in which the inquiry is carried out” (p. 345).

Culling the data for meaning required segmenting portions of the written text from the larger data set. Once these smaller units were identified, data cards were created by cutting the larger data set into manageable portions and pasting these onto note cards. These note cards were sorted, like with like. The unitized data was then used to create provisional categories or themes.

**Category Construction**

The processes for categorizing data for this study were modeled after the constant comparative method developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967). Although designed for
building theory, the constant comparative method of analysis is well suited for the “inductive, concept-building orientation of all qualitative research” (Merriam, 1998, p. 159). Maykut and Morehouse (1994) asserted that the constant comparative method of data analysis required combining the inductive process of creating category codes with a comparison of the previously unitized data. These processes occurred simultaneously as each unit of data was “compared to all other units of meaning and subsequently grouped (categorized and coded) with similar units of meaning” (p. 134). Failure to find similarities in the units of meaning resulted in the formulation of new categories. This process then was one of fluidity, necessitating ongoing revisions as initial categories were modified and additional categories were created, resulting in the discovery of new and different relationships between the categories (p. 134).

The process of formulating and constructing categories required reading and re-reading the data cards and margin notations to determine if the previous interpretations reflected the meaning of the passage. These margin notations, or labels, were used to sort the note cards into assorted piles, like with like. The sorted and labeled cards were then assessed to determine their continued inclusion within these tentative categories. These categories were reviewed and were simultaneously compared with units of meaning across categories resulting in several category iterations with the intent of discovering recurring patterns.

**Representation**

The final loop of Creswell’s (1998) data analysis spiral moves beyond labeling data, unitizing data, and category formation to a discussion about data analysis as representation or reconstruction of social phenomena. Coffey and Atkinson (1996)
argued that critically thinking of how to write about and represent or reconstruct the social phenomena under investigation is a fundamental aspect of qualitative inquiry. This re-presenting or reconstructing begins at the conception phase of the inquiry and continues until completion. Coffey and Atkinson indicated:

> We do not simply ‘collect’ data; we fashion them out of transactions with other men and women. Likewise, we do not merely report what we find; we create accounts of social life and in doing so we construct versions of the social worlds and the social actors that we observe. It is, therefore, inescapable that analysis implies representation (p. 108).

The act of writing then is a textual representation of the experiences, meanings, and voices of the participants in the inquiry. Therefore, care must be exercised in the analysis, interpretation of findings, selection and choices of words, and reconstruction of participants’ stories. To that end, the following section provides criteria for strategies to promote accurate and believable analysis in the representation of participants.

Indices of Quality

A key factor in naturalistic inquiry is responding to concerns about whether the process of data collection, data analysis, and research findings engender believability and confidence. These concerns, involving quality measures such as truth-value or veracity, applicability, consistency, and neutrality, which are quite appropriate for conventional inquiry, have led to the development of techniques designed to judge the quality of naturalistic inquiry. Trustworthiness and authenticity are two such techniques (Erlandson et al., 1993; Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The following section provides a discussion as to how these two techniques were implemented in this study.
Trustworthiness

Techniques for establishing trustworthiness according to Erlandson et al. (1993) address issues of “methodological adequacy” and are undertaken to encourage “methodological safeguards that parallel those established by traditional researchers” (p. 151). Criteria for establishing trustworthiness include credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility refers to the extent to which the inquirer’s interpretation of reality is compatible with participants’ constructed realities as determined by those participants; transferability pertains to the extent to which other consumers of the inquiry deem it applicable if different settings and different participants were used; dependability refers to the extent to which the inquiry’s findings could be repeated using both a comparable setting and participants; and confirmability pertains to the extent to which inquiry findings can be substantiated by other consumers (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Each of these components is discussed in the following section. A discussion of the procedures carried out in this study is also included.

Credibility

Enhancing credibility in a naturalistic inquiry involves a two-pronged approach. The inquirer has a responsibility to conduct the inquiry in such a way that when scrutinized the findings are both believable and reflective of the participants’ experiences. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), the inquirer can best demonstrate credibility by having the findings “approved by the constructors of the multiple realities being studied” (p. 296). To meet these requirements, Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Guba and Lincoln (1989) proposed several complementary activities that dovetail when put into practice. For the purposes of this inquiry, prolonged engagement, triangulation, peer debriefing,
and member checking were used to enhance credibility. Each of these is discussed in turn in the following section.

**Prolonged Engagement**

Prolonged engagement “is the investment of sufficient time to achieve certain purposes: learning the ‘culture,’ testing for information introduced by distortions either of the self or of the respondents, and building trust” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 301). Participant observation as one of the primary data collection methods was used over an extended period of time. Since understanding of a phenomenon cannot be understood or appreciated without sufficient interaction extended, time spent observing and interacting with participants helped facilitate indwelling or immersion in the experience of being an international teaching assistant. Moreover, prolonged engagement afforded opportunities to develop rapport and a relationship with participants with respect and a spirit of collaboration at its core.

**Triangulation**

Triangulation, according to Ely et al (1991), Erlandson et al (1993), Lincoln & Guba, (1985), Patton (1990), is the use of multiple methods of data collection, multiple data sources, and different theoretical perspectives to provide for a consistent, accurate picture of the phenomenon under investigation. This convergence strengthens the study’s design, provides a mechanism for crosschecking of information, and encourages accuracy in findings. Patton (1990) indicated that triangulating data between multiple sources and methods of collection means:

(a) comparing observational data with interview data; (b) comparing what people say in public with what they say in private (c) checking for consistency of what
people say about the same thing over time, and (d) comparing the perspectives of people from different points of view (p. 467).

Data, drawn from multiple data sources (international teaching assistants, documents, and social settings) and multiple data collection methods (participant profiles, observation sessions, personal interviews, and document analysis) were examined for veracity and consistency throughout the course of the investigation. Data sources were compared with other sources of data while prolonged engagement afforded opportunities for comparing actions and behaviors in the classroom with responses to questions. Multiple data sources revealed differing perspectives about the experience of being an international teaching assistant. Moreover, selection of a participant pool reflecting diversity in nationality, ethnic or racial identification, academic discipline, and teaching experiences provided additional means of gathering multiple points of view enhancing confidence in the studies’ findings.

Peer Review and Debriefing

As a third activity for enhancing credibility in this study, peer review and debriefing were used. Erlandson, et al. (1993) indicated that peer review and debriefing enhanced credibility by enlisting the assistance of a peer, an individual who is external to the phenomena of inquiry, for the purposes of asking probing questions to challenge the inquirer’s assumptions, biases, and “working hypothesis and emerging designs, and [to] listen to the researcher’s ideas and concerns” (p. 140). For the peer reviewer role, the individual selected should not be someone in a position of authority over the inquirer or a subordinate. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested that the peer reviewer be an individual
“who is in every sense the inquirer’s peer, someone who knows a great deal about the substantive area of the inquiry and the methodological issues” (p. 308-309).

For the purposes of this inquiry, a faculty member from a different institution consented to serve in the role of peer reviewer. The peer reviewer’s substantive knowledge, relevant experience with the topic of study and research methodology, and prior experience in the role of peer reviewer for several successful dissertations more than met the criteria for the peer reviewer relationship.

**Progressive Subjectivity**

A basic assumption of the naturalistic paradigm is that the inquirer’s subjectivity is a part of the research process. Guba and Lincoln (1989) argued, “no inquirer engages in an inquiry with a blank mind, a tabula rasa. It is precisely because the inquirer’s mind is not blank that we find him [or her] engaged in the particular investigation” (p. 238). As participant and researcher interact over an extended period of time a story emerges that is jointly constructed. Inasmuch as the researcher’s construction cannot be privileged over the participants, the intent of progressive subjectivity is to temper “the degree of privilege” (p. 238).

To temper this privilege or to affect progressive subjectivity, Guba and Lincoln (1989) proposed that the inquirer record his or her a priori constructions at the beginning of the inquiry and periodically as the study progresses. For this study initial and emerging constructions were logged, archived, and discussed regularly with the peer reviewer. These discussions and a chronicle of the constructions were recorded and entered into the field log.
Member Checking

Lincoln and Guba (1985) contended that the most important tool for establishing credibility in naturalistic inquiry was member checking. Member checking is a process whereby participants, in the inquiry under investigation, examine the inquirer’s analytical thoughts, interpretations, and conclusions to ensure that those reconstructions are accurate representations of their realities. Erlandson et al. (1993) and Lincoln and Guba (1985) advised that member checking is not a one-time occurrence but rather it is an ongoing process that occurs both formally and informally. Recognizing that the goal of member checking is to ensure the production of a reality that privileges the participants’ perspective, the process of member checking for this study was continuous. The following section provides details about the process used.

Varying degrees of comfort and proficiency with reading and writing English, an expressed preference for orality rather than the written text, coupled with the complexity of the participants’ day-to-day lives (that of student, teacher, sojourner, friend, and family member) necessitated creativity in member checking. Without exception, the participants expressed a preference for confirming findings and initial interpretations verbally rather than in writing. Consultation with participants, the peer reviewer, and the committee chair resulted in a member checking plan whereby participants were provided with documents (copies of interview transcriptions, individual portrait profiles, and a summary of initial themes and categories). In addition, I also engaged in face-to-face discussions about these documents and their responses.

At the conclusion of each interview session, interview content was verbally summarized from notes taken during the interview. Participants were given an
opportunity to clarify and make corrections while discussing initial interpretations. Following the transcription of each interview, participants were provided copies of the transcription. Transcriptions were either hand delivered or mailed electronically. During subsequent interviews, interpretations formed and data gathered from earlier interviews were verified and discussed. Participants were furnished a copy of their individual case study report for discussion, critique, and verification. Participants were also furnished a copy of initial general constructions including themes, categories, and interpretations to determine accuracy in reflecting the experience of being an international teaching assistant. With one exception, participants requested that grammatical, pronunciation, and syntactic changes, be made in excerpts used in the final report. This request was honored and is reflected in excerpts used in the individual portraits and the general construction of findings. Participants confirmed the accuracy of their individualized portrayals indicating their acceptance of these stories.

It must be noted that although participants, early in the study’s tenure, endorsed the accuracy of the individual portraits and initial interpretations, the final broader, general constructions have not been endorsed. Since the initial rounds of data collection, analysis, and member checking, all of the participants have completed their courses of study, earned their degrees, and with one exception are no longer at the site institution. Efforts to locate viable contact information have not been successful.

Transferability

Naturalistic inquirers make no claim that research findings, through the use of statistical confidence levels, will be generalizable to individuals, groups, or other environmental settings; such is the province of conventional inquiry (Erlandson et al.,
1993, Gay, 1996, Lincoln & Guba, 1985, Merriam, 1988, Patton, 1990). In contrast, the naturalistic inquirer attempts to engender transferability. Transferability is the degree to which research findings about one particular context are transferable or applicable in a different context. The decision for confirming that transferability ultimately rests with the reader (Lincoln & Guba, 1989). However, it is the responsibility of the researcher to construct the study in such a way that engenders transferability. To that end Erlandson et al. (1993) suggested two strategies to facilitate transferability: purposive sampling and thick description.

Rich, descriptive data or “thick description” (Gertz, 1973), is defined as “description that goes beyond the mere or bare reporting of an act (thin description), but describes and probes the intentions, motives, meanings, contexts, situations, and circumstances of action” (Denzin, 1988, p. 39). Through the use of sufficiently detailed description the reader is able to vicariously experience both the context and setting depicted and is thus encouraged to make “judgments about transferability” (Erlandson et al., 1993, p.33).

Detailed, rich description was provided to convey the essence of the participants’ experiences as teaching assistants within the agreed upon constraints of maintaining anonymity and ethical commitment to reduce the risk of participating in the study. Moreover, in spite of the inability to secure a final member check of the completed broader constructions and interpretations, participants acknowledged that initial findings accurately reflected their experiences.
Dependability and Confirmability

Guba and Lincoln (1989), Lincoln and Guba (1985), and Erlandson et al. (1993) asserted that it was possible to bolster dependability and confirmability in a naturalistic study through an inquiry audit. Dependability, as a tool for establishing trustworthiness, has to do with the degree inquiry findings “would be repeated if the inquiry were replicated with the same (or similar) subjects (respondents) in the same (or similar) context” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 290). Bolstering dependability involves: (a) ensuring that the process for conducting the inquiry and the finished product stand up to scrutiny, and (b) ensuring that supporting materials are provided to document the inquiry process. Confirmability, as a tool for establishing trustworthiness “means that data (constructions, assertions, facts, and so) can be tracked to their sources, and that the logic used to assemble the interpretations into structurally coherent and corroborating wholes is both explicit and implicit” (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, p. 243).

Through an audit trail, i.e., notes, journal entries, and other documents, both dependability and confirmability can be demonstrated. For this study an audit trail was implemented and maintained. Materials contained in the audit file include documents and material objects pertaining to the collection and analysis of data and notes that pertain to the process of the case report constructing the case report. The following items are contained in the audit file of this study: (a) audio cassettes of interviews, notes created during interviews, interview transcriptions, fieldnotes from observations, notes from discussions during the member checking process, (b) data cards and data sheets containing notes on category construction and themes, (c) process notes including those created in conversations with the peer reviewer and committee chair, (d) documents such
as course syllabi, recruiting materials, training materials and notes compiled from examining these documents, and (e) other supporting documents deemed significant in establishing trustworthiness.

Authenticity

Although establishing trustworthiness as an indication of quality is quite appropriate in naturalistic inquiry, Guba and Lincoln (1989) argued that trustworthiness alone was not sufficient. Establishing trustworthiness enables the inquirer to develop “methodological safeguards that parallel those established by traditional researchers” (Erlandson et al, 1993, p. 151). However, since one of the primary foci of naturalistic inquiry is to understand the social phenomena under investigation through the multiple points of view of those involved in the inquiry, Guba and Lincoln (1989) suggested a different approach to judging the trustworthiness of the inquiry that is more in keeping with the naturalistic paradigm; authenticity. Authenticity, as an indicator of quality, acknowledges the importance of multiple perspectives and grants these constructions prominence in the inquiry. The premise behind these indications of quality is that in naturalistic inquiry “outcome, product, and negotiation” (p. 245) are equally as important as the process or method of conducting the inquiry. In the section to follow, indications of quality: fairness and ontological authenticity are discussed. Techniques for employing these indices in this particular study are also discussed.

Fairness

As the first criterion of authenticity, fairness refers to the process of soliciting multiple constructions from a number of individuals with differing value systems. For achieving fairness in this study, two techniques were employed. The first technique
involved: (a) adopting a spirit of inclusion and identifying participants with differing points of view and perspectives, (b) giving voice to these constructions, (c) eliciting participant input in interpreting these constructions, and (d) ensuring that the process of identification and reconstruction were included in the audit trail.

Fairness, here, refers to both actions and attitudes. The study was designed to elicit rich data from individuals who possessed knowledge about the teaching assistant experience and were willing to share their stories. Techniques used to fulfill the fairness criteria were intended to encourage selecting a variety of participants who were able to provide the desired richness of information. To that end, participation guidelines were developed that were fair and reasonable and would not arbitrarily exclude individuals from being involved. Additionally, a primary justification for conducting the study was to add to the existing knowledge base about the international teaching assistant experience from the perspective of those individuals most intimately involved. Implementing this goal involved viewing and treating the participants as co-constructors in the study. It was imperative, then, to seek their input and feedback to ensure accurate representation. This was accomplished by keeping accurate details and notations about observations, interviews, and emerging themes describing the international teaching assistant experience. These notations were frequently shared with the participants as a form of member-checking.

Open negotiation is the second technique for achieving fairness in naturalistic inquiry. During the research study, the inquirer acts as both investigator and participant advocate. Measures are implemented whereby participants have the freedom to negotiate both the process and product of inquiry. Conclusions, recommendations for future
actions, and constructions are joint efforts with the inquirer and participant operating as collaborators from equal positions of power. For the purposes of this investigation, the process of informing participants about the nature and purpose of the study, their role, and the role of the inquirer was an ongoing process. Through formal and informal member checks and face-to-face interactions, participants were afforded an opportunity to determine if re-creations of their constructions were accurate and reflective of their experiences. In addition to seeking consent throughout the inquiry process and member checking, participants were afforded the opportunity to negotiate the use of direct quotations for use in the finished product.

**Ontological Authenticity**

The second criterion for enabling authenticity used in this study is ontological authenticity. This criterion refers to the “extent to which individual respondents’ own emic constructions are improved, matured, expanded, and elaborated” (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, p. 248) as a result of participation in the investigation. The inquirer provides participants with materials and information that may enable them to reassess their experiences and to make comparisons with others. This vicarious experience “enhances the opportunity for individual respondents (stakeholders and others) to apprehend their own ‘worlds’ in more informed and sophisticated ways” (p. 248). According to Guba and Lincoln (1989) there are two techniques to demonstrate that ontological authenticity criterion has been achieved: (a) acknowledgement from participants of a different understanding of their experiences, and (b) an audit trail containing a record of both the participant’s and inquirer’s constructions as they occur during the inquiry. Each of these
techniques was employed in this study. A description of the contents of the audit trail is included in the Dependability and Confirmability section.

**Ethical Considerations**

The study’s target population, non-native speakers of U.S. English formally educated in traditions and cultures outside the United States, necessitated a heightened sensitivity to ethical issues particularly because of the intrusive nature of data-gathering techniques used in the study. Patton indicated this sensitivity was particularly necessary: Because qualitative methods are highly personal and interpersonal, because naturalistic inquiry takes the researcher into the real world where people live and work, and because in-depth interviewing opens up what is inside people—qualitative inquiry may be more intrusive and involve greater reactivity than surveys, tests, and other quantitative approaches [italics omitted] (p. 356).

In the following section several behaviors are discussed that were designed to shape the inquiry and aid in ethical decision-making. These behaviors were (a) minimizing physical and psychological harm, (b) measures to ensure privacy and confidentiality, (c) techniques to avoid deception, and (d) methods to obtain informed consent.

**Participant Safeguards**

The purpose of this section is to discuss the techniques used to minimize physical and psychological risk. Primary data-gathering techniques for this inquiry consisted of interviews and observations, practices that are inherently intrusive; therefore intentional consideration was given to minimize both physical and psychological risks. Although, Erlandson et al. (1993) contended that the naturalistic inquirer is “likely to face a
The multiplicity of unanticipated ethical dilemmas” (p. 156), the work of Tuhiwai Smith (1999/2002) and Patton (1990) were particularly appropriate in highlighting these potential risks and providing insight into the roles that cultural norms and values play in inquiry. The very act of questioning and expecting a response could be perceived as disrespectful and considered an invasion of privacy. Participants could provide more information than originally intended and later experience regret for these disclosures. Language and cultural differences could inhibit effective intercultural interactions resulting in misunderstandings. Ethical considerations associated with conducting observations pertained to the inquirer’s influence on the observed activity and the behaviors of the participants. Similar to interviewing, participants could engage in activities they later regretted or modify their behaviors because they were aware of being observed.

In spite of these areas of concern, the risks associated with participation in this study were minimal. Involvement was strictly voluntary. Study participants were adult students pursuing post-baccalaureate degrees. One of the operating assumptions for this study was that at the current levels of their educational and psycho-social development, participants were knowledgeable of the data-gathering tools used for this inquiry and were fully capable of making informed decisions concerning their participation. Furthermore, participants were informed throughout the course of the study that participation was strictly voluntary and that they were free to discontinue involvement in the inquiry at any point. Of the eight participants involved in this inquiry, only one participant elected to discontinue their involvement.
Measures to Ensure Privacy and Confidentiality

Throughout the course of the inquiry several measures were undertaken to ensure participant privacy and confidentiality within the confines of the data-gathering methods selected for use. Invitations were extended to participants to negotiate quotations and transcription excerpts prior to completion of the final product. Participants were also invited to select pseudonyms for use in the study. Names of individuals, organizations, and activities mentioned during interviews, and clearly identifiable places within the selected site were also assigned pseudonyms. Sources of data (e.g., audiotapes, fieldnotes, and transcripts) were confined to a locked file cabinet and kept in a secure location.

Techniques to Avoid Deception

Erlandson et al. (1989) declared that “deception is never justified, not only because it is at a minimum demeaning to the individual who is deceived but also because it is counterproductive to the researcher’s open and free exchange of constructions among stakeholders” (p. 155). Deceptive practices in data collection, negotiation, data analysis and interpretation of findings were deemed harmful to the participants and antithetical to purposes of the inquiry. Therefore, deception of any kind was not a part of this inquiry. In the following section, several methods to provide participants with information about the study are discussed.

Methods to Obtain Informed Consent

At the beginning of the inquiry and periodically throughout the research process participants were provided information explaining the purpose of the research, expectations concerning their involvement in the inquiry, and the role of the researcher in
the study. As mentioned previously, deception and other practices antithetical to the spirit of collaboration and accurate representation of the participants’ experiences were not employed during the course of this inquiry. Prospective participants were provided with a copy of the informed consent form and lay summary. Both were included in the Call for Participants packet. Once participants had indicated a willingness to participate, prior to the first formal interview, a preliminary meeting was conducted to discuss the inquiry and the consent documents. Participants were invited to pose questions and request clarification of ambiguous information. Participants were provided copies of the signed consent forms. A second copy was included in the field log. Again, because of the nature of the participants involved in the study, non-native speakers of U.S. English with varying degrees of proficiency in language and cultural comprehension, consent was not assumed but re-negotiated during each interview, observation, and member check. Moreover, participants were afforded multiple opportunities to deny, confirm, or amend the initial interpretations and reconstructions of the stories they told about the international teaching assistant experience.

According to Wolcott (1990), Merriam (1998), Glesne (1999), decisions about how data will be reported or how findings will be conveyed are just as significant as other aspects of the inquiry and deserving of consideration at the onset of the inquiry. The following section, Data Reporting, provides a discussion of the final product of this inquiry, the case study.

Data Reporting

Lincoln and Guba (1985) proposed that for naturalistic inquirers “the reporting mode of choice is the case study” (p. 357) rationalizing that this form of reporting
accomplished “two major purposes of reporting (raising understanding and maintaining continuity) and, second that the case format has certain characteristics that are especially advantageous to the naturalistic inquirer” (p. 358). In the following section these advantageous characteristics are addressed.

Firstly, the focus of this investigation is to develop a greater understanding of the socialization process of international teaching assistants particularly as they learn to teach. This process is influenced by a number of complex factors that shape international teaching assistants’ perspectives. Merriam (1998) indicated that the case study was well suited for gaining insight and promoting understanding of a phenomenon when “investigating complex social units consisting of multiple variables” (p. 41) particularly when little is known about the phenomenon under study.

Secondly, Lincoln and Guba (1985) posited “the case study is a fitting capstone to the continuous reporting process that characterizes naturalistic inquiry” (p. 358). Member checking, peer review, and negotiating consent and outcomes with participants contributes to this continuous process. The case study, then, is “the best means for summarizing all of the data that have been previously been tested and displaying them for that final review” (Lincoln & Guba, p. 359).

Furthermore, Erlandson et al. (1993) and Lincoln and Guba (1985) indicated that case study reporting was particularly advantageous for the naturalistic inquirer since it involved a reconstructing or a retelling of the participants’ perspective. This enables the reader to experience the context vicariously, and “provides the “thick description” necessary for judgments of transferability” (Erlandson et al., 1993, p. 164).
Summary

The purpose of this inquiry was to develop a deeper understanding of the experience of international teaching assistants who are non-native speakers of U.S. English and who have been formally educated outside the United States. To accomplish this objective, the following questions guided the inquiry:

- How do international teaching assistants who are native speakers of languages other than U.S. English and who have been formally educated outside the United States, learn to teach in an undergraduate classroom at a postsecondary institution?

- How do international teaching assistants acquire knowledge and make meaning of institutional values, attitudes, beliefs and role expectations?

- How do international teaching assistants construct their identities as teachers? What informs these constructions? How is his construction implemented in the classroom setting?

The study was guided by the constructivist paradigm. Qualitative methods were used for participant selection, data collection and analysis, and to report research findings. Several purposeful sampling strategies were employed for participant selection (i.e., criterion sampling, maximum variation sampling, and snowball sampling).

The sources of data consisted of people, their social settings, and documents. Data-gathering sources included participant-observation, in-depth interviewing, and document analysis. Data collection and analysis were conducted concurrently. Participants were able to negotiate continued involvement in the study and were invited to affirm, amend, or modify their participant portrayals and initial reconstructions.
CHAPTER IV. RESEARCH FINDINGS

Let me tell you a story. For all I have is a story. Story passed from generation to generation, named joy. Told for the joy it gives the storyteller and the listener. Joy inherent in the process of storytelling. Whoever understands it also understands that a story, as distressing as it can be in its joy, never takes anything away from anybody (Minh-ha, 1989, p.119.)

The purpose of this chapter is to communicate the general constructions or findings that emerged during the process of data gathering and analysis. To that end the chapter is divided into three interconnected sections. The first section provides a description of the participants in the aggregate. This composite reflects a summary of demographic information such as the participants’ gender, the assistantship category, the length of the teaching assistant appointment at the time the study commenced, the participants’ countries of origin, and the participants’ future plans. Section II provides introductory idiosyncratic profiles of each of the participants. Section III is devoted to a discussion of the most salient themes that emerged during data analysis and the relationship between these themes and the research questions guiding the study. The themes in this section are general and universal in nature, common to all the participants.

Participant Composite

Seven individuals were involved in the research study, three women and four men. The participants contributing their stories to the collective collage of this research study ranged in age from the mid-twenties to the mid-forties. Teaching assistant appointments in semesters, including summer teaching, ranged from three to 10 semesters, with an average teaching appointment of six semesters. Participants’ countries
of origin, in alphabetical order, were Antigua in the Caribbean, China, Kenya in East Africa, Iran, Nigeria in West Africa and Switzerland. Participants were from rural villages and major urban areas. Participants taught in the Colleges of Arts and Sciences, Education, Musical Arts, and Technology. Five of the participants indicated that they intended to become faculty members in the future, either while remaining in the United States or upon returning to their home countries. One participant expressed a preference for working in the corporate sector in the future while the other indicated a desire to work as an intervention counselor for troubled teen-aged girls. The chart (Figure 1) below provides a brief summary of demographic information. Pseudonyms were used in place of the participants’ names.
**Figure 1**

**Participant Composite by Length of Teaching Assistant Appointment**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant &amp; Assistantship Level</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Country of Origin</th>
<th>Assistantship Appointment</th>
<th>Degree Seeking</th>
<th>Length of Time as TA (in semesters including summers)</th>
<th>Future Goal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Paula Schweitzer Discussion Leader</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Switzerland</td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Counseling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simon Liang Lab Assistant</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>Physics</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Faculty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hala Al-Jabhoury Lab Assistant</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Iran</td>
<td>Physics</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Faculty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xuelun Lab Assistant, Instructor</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>Chemistry</td>
<td>Masters/Ph.D.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Faculty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ngugi Wa Thion’o Instructor</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Antigua</td>
<td>Technology</td>
<td>Ph.D.</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Faculty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Omukambi Co-instructor, Instructor</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Kenya</td>
<td>Music</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Faculty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Okpeke Instructor</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Nigeria</td>
<td>Communication Studies</td>
<td>Ph.D.</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Journalist</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Participant Profiles

“I would like to introduce . . .”

The purpose of the following section is to provide individualized introductory profiles of the seven individuals, who, during a period of 19 months, shared stories with me about their experience as international teaching assistants. As a photograph captures the image reflected through the camera’s lens, these profiles of introduction reflect an image, a re-presentation or re-telling, of who these people are. I am not visible in these portraits; nevertheless my presence is obvious. Much like a photographer behind the lens of the camera chooses to click the shutter button at a particular point, my presence is evident in the story that I choose to convey and the examples and words that I select in the re-telling of the story.

My role in the re-telling of these stories is twofold. To some degree I function as an interpretive photographer, capturing a moment in time, providing descriptions, impressions, and my interpretations of the phenomenon in question. Consequently, these narratives of introduction are filtered through multiple lenses that frame my approach to the study, determine the stories that I have selected to report, and influence my choice of words. On the other hand, my role is also that of artist-cum-narrator, as I examine each photograph carefully, selecting those snapshots that reflect the essence of the participants’ experience in an attempt to create a word-picture that most accurately captures and conveys this essence.

Continuing with the photography metaphor, the profiles of introduction capture essential aspects of the participants’ experiences at a moment in time. It bears noting that at another point in time, a different snapshot/story would have emerged, demonstrating
once again the uniqueness of the researcher as human instrument and the bi-directionality of the influence of researcher and researched.

The profiles of introduction are presented in the order that the interview conversations and classroom observations were conducted. The first section of the profiles introduces the participants. The printed word is used to create a likeness, as much as possible, of the individuals involved in the study with the intent that those reading the text will experience vicariously the world of the participant. Idiosyncratic in nature, the narratives provide a general description of each participant or co-constructor involved in the study, summarizes the participants’ decision-making processes to study abroad, and describes the participants’ initial perceptions of the teaching assistantship. Subheadings containing participants’ pseudonyms also include a word or phrase that represents the individuals’ experience of the phenomenon under investigation.

*English is not my Mother Tongue*

... [I]n the patient act of listening to another tongue we may subvert that culture of capitalist frenzy and consumption that demands all desire must be satisfied immediately, or we may disrupt that cultural imperialism that suggests one is worthy of being heard only if one speaks in standard English (hooks, b., p. 174).

It must also be noted that the seven individuals represented in this study spoke multiple languages, English being just one of many. Upon providing the participants with verbatim transcripts of our conversations all, with the exception of one, expressed concern about their ability to speak English well enough to be perceived as intelligent and equally as important; competent. Conversations with each of the participants about how they wished me to portray their speech patterns resulted in all but one of them, requesting
that corrections or modifications be made in the lexis and grammar of the transcripts. Thus, excerpts from interviews and field notes reflect attempts to, as accurately as possible, convey the essence and content of the participants’ spoken word while changing syntax, grammar, and word choice when necessary.

The participant profiles are a departure from the usual conventions of case study research. Oftentimes narrative profiles are constructed describing participants’ perspectives in the aggregate. The primary purpose of the aggregate profile is to describe themes, experiences, and perspectives that all of the individuals share. At some point, this piece shall be no different. However, what must be made clear at the onset is that participant profiles in this section of the study are deliberately idiosyncratic moving away from sweeping generalizations that serve to conceal the unique characteristics and nuances of the individual. Moreover, as has been mentioned previously, one of the shortcomings of the language used in higher education is a failure to use a term that adequately describes international students. However, for the purposes of this study the term, when referenced, is intended to describe a student population with a diverse membership.

Paula, the Sojourner

Paula traveled the long hallway to my office during a cold, but sunny February day to gather additional information about the research project. Her youthful appearance and trendy dress belied the words she spoke: “I am a teaching assistant in education and I would like to participate in your study” (PSFN). She could have easily been mistaken for an undergraduate student. Paula had been teaching within the College of Education for
four semesters at the time she volunteered to participate in the study. Paula’s motives for participation in the study were quite simple:

I really want to talk about this experience of trying to learn to teach here. I don’t think the teaching assistantship should be the way it is and I think somebody should know about it rather than me just keeping it all inside (PSFN).

For Paula, as she shared her perspectives about her semesters as a teaching assistant, our conversations served as an opportunity for catharsis in the hopes of affecting change in the assistantship process.

*Paula’s Story*

Paula was born in Belgium and as a small child learned to speak French, German, and English. At the age of six, she and her parents and two sisters moved to Switzerland where she began formal primary school education. Paula’s journey to the United States began with participation in a study abroad program during her final year of high school. After graduation from high school, she stayed in the United States to complete a bachelor’s degree in psychology at a small institution in the Southwest and then began work on a graduate degree in school psychology at the site institution. Paula recalled several personal and professional factors that contributed to her decision to study abroad, both as a high school student and graduate student. An express desire to follow the path of an older sister, receiving encouragement and support of her parents, a general curiosity about life and education in the United States, and the perception that educational and professional opportunities were more expansive here than back home were among these factors.
At the time of our first conversation, Paula had been working as a teaching assistant in the College of Education for four regular semesters, including the current semester at the time the study commenced and one summer session. She was completing her last semester of coursework and was beginning to prepare for her comprehensive examinations with the intent of graduating in the Spring semester. Paula’s primary responsibility in the role of a teaching assistant was that of a discussion leader for three introductory undergraduate courses “designed to prepare prospective teachers to make informed decisions about the teaching profession” (PSCM1, p. 1). 3

A week before the beginning of her first Fall semester, Paula was notified that she had received an assistantship and that her primary responsibilities would be teaching. Prior to this teaching appointment, Paula had no formal teaching experience, particularly in an academic setting. In describing those first few days after she had been notified about the assistantship, Paula expressed both relief and concern:

Well, I mean I was really relieved that I didn’t have to pay this bill that I had just received . . . . But when I heard it was teaching that I was going to do, I was kind of scared. I was scared but I expected to get trained. So I was like, oh my God, this is going to be a huge challenge but I’ll be ready for it because of the training. I didn’t expect to come here and to be told that I would be teaching the next week (PSI1, Lines 56 - 62).

Although delighted to receive an assistantship to defray the costs of her graduate tuition and fees, Paula strongly believed that she was ill equipped to carry out the objectives of a course designed to prepare future educators since she had no experience

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3 CM reflects course materials.
teaching and had no knowledge of course content. Her concerns were somewhat allayed; temporarily. She was reassured by the hope that institutional and departmental training would provide her with the necessary skills and information to teach effectively. The training did not occur. This lack of formal training would become a key ethical issue for Paula as she struggled with teaching a teacher preparation course when she herself had no formal teacher training.

An appropriate descriptor to portray Paula Schweitzer’s experience of being an international teaching assistant is that of the sojourner, an isolated figure traveling alone through the university, residing temporarily, briefly, in the college classroom. Paula explained:

> It’s really strange. [It is] like you are invisible here at school. You know people in class or people you teach with or the person where I drop off my cat, otherwise I don’t know other students. It’s kind of hard (PSI2, Lines 580 - 584).

Paula’s experience, then, is about the process of learning to teach while making sense of the graduate assistantship. This can be described as a journey, which for the most part she traveled alone.

**Omukambi, the Enthusiast**

Omukambi and I met at a high tea ceremony organized by several Kenyan faculty members and graduate students. The informal gathering was designed to welcome new Kenyan students to the United States and to the university community. We shared several cups of hot sweet tea mixed with generous amounts of milk as I discussed my research project. Omukambi enthusiastically volunteered to participate as a member of the study, eager to share his story about learning to teach and the experiences of being a Kenyan
graduate student on a regional campus in the Midwest. Omukambi had been teaching in the College of Music approximately 8 semesters when the study began. Enthusiastic is an appropriator descriptor to portray Omukambi. On any given day, he could be observed racing across campus at a frenetic pace as he attempted to balance the responsibilities of being teacher, learner, long-distance husband, and father. My comment concerning this business was met with a smile and a chuckle as he explained, “there is so much to be done and so little time to do it. So, I must move fast” (OMFN).

Omukambi’s Story

“I was a high school teacher before I made up my mind to come and pursue my higher education in the United States,” began Omukambi as he shared his personal history with me. Growing up in the small village of Maseno in western Kenya under the watchful eyes of his grandparents, Omukambi developed an appreciation for learning. This personal appreciation for all things academic would eventually evolve into a desire to motivate others to become life-long learners. About the early years of formal education, Omukambi recalled a fascination with “everything” but most particularly math and science and considered becoming a teacher of these subjects. However, he recalled, “just when I was making math and science my favorite subject, I realized I had this gift for music. So I turned to music,” eventually earning an undergraduate degree in music education from Kenyatta University in Nairobi (OMI1-1, Lines 16 - 17).

At the time of our first conversation, Omukambi had just begun work at the site institution on a master’s degree in ethnomusicology. Previously, he had earned a master’s degree in teacher education from an institution on the west coast. The marriage between teacher education and ethnomusicology was rooted in his desire to earn a doctoral degree
and teach at the college level at some point in the future. In describing the benefits of this union, Omukambi acknowledged:

I wanted a broad experience . . . to link them in the future. [The site institution] was offering something different than the west coast institution. It was different but still linked to my undergraduate training as a teacher. [. . .] One institution was giving me a degree in music. The school on the west coast was giving me a degree in education and I thought this was a very good combination for my goal of teaching higher education (OMI1, Lines).

Omukambi’s desire for a broad experience in selecting an educational track also influenced his decision to pursue graduate education in the United States. He reasoned that the formal postsecondary curriculum in Kenya, heavily influenced by the indigenous culture and decades of British colonial rule would bear similarities, at least organizationally, to the educational hybrid reflected in postsecondary education in the United States. Omukambi rationalized that these similarities would ease the transition to higher education in the United States but would also provide a broad enough experience to be of assistance in bringing about educational reform in his home country. Moreover, a graduate degree and teaching experience from an institution in the United States would provide him with the necessary teaching experiences to reach his goal of becoming a faculty member. He recalled, “I chose to be a teaching assistant [. . .] rather than do some other assignment in the department” (OMI1, Lines 74 – 79) believing that his undergraduate training and previous teaching experience would aid him in reaching his future career goals.
Omukambi’s first experience teaching at the collegiate level occurred at the site institution. Upon accepting the teaching assistant appointment, he strongly believed that his experience as a learner provided an adequate understanding of higher education at any postsecondary institution in the United States. Omukambi reasoned that his previous enrollment as a graduate student provided an opportunity for “pre-exposure to the system of education . . . in terms of pedagogy . . . and the curriculum’s interdisciplinary focus” (Lines 48 – 52). As a result, he determined that this earlier graduate school experience in concert with teacher education training and high school teaching in Kenya provided him with a general understanding of the teaching assistant role.

Omukambi expressed confidence in his ability to perform teaching tasks such as lecturing, classroom management, and student evaluation. Despite this confidence; however, he indicated that his previous training, education, and experience as a learner did not adequately prepare him to assume sole responsibility for classroom teaching. Omukambi commented:

Being an international teaching assistant, I thought I would be working very closely with somebody or at least have some special section in the department just to see how well we were doing or just to train us a little more on how to deliver content; particularly to U.S. students given the fact that we [. . .] trained in a different education system not to mention in a different linguistic background (Lines 285 – 289).

These unfulfilled expectations would be reflected in Omukambi’s difficulty in reconciling learning and teaching approaches from different systems of education rooted
in cultures with striking dissimilarities that appeared to contradict his Kenyan academic experience.

Simon, the Novice

Simon arrived in the United States from China in early January just prior to the beginning of the spring semester. When we met in mid-April, after corresponding via e-mail for several weeks, he had been working as a lab assistant since his arrival and was responsible for conducting laboratory sessions for three introductory physics courses. Simon had been working as a teaching assistant for four semesters when he consented to participate in the research study. Simon was rarely still, as we talked about his experience as a teaching assistant in the Physics Department. During our conversations, he frequently tapped his fingers on the textbooks lying on his desk or shuffled and reshuffled stacks of paper. His demeanor was occasionally solemn, sometimes even formal, and his brow was often noticeably furrowed as he carefully, painstakingly selected the most appropriate U.S. English word to respond to my queries. From time to time, his comments were punctuated with cautious laughter as he grappled with the nuances and idioms associated with speaking and comprehending U.S. English.

Simon’s Story

Simon recalled growing up with his younger sister and parents, “in a capital city of a province that is like a Columbus of Ohio” (SNI2, Line 185, p. 9). Familial and cultural expectations were the catalyst for his pursuit of higher education and his choice of majors. He observed that many family members in China value and support formal education for their children and work hard to nurture and achieve this goal. Simon
asserted that education, particularly higher education, is an “equalizer and necessary for social and economic success” (SIFN, Line 15).

Although he had explored the possibility of attending graduate school in the United Kingdom and Canada after earning a bachelor’s degree in applied physics, Simon chose the United States because of its system of financial aid, graduate assistantships, and its educational policies that promote access. Simon contended:

I think the United States has an advanced education system. They have more money to support new students . . . [and they] welcome intelligence from all over the world” (SNI2, Lines 13 – 24, pg. 1).

Because of this policy, science, technology, and understanding of science and technology [are] much better, I believe. Because of the many different people and the technology, it is a likely environment to achieve (FN).

Prior to leaving China, Simon was aware that he had been awarded a graduate assistantship in the Department of Physics and fully expected to work with a faculty member as a research assistant. However, upon arrival at the institution Simon was informed that he would be conducting laboratory sessions; sessions which he indicated were “designed to reinforce classroom lectures to determine if the students can put into practice concepts learned during the lecture. They are also designed to provide students with an opportunity to manipulate their physical environment” (SNI1, Lines 89 – 91, pg. 6). Although Simon understood the value and the intent of the laboratory sessions, he was less certain of his ability to be effective in the classroom or of his role in creating an environment for students to be successful. He also acknowledged that he lacked a frame of reference for his teaching assistantship as the following suggests:
I was shocked and concerned about the expectations of being a teaching assistant. I was concerned about my English speaking abilities. I expected to have an assistantship, perhaps a research assistantship, but I did not expect to teach or be a lab assistant. I did not have any teaching experience prior to coming . . . there is no equivalent position--teaching assistant (emphasis reflected on audiotape) in China (SNI1, Line 6-14, p. 2).

The first of multiple interactions with Simon occurred when, as he described it, “everything was new” (SNI1, Line 19) in his tenure as a teaching assistant as he sought to understand the role and purpose of the position and to maneuver in his environment as a newcomer. Subsequent interactions occurred periodically during his two-year appointment and continued after he had developed a level of confidence with his teaching ability and comfort with the culture and language. Being privy to Simon’s experience at different points in time brings a unique perspective to the narrative collage. Other study participants, as they recounted their stories, had both the benefit and disadvantage of relying on memory as they attempted to critically reflect on their experience of learning to teach. Early interactions with Simon revealed a learning process in real time, a first-hand account of a newcomer poised on the periphery of the teaching experience while subsequent interactions reflect growth and determined efforts towards self-improvement and meaning making.

_Hala, the Risk Taker_

I was introduced to Hala by one of the other study participants in late March. At the time of the initial meeting, Hala had been a teaching assistant in the Department of Physics for four semesters, was teaching three laboratory sessions, and had begun work
on her thesis. Her primary teaching responsibilities were to reinforce, through practical application, information disseminated during class lectures. She assisted students with experiments designed to compliment and reinforce theoretical and abstract material delivered in large lecture sessions, proctored and graded examinations, and conducted study sessions. Hala described herself as being both brave and a worrier and described her experience as a teaching assistant as being difficult and daunting. The only woman participant in the study not pursuing a degree in the social sciences, Hala’s perspective provides insight about the experiences of a teaching assistant in a relatively experimental field heavily dominated by men and requiring significant intellectual prowess and time on task.

Hala’s Story

Hala completed her postsecondary education at Tehran University in Tehran, Iran and worked for several years as a tutor at a college preparatory institute before journeying to the United States to begin her graduate education. Like many of the participants, she found the U. S. educational system attractive partially because of the financial assistance available to international students and partially because of the access and pervasiveness of technology. Advanced technology was necessary to enable her to parlay her love of mathematics, computer science, and physics into a master’s degree in computational physics at the site institution.

As she shared stories of life in Tehran with her three sisters, laughter, albeit self-conscious at times, came easy to Hala. She described a setting where the value of learning and the pursuit of higher education were valued as demonstrated by the fact that she and all of her siblings were either currently enrolled in college or would soon be.
Hala indicated that her decision to leave home to pursue graduate education constituted a departure from traditional practices since it was customary for young adults to remain home with their families until marriage. Although reluctant to be separated from her family by distance and extended periods of time, Hala acknowledged that her very presence at the site institution was evidence of her families’ support of her love for learning and particularly her love of physics and mathematics. She recalled:

My family did not want me to come here because they wanted me to be with them. It was so difficult for them—for me to leave them. That was my first time leaving. In Iran, we are family oriented and you live with your family until marriage (HAI1, Lines 20 – 23, pg. 1).

Although Hala’s parents were concerned about her leaving home, they were respectful of her decision and committed to her success. She recalled them eventually acquiescing because of wanting what was best for her and not wishing to interfere. Hala indicated that her family was reassured because, “I have a relative here. My cousin. My family thought it was a good idea that I come to where I knew someone. That is another reason why I chose the [site institution]” (HAI1, Lines 30 – 31, pg. 2).

Reflecting on the first semester as a teaching assistant, Hala described the experience as daunting. One of the challenges she faced was that of communicating. She disclosed, “I had a lot of problems. I had a lot of big worries that first semester. First, I didn’t understand people. I didn’t have any idea of what they were talking about.” (HAI1, Lines, p.). Although she had spent several years studying formal English prior to coming to the United States, she encountered difficulty in understanding the language and being understood by others. After failing to meet the site institution’s minimum proficiency
requirements in both spoken and written English, she was required to enroll in several writing and pronunciation courses. These courses, she indicated, were instrumental in enhancing her language skills and bolstering her confidence in her performance as a student and a teaching assistant.

Hala described her teaching assistant experience as a process marked by attempts on her part to knit together what was comfortable and familiar with the strange and unfamiliar. She described the process this way:

I think that I’m the one who started from zero here, I mean in a foreign country. . . . Step by step I have tried to improve myself in teaching, in language, in life, in thinking and everything here. Now I am glad that I did that—came here . . . Just this one year is more important than ten years in my country . . . I didn’t have the same progress . . . But in one year I have experienced more here . . . and developed a deeper understanding of myself (HAI2, Lines 247 – 255, pg. 11 – 12).

Xuelun, the Protected One

In April, at the time of our first interview conversation, Xuelun had been teaching for six semesters, was completing his master’s thesis, and was looking forward to his upcoming graduation. He had been admitted to the photochemistry doctoral program at the site institution but decided to pursue a master’s degree instead. Xuelun’s decision to change his course of study was predicated on a desire to improve his “English and understanding of culture and higher education in the United States” (XLI1, Lines 9 – 10) before attempting the rigor of a doctoral program. His graduate assistantship appointment was in the Department of Chemistry and Photochemical Sciences where during a period
of almost four years he had served as a lab assistant and eventually as an instructor. During this time in the department, Xuelun had progressed from conducting laboratory sessions and small study groups for lower level chemistry courses to teaching several sections of General Chemistry.

At the time of our initial meeting, Xuelun had been released from directly teaching undergraduate students to give him time to finish writing his thesis. He had also begun preparing to visit the People’s Republic of China before beginning a doctoral program at a flagship institution in an adjacent state. However, occasionally he was called upon to proctor examinations within the department or to function as a substitute instructor in a faculty member’s absence. Xuelun volunteered to participate in the study because as he put it, “since I am not teaching a class right now, I have time now and can really look back and really think about what I have learned” (XLFN1). Thus, Xuelun’s narrative provides a truly reflective and contemplative snapshot to the participant collage.

Xuelun’s Story

Xuelun’s attraction to graduate education in the United States was similar to that of the other study participants. He explained, “I think one of the main reasons that most international students come to the U.S. to study is because of the open access for research and the technology that is available” (XLI1, Lines 17 – 19, pg. 3). Family members, friends, and graduates of the Photochemistry Department also influenced his decision. In describing his family’s role in his decision to study abroad, Xuelun recalled that his father encouraged him to pursue “teaching and learning in America” because doing so “would be beneficial to my future success” (XLI1, Lines 16 – 17, pg. 3). A sister and brother-in-law, doctoral students in photochemistry at an institution in the
eastern part of the United States, also encouraged Xuelun, not only to study in the United States but at the site institution as well. They based their counsel on the university’s reputation for being a “supportive place for Chinese students” (Line 15). Xuelun elaborated:

A former student in the Photochemistry Department at the [site institution] was a friend of my sister. He had a very positive experience here and knew of my interest in chemistry. He told me that the university was a supportive place for Chinese students. I decided to apply and was accepted (Lines 12 – 15).

Xuelun indicated that, just as his family and friends predicted, he found a supportive environment at the site institution, marveling at what he considered to be an American peculiarity. “The U.S. has a conglomerate of folks. It makes it easier to find someone like yourself even if you are an international student. You are not so isolated, not so alone” (Lines 19 – 21). Xuelun continued by describing his new environment as an extremely foreign place yet at times familiar because of being able to associate with individuals who shared a similar language and background. This phenomena, Xuelun insisted, enabled him and the other Chinese students to create “a little bit of China” (XLFN) within the larger campus community diminishing the sense of isolation, difference, and loneliness.

He recalled:

The Chinese students here provide a great deal of support, encouragement. We are a pretty close-knit group. We recognize that we are all foreigners here and that it is less difficult for us if we work together. Individually we cannot live well but together we can help one another with the transition (XLI1, Lines 44 – 47, p. 6.).
Xuelun was notified, prior to leaving China, that he had been awarded a graduate assistantship. However, he was not informed that he would be a teaching assistant until his arrival at the site institution. He recalled that his initial reaction was one of fear because he had no training as a teacher and was not yet comfortable with his language skills. Moreover, Xuelun recalled having difficulty perceiving himself as anything but a student. He explained:

I did not have any formal training in teaching prior to assuming my responsibilities as a teaching assistant. I didn’t know how to teach and did not feel adequately prepared to assume these responsibilities. I had always been taught by others. I was excited about experiencing the U.S. first hand. That excitement turned to fear. I liked this place but was a little afraid. I had to learn to do everything in English—read, study, write, speak, understand, comprehend (XLI1).

However, in an attempt to overcome these challenges, Xuelun took comfort in advice that his father imparted on the eve of his traveling to the United States. “My father’s words of advice to me when I left . . . were to ‘work hard, do your best, don’t be hard on yourself, and don’t be afraid. You can learn anything.’ I believed him.” (XLI1).

Xuelun indicated that he relied on his father’s words to sustain him as he struggled with making sense of the assistantship experience and wrestled with the ethical implications of being asked to teach when he felt ill-equipped to do so.

Ngugi, the Pragmatist

On the afternoon that I observed Ngugi’s Introduction to Design and Engineering Graphics class, just one of the many introductory courses he taught during his appointment as a teaching assistant, he entered the computer technology lab at a brisk
pace, carrying a stack of papers, textbooks, and several computer diskettes. As he made his way to the front of the lab, he deftly maneuvered around students clustered in small groups near computer terminals, stopping periodically to respond to questions about the day’s lecture, class assignments, and the upcoming final examination. “Let me explain . . . ,” he commented as he began the day’s lecture, “It is about being pragmatic, about efficiency . . . this is how you approach this subject.” (NGFN).

The emphasis on pragmatism was a common theme permeating my conversations with Ngugi. Not only did he indicate that he approached teaching and decision making through these particular lenses but also used these terms as self-descriptors as well. Ngugi explained that being pragmatic meant that his vocational choices and educational path were rooted in a desire to create and apply workable solutions in problem solving—whatever the situation.

Ngugi’s Story

Ngugi’s assistantship appointment was in the College of Technology in the Department of Visual Communication and Technology Education where he had been teaching eight semesters. He was solely responsible for teaching several entry-level Design and Engineering Graphics courses while enrolled in the technology management doctoral program offered through a consortium of Midwestern universities. The doctoral program made extensive use of the Internet information delivery system and the virtual classroom. Prior to traveling to the site institution in the early 80s where he would eventually complete both a baccalaureate and master’s degree, Ngugi taught high school industrial education in his home country, Antigua. Upon completing his master’s degree
in 1986, he returned home to Antigua and worked for several years in a company he created before traveling back to the site institution to begin his doctoral work.

Ngugi credited a wide-range of “collective factors” (NGI1, Line 183, pg. 8) in shaping his commitment to education. Most significant were parental influences and societal expectations. As far as his parents were concerned, “there was no reason acceptable for missing school. . . . School and church. . . . Go to school during the week and go to church on Sundays. Everything else happened after that (hearty chuckle)” (NGI1, Lines 153 – 156, pg. 7). In the community at large, education was an expectation and an obligation if you were to be considered a positive contributing member of society. Ngugi asserted, “so I grew up with people who aspired to have advanced education” (Lines 169 – 170) and who considered education a tool to bring about change in the country’s economic, educational, and political systems.

Ngugi’s previous experience and teacher preparation program formed the foundation for understanding his current teaching role. He indicated that a heavy reliance on his past experiences informed his current teaching methods. Ngugi elaborated:

I had teacher training before and a diploma in industrial arts teaching. I had a number of courses in education in terms of education psychology and that type of thing. So, I had a concept of teaching in terms of lesson preparation and objectives. . . . [B]ased on that, I think I was prepared from prior training and prior teaching experiences . . . . (NGI1, Lines 90 – 96).

Moreover, because of being previously enrolled at the site institution as both an undergraduate and master’s student, Ngugi was quite familiar with the microculture of higher education in the United States embedded within the larger macroculture in
general. Consequently, much of the angst experienced by other study participants as they attempted to make sense of their environment and their dual roles of both student and teacher was, for him, a distant memory.

**Okpeke, the Unapologetic One**

The last individual to volunteer to become a member of the study, did so following a conversation with another participant as the two of them discussed the nature of the research and “the difficulties of being a foreign teacher” (OPFN). Okpeke consented to add her voice to the collection of narratives because participation in the study, about which she was quite enthusiastic, provided her with an opportunity for reflection on her sometimes exhilarating but often times frustrating ten semesters of experience as an instructor. Moreover, she indicated that involvement demonstrated solidarity with me as a fellow doctoral student and woman of color. Okpeke’s conversations revealed an effusive, expressive young woman brimming with words, quick to laugh but also speaking with deliberate candor and seriousness about her experiences. As a result, her addition to the photomontage provides a perspective that is often times startling insightful, unabashedly straightforward, and intractably unapologetic as she recounts her experiences as a teaching assistant and her interpersonal interactions with her undergraduate students.

**Okpeke’s Story**

Okpeke had been a doctoral student and teaching assistant in the School of Communication Studies for nearly three years in the spring semester of data collection and was busily preparing for her qualifying examinations. The eldest of seven children, she was born in Lagos, Nigeria, West Africa and began her pursuit of higher education at
the University of Lagos (UniLag), an elite institution in the region, at the age of 16. She journeyed to the United States to begin a master’s program in mass communication at an institution in the rural Midwestern region of the country prior to beginning her doctoral work at the site institution. Okpeke indicated that pursuing education in the United States was, according to her father, “My destiny. He had planned it for as long as he could remember. I wasn’t consulted on that. I was just told that this is what I was going to do” (OPI1, Lines 363 - 365).

While pondering what her new role as a doctoral graduate assistant would be, Okpeke assumed that she would function as a research or administrative assistant since this had been her role during her master’s program. However, shortly after arriving at the site institution, Okpeke was notified that she would be teaching introductory communication courses. She recalled feeling frustrated and angry during the first semester of teaching as she attempted to “sort out” (OPFN) what was expected of her and what she in turn should expect of her students. She recalled:

I had never taught before and they said, ‘you are teaching’. No orientation on how to teach, how to write a syllabus, nothing! I just came and they said, ‘Monday you are teaching two courses.’ There was nothing. [The Orientation Program] didn’t have anything to say about how to teach or how to make a syllabus. Nothing. Nothing at all (OPI1, Lines 403 – 407).

I was really angry. I did not like trying to do something that I thought was really important without the means to do it. I didn’t know the theories, the models, the culture—nothing (OPFN).
Okepke admitted that over the semesters her anger dissipated as she created a system of support within the department and developed a comfortable approach to teaching strongly influenced by former teachers. Becoming familiar with course content and participating in departmental programs designed to assist teaching assistants with the teaching process were also instrumental in assuaging her anger and frustration.

Summary of Participant Profiles

The preceding discussion provided a preliminary introduction of the participants involved in the study. The initial profiles were idiosyncratic in nature in an attempt to convey the unique characteristics and nuances of the individuals involved in the study. As noted in the beginning of this chapter the narratives were initially disaggregated with the intent of discussing the multiple themes imbedded within the narratives. These themes included: (1) the initial meeting, (2) the rationale for participating in the study, (3) the reaction to the assistantship, and (4) the personal and demographic information such as country of origin, academic discipline of study, rationale for pursuing higher education in the United States and at the site institution, and years of teaching. As indicated in the chapter’s introduction, the remainder of this chapter is devoted to a discussion of the major themes that emerged during the data analysis process. Since the purpose of the research study is to gain a deeper understanding of international teaching assistants’ process of learning to teach, Section III of the narrative is more contextual, describing the participants’ engagement in the learning process.
Emergent Themes in the Aggregate

Learning While Doing.

One of the recurring truths to emerge from data analysis was that participants learned to teach while actually teaching. Thus, the process of learning to teach was inextricably intertwined with the practice of teaching. Two of the participants, Ngugi and Omukambi, indicated they were formally trained as teachers in their home countries and had taught for a number of years prior to their arrival at the site institution. The other participants indicated that prior to accepting the teaching assistantship they had not received formal teacher training. Moreover, they had no practical experience as a teacher. In either case, having or not having received formal training as a teacher, the participants contended that learning to teach in their new environment, was a process of learning while doing. Although the participants’ experiences varied in a number of ways the process of learning to teach converged into two interrelated themes: figuring it out on one’s own and learning from others. In the following section each of these themes will be discussed.

Figuring it Out On One’s Own.

Paula, one of the participants without formal training as a teacher, noted that her initial approach in learning to teach was to become as familiar as possible, as quickly as possible, with the subject content. She recalled creating weekend “cram sessions” (PSFN) where she would spend the bulk of the weekend studying course content:

I gathered up the materials that were given to me and spent the weekends in bed trying to figure out what I was suppose to do. I tried to read the textbook and books and the packet of assignments. I didn’t know anything about the education field or the
material that I was going to be teaching so I just tried to figure it out on my own and hoped that the students couldn’t see that I didn’t know much more than they did. That helped somewhat. For the most part though it was a mystery and I was really, really scared (PSFN).

I tried very often at night in bed to imagine myself teaching. I was just trying to de-sensitize myself to the nervousness by visually imagining myself standing in the classroom and imagining what I would do and how I would feel at that moment . . . (PSI1, Lines 152-156, pg. 8).

Like Paula, Hala had not been trained as a teacher; nevertheless, she had worked for several years tutoring high school students in physics and mathematics prior to coming to the site institution. As a result she felt quite confident in her ability to convey course material. She also indicated that her department had provided her with a “great deal of information” (HAI1-14, Line 307) about what her responsibilities and duties would be. As she recalled, “they made everything clear from the beginning. So when I arrived, I knew about the responsibilities and everything. That was clear” (HAI1-14 Lines 308-311). However what was not clear to Hala was what to do once she entered the classroom.

What wasn’t clear to me was what to do once the teaching actually began, once classes actually started and the students were in the classroom looking at me. I just sort of went along doing the best I could for the first few times I met with my classes. It was really strange. I was afraid that the students were going to realize that I did not know what I was doing . . . (HAI2-12, Lines 276 - 278 ).
I had so many questions and thoughts at first. What do I do, what do I say, what do I do if the students ask me questions about the experiments that I cannot explain. I remember being anxious about speaking English particularly trying to discuss problems with the experiments. I finally decided that I was just going to try to do my best with the hope that it would be all right eventually (HAI2-16, Lines 280 - 284).

Both Paula and Hala described their fear and anxiety as they struggled with issues of role ambiguity, attempted to identify appropriate teaching behaviors, and worried whether their students would perceive them as competent. Okpeke’s reaction was strikingly different. She indicated that her initial reaction was one of surprise, regret, and eventually anger. While meeting her faculty advisor for the first time she learned that her role within the department was not yet solidified. Okpeke recalled that her advisor appeared not to have been aware of her arrival or her assistantship appointment. Moreover, her anger was exacerbated when she was informed by her advisor, “you know, I am sorry, but I have too much work to do. So I am going to give you to someone else [as an advisee] (OPI1-18, Lines 402 –403). This initial reaction from her faculty advisor colored Okpeke’s perception of the faculty member, the department, and the institution. She determined that she did not matter.

Teaching was a task that Okpeke deemed “very important,” (OPFN) much too important for someone without training to attempt to do. Similarly to Paula and Hala, Okpeke’s previous experiences had not provided her with the requisite training to teach. Without formal training, guidance, or knowledge of the content she decided that her best course of action was to rigidly adhere to the course outline.
I remember going into my first class and I went in and I said—I don’t know this material and it’s true—it wasn’t my area. It was interpersonal communication—speech. I had been doing speeches since I was six but never had it as a formal class. There was no knowledge of models, theories. Never had I sat down to watch Americans give speeches and say this is what is cultural, this is what is not. So I went and told my students, ‘I am going to follow the book because I have nothing in my brain that says this is how you should do this. I have no training. I have nothing. So you guys all have your manuals? They said ‘yes.’ ‘Then we are going to follow this to the letter.’ And the students hated me. They hated me (OPI1-19, Lines 418-426).

Paula, Hala, and Okpeke indicated that their first task in learning to teach was to determine what teaching behaviors were necessary to be effective and to be perceived as competent. Simon, on the other hand, indicated that his first steps in learning to teach were to both understand and define the teaching assistant concept. He acknowledged that he lacked a point of reference considering, “there is no equivalent position, teaching assistant, in China” (SII1, Line 14, p. 2). When questioned as to how he defined the term, Simon indicated that initially his definition was very narrow and he determined it meant an individual assisting a faculty member with his or her teaching, much like an apprentice. He believed that as an apprentice he would work closely with a faculty member mastering specific stages of teaching before moving on to the next. However, his perception of the assistantship and the reality of his responsibilities were incongruent resulting in confusion as he attempted to make sense of his new environment and realign perception with reality.
This was all so new to me. All of it. I really expected to be working closely, sort of, side by side with my faculty advisors. First I had to determine what a teaching assistant was before I could determine what to do. This required quite a few conversations with the other TAs sharing the office space. It also required that I look at this experience much like I encourage the students to look at the experiments, I knew that there was a solution. It just required that I think it through until I could determine the solution (SIFN).

Xuelun, like Simon, struggled with the concept of teaching assistant. Moreover, early in his appointment perceiving himself as “someone who imparts knowledge” (XLFN) was problematic since he, “had always been the student never the teacher.” (XLFN). Xuelun’s initial struggles, in concert with inadequate teacher preparation and a general lack of teaching experience were compounded by limited proficiency with English and an inability to ascertain how his class fit into the student’s overall educational experience. As discussed in the profile section, Xuelun was no longer teaching when the study began and unlike the other participants had the luxury of retrospection permeating his recollections.

So much of what I did in the classroom was left for me to determine how it should be done. This was really awkward since I was not quite confident in my ability to speak English nor to make myself understood and teach in English. Also, I did not understand the purpose of the classes that I was teaching. The teaching assistants need to know the purpose of the classes that they are teaching. They cannot see this at the beginning. This importance comes much later (XLI1-11, Lines 62 – 67).
Omukambi credited his time as a high school teacher in Kenya and a graduate student in education with providing him with the foundation for understanding his teaching role. Believing that his teacher training had prepared him well for the task, he was quite confident in his knowledge of “Western” (OMFN) educational theories and pedagogical methods. Time spent as an undergraduate and graduate student in education had afforded him the chance, not only to be taught by teaching assistants, but it also provided an immersion experience in the culture of higher education in the United States.

Omukambi experienced little of the uncertainty and role ambiguity demonstrated by Paula, Hala, and Simon. To the contrary, he believed he had a good grasp of role expectations having chosen to be a teaching assistant and because he “participated in a sort of pre-orientation program through the mail and through the university’s web pages” (OMFN) prior to his arrival at the site institution. The summer before beginning his graduate work, Omukambi received materials designed to orient him to the department and to make his transition as smooth as possible.

[The department] wrote to me to say that . . . ‘you have been assigned a teaching assistantship and your duties will be to help in the classroom organization, to assist a professor in the lecture presentation, and to actually help with teaching some of the classes’ (OMI1-5, Lines 83 – 87).

When [the department] sent me this information, I read through it first to understand. . . . There was additional information that I had been able to access on the web pages and it just prepared me to know what the [institution] was really like—particularly my department, the professors there—what they specialize in—the kind of core curricula activities in the department and my place in all of this--
just everything that would give me some kind of insight into the department
(Lines 90 - 94).

Confident in the skills and knowledge gained from his previous education and
training to be effective in the classroom, Omukambi’s primary concern was determining
a “level to pitch to the students” (OMFN). Omukambi’s previous experience with higher
education had been within a highly specialized system, a homogenous student body all
enrolled in the same courses and majoring in the same field. The heterogeneity of the
students in his general education courses was perplexing.

The classes that I teach . . . introduces both music and non-music majors to the
discipline of music, of Western classical music. We get students from all over the
campus enrolling in these courses. That is what makes it a challenge for me
particularly because I have students who know absolutely nothing about music
but here they are. They must get some musical knowledge. And, I have students
who are music majors, and they are . . . advanced. They play instruments better
than I do. They can compose. They can do a lot of stuff. So it is a wide range of
students and that is how the classes are, kind of huge classes that are
heterogeneous. So I have to adjust in bringing everybody to some kind of level
playing ground and that is very tough to do because the advance ones tend to get
bored and if you become too technical than you lose the beginners. So striking a
balance is the challenge (OMI1-10, Lines 200 – 211).

I haven’t quite understood—still. I’m still struggling to understand why an
engineering student from the aviation school would come to take a music class if
you are going to be a pilot. . . . We need to understand why students are taking the
classes that they are taking. What are we supposed to help them achieve (OMI1-28, Lines 611 – 616).

Ngugi, like Omukambi, was an experienced high school teacher. He credited this experience, coupled with earning an undergraduate and graduate degree at the site institution, as the reason that he experienced little if any of the ambiguity and transition issues that the other participants faced. Ngugi’s area of specialization, during his graduate and postgraduate work, was quality systems. Consequently, he approached and evaluated his teaching with a heightened emphasis on quality improvement. During his time as a teaching assistant he was able to draw parallels between the purported intent of student evaluations—maintaining systems of quality within teaching and quality systems within technology—but nevertheless contended that students assessing teaching performance was an ineffective tool to improve or evaluate teaching performance.

I think that conducting the evaluations is good but at the same time I think it falls short in a number of ways. What do we know about the students doing the evaluating? What is their motivation for marking the forms as they do? Is it to improve teaching or are they disgruntled students? We don’t know these things and I would say that this makes a difference (NGI2-23, Lines 17 - 20).

From a quality systems perspective, there is a problem with students setting the standards of quality in the classroom—these are individuals who are not familiar with the content or my style of delivery but are able to determine how well I am doing? It would be much more effective if faculty members would do the evaluating. I would like to see what my colleagues think about my delivery and that type of thing but that system is not in place. Faculty members should set
the benchmark, the standard for appropriate teaching behaviors. One of the things that I have learned is that when it comes to teaching in this academic institution . . . professors are on an island of independence and you are on your own basically (NGI2-3, Lines 50 - 54).

The participants, whether formally trained as teachers or inexperienced, shared the common experience of learning the nuances of teaching behaviors while engaged in the acts of teaching. Moreover, from their perspective they were required to learn these nuances without guidance, direction, or a clear comprehension of role expectations. In the absence of formal training or an effective orientation about appropriate teaching behaviors and classroom expectations, participants devised resourceful but diverse approaches to determine acceptable teaching behaviors.

Imbedded within the major category of figuring it out on one’s own, secondary themes emerged from the participants’ experiences. Paula and Okpeke attempted to learn the course content by determining the most appropriate pedagogical methods. Simon and Xuelun needed to determine the meaning of the teaching assistant concept before being able to understand role expectations. Thus, role comprehension was a precursor to teaching.

Omukambi, one of the participants with several years of teaching experience attempted to determine how to teach in a heterogeneous classroom and consequently, grappled with teaching students in his classes who were enrolled in a variety of majors and possessing multiple levels of ability and knowledge. Lastly, Ngugi struggled with understanding the departmental practice of encouraging students to evaluate their
classroom teaching performance particularly when a systematic “feedback loop was not in place to replot what they were doing” (NG12-7).

**Learning from Others**

In addition to relying on intuition and wit, participants acknowledged that specific people or groups of people were instrumental in helping them in the process of learning to teach. Family members, other teaching assistants, former teachers, and students were specifically mentioned and were perceived as being critical to the participants’ current approach to teaching. It must be noted that although the participants acknowledged the contributions that their students made in their process of learning to teach, these individuals were, more importantly, viewed as cultural informants—pursuers of cultural values, attitudes, and beliefs about learning, teaching, and the classroom, in spite of the fact that this learning occurred in the wake of students’ criticisms.

For this reason, it is more appropriate to discuss these perspectives in response to the second research question which examines the participants’ process for learning institutional values, attitudes, and beliefs relative to teaching. The section to follow then is a discussion of the participants’ perspectives on the role that family members, other teaching assistants, and former teachers played in the experience of learning to teach.

Xuelun indicated that his teaching skills and knowledge were shaped by his father, a physics faculty member and a researcher at a university in China and his sister and brother-in-law who were teaching assistants in photochemistry at an institution on the East coast. “From my parents, particularly my father, I think I learned how to learn and
learned how to teach.” (XLFN). When questioned about his sister and brother-in-law’s influence, Xuelun replied:

I would have to say that [they] really helped me understand the cultural differences between American students and Chinese students, the way education is here and how education is at home. The emphasis here on asking questions and on talking—this was so very different and so unexpected. It was a good thing that I visited with them before coming to [the site institution]. I appreciated the advice they gave me (XLI2).

In addition to participants’ family members playing a critical role in the process of learning to teach, other participants reported being influenced by peers, specifically other teaching assistants. Okpeke recalled taking the initiative each semester to have an international teaching assistant observe her teaching. Her goals for these activities were many:

For us as international TAs it wasn’t that easy—because when we came here we really didn’t know who or what or how—you know. So basically we just decided to watch each other’s classes to see what we were suppose to do. We also determined that watching another international student actually would be more beneficial than an American student (OPI1).

When questioned why she believed this to be so, Okpeke provided additional details for her assumptions:

In terms of being a foreigner for instance there is a connection. Secondly, you would ask—what are you doing as an international TA that I could do differently and bring my own culture into it. Let’s say that you come into my class and you
watch, you notice that I use humor—you might ask yourself ‘can I use humor’ or .
. . . you notice that I use examples from home—‘you might ask yourself what
eamples can I use from home.’ Things like that. I could go watch an American
colleague but my American colleague will always have a certain level of success
that I might not expect. Number one, because they speak English with the same
accent. Number two, they are the same color. Number three, there are examples
they can use that I can not use. . . so how am I going to relate to that? So
watching another international students sort of gives you another perspective that
you can try and use your own experiences to hook up with—which is quite
different from watching an American colleague. You know, because regardless—
Americans will always see each other as the same but with a foreigner . . . you
know what it is like to be from outside—you know (OPI2-23-24, Lines 517 –
540).

Other participants singled out former teachers, either from high school or their
undergraduate programs, whose teaching style appealed to them at the time and whom
they patterned teaching after now. Both Hala and Omukambi fondly recalled high school
teachers who served as role models in their process of learning to teach. Hala’s
perspective on teaching was inspired by her high school physics teacher. She described
her teacher as “someone who opened my eyes to the world of physics and helped me to
see that everything in the world can be explained through physics. She continued by
explaining that her teacher’s enthusiasm for subject was contagious. Moreover, Hala
indicated that she chose physics as a career and patterned her teaching philosophy after
that of her high school teacher. She recalled:
Sometimes when I think one teacher could be so important in my life, I think maybe I can be as important in somebody else’s life... I am sure that even one person can make a difference in somebody else’s life (HAI1-4, Lines 103 – 113). Like Hala, Omukambi shared his recollections of a teacher in high school whose approach to teaching, connection to students, and thirst for knowledge were inspiring. Consequently, Omukambi sought to replicate his learning experience with his current students.

In high school I had... [a] teacher who inspired me even more because he was a teacher that enjoyed teaching and valued learning so much that he would probably be able to teach almost anything--you know--even though he wasn’t trained to teach all those subjects. He was outgoing. He was not musically trained but he studied music on his own and he was articulate and he was able to teach and play music... He was a Swahili language teacher, he was a French teacher, he was a Scottish dance teacher. He was able to do almost anything from nothing. You know—he was not trained to do all those things but he trained himself. He wanted to be an all around human being. That inspiration of who he was and wanting to try almost anything on the face of the earth is very good. With these subjects, he helped make the connections for the students, with the students, and with the world. So that inspiration is paramount for me. This is what I try to do in the classroom. I try to be like him (OMI1-20, Lines 415 – 432).

It is significant to note that although participants mentioned having positive relationships with their faculty advisors and other faculty members within the department, these individuals were only tangentially involved in the process of helping...
them learn to teach. With few exceptions, participants indicated that faculty members were more apt to operate as academic advisors, informants providing insights to ease the transition to the new environments, or as Paula intimated, “a mother figure if we needed one” (PSI1-10, Line 193). However, Xuelun and Okpeke noted that the experiences with their departmental faculty members were an exception, maintaining that they had learned important lessons about teaching through observation, modeling, and affirmation. For example, unlike the others, Xuelun did not have a particular teacher in mind when asked whether there was one significant inspirational teacher but instead admitted to admiring and “watching other faculty members [at the site institution] and trying to learn from them. They seem[ed] to be smooth and active and I tired to model their behaviors.” (XLI). Okpeke, on the other hand, excitedly recalled meeting a faculty member, “a foreigner like me,” (FN) late in the course of her doctoral program who served as a role model and inspiration for her own teaching. Okpeke suggested that because she and this faculty member shared similar backgrounds, that of being a foreigner and a teacher, her own experiences were validated and affirmed.

I regret not meeting her sooner and taking a class with her sooner. I think my teaching experience would not have been so difficult if I had met her at the beginning of my teaching assistantship. I learned quite a bit from her—about what to do in the classroom—perhaps it was because she wasn’t born in this country and approached her students with a no nonsense attitude. I could appreciate that (OPI2).

[S]he makes you work hard for your grade. She appreciates you when you go above and beyond what is expected. So she challenges you so that you can
bring all of your misconceptions or perceptions to class and she can take it down or build it up. She is kind of an all arounder. I like that—so when I teach—I think of the way she teaches. I think of her now. She only taught me just last year. I got her too late but she actually gave me more confidence in teaching as a foreigner. . . . She is a foreign teacher as well and I don’t think there is any student of hers that you meet that would tell you, ‘I didn’t deserve that A,’ but rather they will tell you, ‘I deserved that A. I worked for that A.’ That is what I try to do with my students—to say you worked for that grade and you should be proud of that (OPI2-29, Lines 639 652).

One of this study’s research questions was: How do international teaching assistants who are native speakers of languages other than U.S. English learn to teach in an undergraduate classroom at a postsecondary institution?

Two themes emerged from the participants’ perspectives on their process of learning to teach in a postsecondary classroom. In the absence of formal teacher training, an effective orientation program, or an apprenticeship program, participants attempted to teach themselves often relying on intuition and their intellectual prowess in determining appropriate and inappropriate teaching behaviors. Participants attributed much of their learning to teach to the efforts of others, particularly their high school teachers and undergraduate teachers back home. Current faculty members were only marginally instrumental in their process of learning to teach. Learning to teach was inextricably linked to the act of teaching and occurred while participants determined appropriate teaching behaviors. People of influence, such as family members, other teaching assistants, and former teachers were significant in the process of learning to teach.
Participants relied on these individuals for guidance and direction or adopted their teaching behaviors as their own.

Knowledge Acquisition

The purpose of the second research question was to determine the process that participants undertook to acquire knowledge or information about the teaching environment and to determine the process participants used to understand or construct meaning of the knowledge and information once it was acquired. In response to this question, the second theme to emerge from data analysis was that participants acquired knowledge of concepts, values, and beliefs relative to teaching through multiple orienting activities, activities that essentially served to illuminate aspects of classroom culture. Sense making or assimilation of information occurred as participants synthesized what was unfamiliar, their current educational experiences, with the familiar, that of their previous educational experience. The process that participants undertook to acquire knowledge of teaching culture and to construct meaning of these experiences is discussed in the following section. Although presented in a manner that appears to be somewhat sequential, the process of knowledge acquisition and meaning making occurred concurrently. In light of this, the discussion reflects an integration of these components.

Orienting Activities and Sources

Participants described several activities or sources of information they believed were instrumental in gaining cultural knowledge relative to the process of learning to teach. Not every participant emphasized the same orienting activity nor conceptualized these activities in the same fashion. However, each participant described being exposed to orienting information or engaging in activities that were fundamental to their
understanding of teaching culture. Sources of information or orienting activities viable to
this understanding included formal/intentional orienting sources (e.g., documents
including electronic documents, section meetings/teaching meetings, and structured
courses) and informal/unintentional orienting sources (e.g., the mass media, reputation,
and people). For the purposes of this study, intentional orienting sources refers to those
activities or pieces of information that were designed by the site institution to help the
participants become familiar with the culture of teaching. On the other hand,
informal/unintentional orienting sources were not organized by the site institution but
rather were sought out by participants or where the result of happenstance.

Documents and Electronic Sources

Paper documents such as letters of admission and course syllabi and electronic
web pages were beneficial in helping a number of participants become acclimated to the
classroom and in helping them to understand teaching culture. As indicated in the
participant profiles, Omukambi, Hala, and Ngugi acknowledged being notified that they
would be teaching prior to their arrival at the site institution and recalled frequently
receiving materials from different offices on campus. Although Ngugi had previous
teaching experience at the site institution and felt comfortable with his knowledge and
experience, he relied on these documents, particularly the electronic sources, to assist in
becoming re-familiar and reconnecting to the current environment. Omukambi and Hala
shared that they were eager for information as they prepared to assume their new roles.
Hala indicated that the web pages and paperwork she received from the university were
critical in her orientation process claiming, “since I was so far away, the information was
helpful in introducing me to this place and the assistantship” (OMI1).
Similarly to Hala, Omukambi recalled accessing the university’s web pages repeatedly and receiving several packets of materials from the Music Department and the Graduate College the summer before arriving at the site institution. He remembered, “reading and re-reading and re-reading . . . the course outline, the expectations and all that goes with the academic standards at [the site institution]” (OMI1-6, Line 109) to gain a general sense of what would be required of him. Perhaps more significant, Omukambi posited that the information provided a sense of what might be important in the classroom.

It appeared that there was going to be high expectations for me—particularly that I was truly going to need to be prepared to stay ahead of the students and be thorough with the course content. The course outline provided for several assignments—this emphasis was surprising to me—there were so many. It seemed to make the course easier for students to succeed and difficult for them to fail. This was different, really different than the schools in Kenya. (OMI1).

Teaching Meetings/Section Meetings

Participation in a weekly or bi-weekly meeting with faculty members and other teaching assistants was an experience shared by all of the participants. Teaching meetings, as they were called by Ngugi and Okpeke, provided opportunities to discuss, among other things, concerns about the course content or to request guidance in dealing with a difficult student. Ngugi, because of his previous experience in the department and knowledge of the course material, was invited to attend departmental faculty meetings. He acknowledged, with some degree of modesty, being treated more like a colleague than
a teaching assistant or graduate student and as a result believed he was encouraged to actively participate both providing and receiving feedback.

Okpeke indicated that the meeting she attended was actually a pedagogical course required of all teaching assistants within her department. She viewed these sessions as “stress relief time on Monday nights and we would all come in saying, ‘this is what I am facing and I want to know this’ and then we would talk about it” (OPI2-12, Lines 261 – 263). Okpeke recalled raising a concern in class that the readings or discussions provided little information or perspective about the teaching experiences of international teaching assistants, an oversight that she believed hinted at the fragility of her position in the department.

. . . I realized from my experiences that all the literature that we were reading was too general. In a sense it seemed to put every teacher under the same umbrella as if there was nothing that made us different. . . . It seemed as if they just wanted us to come in and just fit the American structure and follow that path. And I said that I had a problem with this basically because I am an international teacher and I need to understand how I can bridge the gap between my own experiences with the experiences here and make that transition smoothly (OPI2-12, Lines 263 – 271).

Section meetings, weekly sessions between teaching assistants and members of the department faculty organized within the respective departments, afforded participants opportunities to preview the content of upcoming lectures and to practice conducting experiments. The meetings were also designed to anticipate the questions and concerns that students’ might raise about the experiments and to prepare appropriate responses.
Simon, Hala, and Xuelun, the participants with appointments in the physical sciences, indicated that in addition to these meetings helping them to determine role expectations, they were also instrumental in revealing cultural nuances; making the unknown—known. In some instances the references to what the participants were learning about classroom culture were somewhat vague [e.g., Hala’s reference to “things just becoming clearer from the section meetings” (HAI2-2, Line 12)]. However, in other cases the references were far more specific. Xuelun, for example, recalled an early meeting during his tenure as a teaching assistant when he realized how much emphasis was placed on “giving assignments, grading, and individual problem solving rather than students working on things as a group. These things seem important here but not so important in China.” (XLFN). Xuelun believed the emphasis on multiple assignments done individually by the student to be in direct conflict with his idea of an effective classroom. He was far more comfortable with memorization and recitation believing these strategies to be the most effective tools for learning. Xuelun also noted that these strategies were best carried out in small groups. He was aware that what he believed was in conflict with what his students wanted and struggled trying to reconcile these differences.

Another key cultural aspect that Xuelun gathered from the early section meetings was the importance placed on communication and discussion between the faculty member and the student, what he described as the “whole talking thing” (XLI1, Line 54).

This whole talking thing was a surprise to me—that there was so much of it.

From the very beginning I experienced difficulty in trying to teach in English.

One of the greatest difficulties was trying to convey directions and course content.
. . . Students complained about my accent. English in China is very formal—it is almost British. This is very different from the English spoken in the U.S. . . . In China, English is taught as early as the middle-school years. However, the emphasis on teaching English in China is about mastery of reading and writing, not necessarily comprehension and speaking. . . . I have taken several English courses as well in an attempt to improve my English speaking, reading and comprehension (XL11, Lines 54 – 60).

Simon also indicated that the emphasis on discussion between faculty members and students was a bit disconcerting. However, what he found most intriguing was that this emphasis represented a different teaching model and raised questions about what it meant to be a good teacher.

Back in China . . . I had some very good teachers. But the teaching method in China is very different than that in the U.S. In the U.S., the teacher will encourage the student to ask questions. But in my memory a good teacher in China does not answer or encourage students’ questions. This is a very big difference. And [rarely] does the teacher in China ask the students if they understand the lecture fully before he moves on to another topic. So, he usually prepares the content of one lecture and then talks from the beginning [of the class] to the end and maybe he asks a few questions but [rarely]. And usually he does not check to see if the student has understood or not . . . that is a difference. (SNI2-8, Lines 160-171).

Xuelun’s observations eventually led him to realize that the dissonance he was experiencing in the classroom reflected differences between his home and host culture.
He described this concept and his attempts at reconciling this dissonance in the following excerpt.

Eventually, I just determined that if was just different here than back in China—we do things in China because we have learned that this is the way to do it. I realized one day that this is the same way it is here. Just different (XLFN).

Additional formal orienting activities that participants determined were instrumental in illuminating the culture of teaching were structured classes designed to improve English language proficiency and communication skills. Pending the results of a number of language proficiency examinations, participants were required to enroll in a series of English courses “in reading comprehension, vocabulary building, aural comprehension, as well as . . . grammar and writing skills” (Orientation materials, p. 3).

Simon was particularly forthcoming in describing the learning that occurred from participating in a formal class. He was immediately able to apply what he was learning in his teaching courses to his lab sessions. He recalled making contended connections made between his assignments and homework and the actual experience of teaching. These two aspects in concert generated greater feelings of confidence in his knowledge base and created a heightened sense of being able to teach effectively.

First, the course I am taking this semester—I learned more strategies of teaching in that course and we have a very good book. . . . [T]here are many strategies in that book regarding teaching a lab or teaching . . . . [T]his week we are focusing on how to do the questioning—how to field the students questions. We have four steps. First there is the three-second rule. You have to respond to the student’s question within three seconds. Then repeat or clarify the question. Then respond
to the question. Then check to see if the student understands you. This is a very
good strategy. This is just the one case. There are many, many strategies in the
book. So I have learned a lot of things (SNI2-7, Lines 142 – 152).

Second—the experience—thinking of the experience—that has just
accumulated with time. After I have spent more semesters teaching, I have seen
many students. I have seen many situations, both good and bad (laughter). I now
have some idea how to deal with different situations and to try to improve my job
(SNI2-7, Lines 153 –156).

*Unintentional Orienting Sources*

In addition to acquiring knowledge about teaching culture through sources
designed intentionally for that purpose, participants asserted that there were other,
random sources that served to illuminate the culture of education and teaching at the site
institution. One of these sources, print and electronic media, was not intentionally
designed to orient participants to their new environment nor did these materials originate
with the site institution. Moreover, because of numerous methods to disseminate news
and information worldwide, participants were apt to be exposed serendipitously to
sources of data about the United States in general and education in particular.
Consequently, participants arrived at the site institution with a set of notions about the
teaching environment long before their actual arrival. From their viewpoint, these sources
of information essentially served as a pre-orientation to the cultures of education and
teaching.

Both Simon and Xuelun recalled being exposed to information about the system
of higher education in the United States that was often times contradictory; yet,
intriguing. News reports back home describing discriminatory practices and policies, “towards people from other nations,” were quite common Simon reported (SNI2-2, Line 33). On the other hand, these reports were often interspersed with marketing campaigns highlighting U.S. education policies that promoted equality and appeared to “welcome intelligence from all over the world.” (SNI1-1, Lines 20 – 24).

Similarly, many of Paula’s initial perceptions about education, teaching, and classroom culture were shaped by television broadcasts, and news reports about school violence aired in Switzerland. Paula’s expectation and perceptions of the educational setting were largely influenced by mass media.

I expected it to be like what you see on TV. I mean—we get all the American television series back home. . . . I expected it to be more like that but in reality it was totally different (PSI1, Lines 36-39).

In addition to network television shows, news broadcasts also influenced Paula’s perspective concerning the educational setting, particularly news shows airing broadcasts of school violence. She determined that classrooms were dangerous places where student and teacher safety were compromised while attempting to make sense of this phenomenon.

When I saw things on TV about gun policies and things like that, that was really scary to me. It’s almost something I would like to see before I go home to be really able to comprehend that this really exists and it’s not just on TV that students have to be searched (PSI1, Lines 44-47).

Questioned as to how these news broadcasts of school violence influenced her perception of the college classroom environment, Paula commented
After I finished my senior year in high school here and started college, I realized that not everything on television back home was actually the way it was here. So I was relieved. But there were times when I was teaching though that I used to wonder about those things and wonder about the students I was teaching. Was it possible for one of the students in my class to become so angry that they would want to hurt me or someone else—it made me wonder (PSFN).

*Students as Socializing Agents*

Although participants acquired knowledge about teaching culture through orientation materials designed for that purpose and through materials intended for other purposes, the most significant source of information was obtained through classroom interactions and the ensuing relationship between student and teacher. Participants indicated that the teaching environment was one of bi-directionality—they taught subject content but students provided information on what they valued in the classroom regardless of stated institutional missions, goals, or purposes. In essence, students operated as socializing agents—purveys of values, beliefs, and norms about learning, teaching, and the classroom environment. Oftentimes this learning occurred in the wake of students’ criticism. Omukambi described this phenomenon this way:

I teach students about music. That’s my responsibility but they certainly teach as well. From them I learn what to do—what they think is important—even though I don’t think they intend to do this and it isn’t always good. I think teachers are at the mercy of the students when it comes to knowing what to do in the classroom (OMI2).
The process of acquiring knowledge of teaching culture was accomplished in the physical space of the classroom through observing student and interpreting these behaviors through the perspective of their own experiences within higher education. In the following section the components that students identified are discussed.

*Observing and Interpreting Student Behaviors.*

Participants acknowledged using teaching methods that were both comfortable and familiar. These methods were rooted in their belief system about teachers and students. However, students were often critical of these teaching behaviors and were quite vocal in expressing their dissatisfaction with the classroom environment. For example, Ngugi preferred lecturing and using power point presentations to deliver class content. He indicated that his students wanted him to personalize the lectures or as he described it, “put more of myself into it. . . . How can I put myself into it? A line is either a line or it isn’t. Either you can draw it correctly or you can’t. There isn’t any more to it than that” (NGFN). As far as Ngugi was concerned, teaching was about being efficient, systematic, and practical in delivering class content.

Unaccustomed to student criticism, verbal or written, participants admitted being puzzled by these reactions. It is important to note that in some cases the nature of the criticism was less important than the fact that students were openly critical. For example, Paula acknowledged being perplexed that her students felt at liberty to lodge complaints at all. “Back home, students complaining like this would just never happen. You just don’t do this kind of thing. You are just grateful to be able to be in University (NGFN).

Similarly, Omukambi noted how perplexed he was at the practice of students levying complaints against teachers through an evaluation process. He acknowledged that
his teacher training helped shape and develop a teaching philosophy and teaching methods reflective of the educational and cultural values back home. As such, Omukambi approached his teaching responsibilities in that same vein. For example, he explained that “lecturing is used a whole lot in my country and so is a didactic process of teaching” (OMFN). The methods provided him with significant control over the classroom setting. However, his students were clear in expressing their dissatisfactions.

Well, at first I didn’t know what to think when the students complained about my teaching style and I didn’t know what to do about it. It was something so different from my previous experiences in higher education. I was not accustomed to students being able to lodge complaints against a teacher for just teaching (OMI1).

They (students) speak their minds. . . . They don’t just keep quiet. They will talk about what they think and how they think you are doing. I found that very different from students in Kenya whose training is—from a cultural perspective—whether in kindergarten or at the university level will keep still and be almost a passive listener in the classroom and only open their mouths when the teacher has so asked (OMI1-7, Lines 135 – 140).

In addition to criticisms concerning pedagogy, participants acknowledged being puzzled because students appeared to value a classroom environment where receiving a letter grade in a course seemed to be more important than actually learning. Although the participants acknowledged that they were good students, meaning that they worked hard and received grades reflective of these efforts, they all indicated they valued learning for the sheer thrill of it. This concept appeared to be in stark contrast to their students who
appeared to value receiving a grade irrespective of the learning that occurred. In attempting to make sense of this observation, Xuelun decided:

I think that a number of students don’t seem to care about learning. It is easier to teach students who are excited about learning and want to learn. Students here want to be given information with little effort on their part. In China you must learn on your own and push yourself very hard (XLII-6, Lines 107 –111).

As discussed earlier, Ngugi expressed difficulty in understanding the rationale behind student evaluations believing that students were setting the standard of quality for teaching and experienced frustration each semester upon receiving the evaluation results. Comparing his undergraduate experience with that of his students, he, like Xuelun, determined that they were not serious about their studies.

I think the students want the instructor to be entertaining. One of the criticisms I have had from my students is that I am not entertaining enough, the class is boring, and I’m saying just learning should be entertaining enough. I don’t think a teacher should be an entertainer and I think this is where I find they, for this level, they are not going to notice the information. They want to be spoon fed too much. It is challenging, like one of my students said you actually have to think, that’s the hard part. For this level, this is one of my disappointments where I think students need to be able to think through rather than to be spoon fed information (NGI1-6, Lines 104 – 113).

The notion that students were reluctant to fully engage in the learning process was a sentiment that Okpeke shared as well. She believed that her classroom was a place
where students adopted a “spirit of anti-intellectualism” (FN) and failed to take full advantage of resources and opportunities for learning.

I feel too much is taken for granted in the education system here. You have a syllabus laid out for you telling you what to read. Now if I had a syllabus in Nigeria it was basically—basically it meant that I was to stay a week ahead of the professor in each instance—not this strict outline that you cannot deviate from without the students becoming anxious (OPI2-12, Lines 234 - 238).

I think students just go through the exercises or motions of learning, motions of education—students are here to be fed and when they are done feeding they want to be let go. That seems to be the routine (OPI1-10, Lines 33 - 35).

*Valuing Homogeneity.*

Participants determined that students preferred to be taught by teachers or teaching assistants more similar to them in culture, language, and experiences. All the participants to some degree indicated that being from a foreign country mattered to their students. Xuelun indicated that “his differences” (XLFN) were a source of tension as far as his students perceiving him as an authority figure in the classroom, “Students would challenge my authority to be in the classroom saying, ‘well how do you (emphasis reflected on audiotape) know that’” (XLI1-6, Line 42)?

Paula’s students were openly critical, expressing their preference for an experienced teacher, one who was pursuing graduate education in the education field, and one who was American. She conceded that her students’ concerns about her lack of experience and knowledge of the education field were valid. However, because of the nature of her life experience; having spent her formative years in Europe, speaking
several languages fluently, and moving freely between bordering countries, her students’ concerns about her foreignness were unexpected and unappreciated. “Often I feel when I go into a classroom students act as if they have never been around someone from another country. The students complain because I have an accent—what is this? I don’t get it. Doesn’t everybody (PSI1)?

In contrast, Omukambi emphasized that his students appeared not to have a problem with understanding his accent but rather they had difficulty finding common ground with someone from another country. He maintained that his students possessed a narrow perspective of the world beyond the borders of the United States and consequently had difficulty finding common ground with him.

Students because they are 18, 19 years old and have only been in the U.S., they haven’t been educated in Brazil, and South Africa, or Indonesia. They have a very narrow view of the world. They have no idea how to make connections with a TA from a foreign country. This TA is telling them things that they don’t know and they cannot make a connection (OMI1-28, Lines 599-602).

Okpeke recalled interactions with her students were she was certain that nationality and the color of her skin mattered. Although all the participants believed that students responded to them differently because of language, cultural, or religious differences, Okpeke was the only participant to examine students’ preferences in the light of racism. Never expecting to come face-to-face with stereotypes, not to mention racism she reasoned:

For some of them I am the first Black person they have ever known as a teacher which is an interesting thing that I never thought of before I came here. . . . And like I
said, just like it’s sad that so many of us come here and they say teach and you have no experience teaching, you are also not taught about the stereotypes that your students will bring into the classroom because you are a foreign teacher. So you are not even aware of these things. You have to face them as they come up. And if you don’t know how to deal with them like I didn’t know how to deal with racism you just have to learn (OPI1).

Her course of action in learning “how to deal with racism” was to reaffirm her identity as a human being separate from her burgeoning identity as a teacher.

I teach in my native attire. . . . I want my students to meet me. You know? This is who I am. I mean it’s only fair. Being a teacher does not mean that I have to become American in every way for you to accept. I refuse to do that. So that’s basically what I do. I decided that this is who I am. This is what I have to do so survive. But this is what I will not give up in the name of survival here whether it’s in the classroom or somewhere else.

Growing Into a Teacher

The third and final foci guiding this study were to determine the process that participants engaged in to develop an identity as teacher, to determine what information or knowledge informed this identity development, and to discover how this identity development was manifested in the classroom. It is important to note that identity development for the purposes of this study was about identification with the profession (teaching) not a reference to development in a global sense.

In response to this particular emphasis, the third major theme to emerge from the data analysis process was that identity development was a function of multiple
interrelated factors, both cognitive and affective, that occurred during participation in the teaching assistant phenomenon. While taking part in the practical experience of teaching, participants began to think of themselves as teachers, developed greater confidence in their ability to engage in teaching behaviors, and reported feeling more competent in their role. Participants described gaining a newfound maturity. This maturation was precipitated internally through reflection, discourse, and a synthesis of knowledge stemming from acts of teaching. Thus, identity development was about the participants experiencing a change in attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors, with the result being a deeper understanding of the complexity of the teaching role.

In determining the process that participants engaged in to develop an identity as teacher there are additional factors to consider. As indicated in the participant profiles, the participants’ length of time teaching at the site institution varied considerably from individual to individual. Moreover, the degree of preparation and training, knowledge of subject content, and comfort level with pedagogical strategies were other areas that were vastly different for each of the participants. For example, Omukambi and Ngugi’s path to becoming a teacher began prior to enrolling at the site institution. Formal undergraduate classes, qualifying examinations, the teacher certification process, and eventual employment as a teacher were just a few of the steps they described on this journey. Consequently, they viewed the assistantship appointment as an extension of what they had been doing previously, only the players and location had changed. Having completed the external requirements of the profession in their home countries, when notified of the assistantship, they began the internal process of thinking of themselves as teachers and consequently arrived at the site institution prepared to assume this role. In the absence of
these formal preparatory steps towards identity development, the other participants began as novices and advanced through multiple levels of identity development precipitated by learning to teach and the act of teaching.

Regardless of dissimilarities; however, the process of developing an identity as teacher converged in the following areas: (1) participants experienced integration of their past experiences as learner with their current experiences as teacher and, (2) participants moved from a simplistic perspective of teaching to one of greater complexity. These converging points are discussed in the following section.

Synthesis of Learner and Teacher Experiences

As participants defined themselves as teachers, their experiences as learners at the site institution and at home, served as a point of reference philosophically and pedagogically; thus, teaching represented the nexus between these experiences and the current reality of teaching (synthesis of the experiences of learning and teaching). Participants developed a teaching philosophy and pedagogical strategies that were rooted in their experiences as learner. Essentially, what they believed and valued about teaching, learning, and the purposes of education formed the foundation for their teaching behaviors and their approach to teaching. Paula was quite explicit in explaining that she emulated teaching behaviors and approached teaching based on her experiences as a learner.

Pretty much, I teach the way I was taught. It just seems to make sense that way. I probably can’t say that there is a teacher who stands out to me that really got me excited about teaching. But, sometimes I do things in the classroom the way I saw my teachers do—my high school teachers and my teachers when I was an
undergraduate student—it seems more natural and comfortable that way particularly since I went to high school and college here in the States (PSI2-15, Lines 311 - 314).

Like Paula, Simon explained that initially his experiences as a learner in China shaped his perceptions of teaching and teachers and consequently influenced his teaching behaviors in the classroom. “I only knew how to do things the way we did in China” (SIFN). However, he explained that through his experiences as a learner at the site institution his teaching behaviors and outlook evolved as he merged the perspective of a learner with that of a teacher. He recalled:

Teaching here was so different than in China. In my lab sessions, at first I tried to act like my teachers in China. This was a very difficult thing to do since American students are so very different in what they expect in the classroom (SIFN).

For example, in my memory a good teacher in China does not answer student questions or encourage students’ questions. Rarely does the teacher in China ask the students if they understand the lecture fully before he moves on to another topic. He usually prepares the content of one lecture and then talks from the beginning to the end and maybe he asks a few questions—but very little. And usually he does not check to see if the student has understood or not. This is how it has been in my own experience (SNI1, Lines 164-171, pg. 8).

After a while I realized my teaching had to change. The students were not doing well on the assignments and this bothered me. I wanted them to do well. I believed that they were capable of doing the work. As I watched my advisor, I began to think about how he teaches and so I tried to follow his example—the
way he delivers the lecture and explains things very closely and thoroughly. He asks questions and delivers the material to stimulate the students’ interest. This is a good thing (SIFN).

In describing the process of developing an identity as teacher, Hala waxed metaphorically using terms such as “road of discovery” (FN) and “curve journey” (FN) as she reflected on how her experiences as a learner served as a springboard for her teaching. Initially as a teaching assistant her approach to teaching was dictated by the academic discipline and her strong identification with her role as a student/learner. However, as she became more comfortable in her role as a teacher, Hala indicated that her understanding and knowledge of role expectations also increased. Consequently, she observed that her perspective of what a teacher is and does began to change. Initially her perspective of the role was somewhat one-dimensional and fairly simplistic. As she matured in the role her concept of the position reflected greater complexity. In the following passage, Hala weaves back and forth between her experiences as a learner and her experiences as a teacher as she describes the evolving process and the learning that occurred.

At first, I was very solution oriented—that is what physics and mathematics demand—there is a problem so there must be a solution. But now I determined that there is more to learning and to teaching--it is about the process of learning not just the destination (HAFN).

Before I was thinking that just the result of everything is important. I was not thinking about—the road—the way we are going to get that result. I was thinking about just the result. If you get the result that’s it. There’s nothing else.
But now because of my teaching role, I think in every experience we are still learning something. We can learn something from this road that we travel—not just learning from what is at the end. This road has taught me a lot not just the result. I think the teacher can convey this idea to the students, for example, in Physics they need to solve problems and they are doing some experiments to solve problems. If they could just understand idea that is it isn’t just about how important this experiment is, it’s also about how important what it is you can learn from this experiment—the most important thing then is what you get from the result. I can not say that the result is not important but if you care about the road, if you care about the path you are going to take that would be good as well (HAI1-11, Lines 215 – 233).

Moving through Simplicity to Complexity

An additional concept that participants described in their evolution as teacher was that of developing a deeper, more complex understanding and definition of both teaching and teacher. Participants reported experiencing varying degrees of growth and developing greater maturity as meaning making evolved. Initially, participants reported being more inclined to focus on their needs, their discomfort and confusion, and their fears and anxieties as they attempted to learn course content, fine tune teaching behaviors, and develop appropriate ways to convey information in both a language and culture that were unfamiliar. The collective bodies of theories associated with student development provide insight as to the process that international teaching assistants experience as they move from simplicity to complexity as they began to perceive themselves as teacher.
One of the problems associated with applying student development theory to international students is that traditional models may only tangentially provide insights to this population of students. The conceptual framework of a particular theory is reflective of the values and beliefs of the respective culture. For example, Bulthuis’s (1986) research on international students indicated that in the United States much value is placed on “independence, self-reliance, autonomy, efficiency, time management, and entrepreneurship” (p. 26) and that many international students may not share these same value systems or principles. Xuelun, Simon, and Hala for instance, believed that in their home country admission to the university was very competitive but they and other students worked together to prepare for national examinations believing that competition requiring that others fail was unnecessary and detrimental to the good of the group. They also indicated that the needs of the group took precedence over those of the individual and stressed a dependency upon family; particularly parents for guidance, direction, and support.

A review of the literature on international student development revealed that very little research has been conducted on the affect of the college experience on this graduate student population. The heterogeneity of this student group makes generalizations difficult. As discussed previously, international graduate students, like many other students, come from various cultures, countries, background, religions, age groups, and socioeconomic levels. Nevertheless, Lee, Abd-Ella and Burks (1981) contended that commonalities do exist. Issues related to adjusting to a new environment, such as developing interpersonal relationships and adapting to the classroom setting are often compounded because of language and cultural barriers. Bearing in mind that conventional
application of student development theory to predict or explain international teaching assistant behavior may only indirectly apply and that this student population does share common experiences related to adjustment, adaptation, and transition to higher education insights can be gleaned from the application of select development theories.

Student development theory has its roots in the disciplines of psychology and sociology and the field of vocational education. These fields of study function as conceptual frameworks providing insights as to how students develop in the collegiate environment (Evans, Forney, & Guido-DiBrito, 1998). Certainly at the core of student development theory is the belief that during the course of a student’s tenure on a college or university campus, the experience, through intentional academic and programmatic interventions, changes individuals so that they leave college different, perhaps better than when they arrived. To that end, Sanford (1967) defined student development as “the organization of increasing complexity” (p. 47) whereby individuals not only grow and change in a positive direction but also are able to “integrate and act on many different experiences and influences (p. 47). In addition to developing the skills to organize the multiple, complex facets of their lives a maturation process also occurs. Sanford opined that this maturation process is precipitated by an environment that is both challenging and supportive. Certainly in the case of international teaching assistants the experience of learning to teach in an unfamiliar language and culture was a challenging one and as mentioned previously participants found support in often times unconventional ways.

Often representing the “intellectual and social elite of their countries” (Hull, 1978, p. 3) international teaching assistants were quite accomplished academically. In the research interviews they stressed their academic credentials, national and regional
rankings, and spoke with a great deal of pride about their personal and professional accomplishments prior to coming to the site institution. However, as they attempted to adapt to the classroom setting, issues related to feeling competent in a particular subject area or in practicing the art and craft of teaching surfaced. Bulthuis (1986) indicated that most international students were educated in systems that stressed memorization. In fact, “knowledge is conceived as a body of facts that students memorize” (p. 25).

Consequently, the participants experienced difficulty operating in an educational system that perceived knowledge and discovery as an ongoing process. Pedagogical strategies such as quizzes, classroom assignments, and the practice of posing questions to generate discussions were often bewildering. Moreover, Parr, Bradley, and Bingi’s (1992) study that explored international students’ feelings and concerns during the acculturation process revealed that this student population was most anxious about understanding class lectures because of the pace of speaking and attempting to understand idioms and slang terms.

As understanding and meaning making occurred, participants reported experiencing changes in attitudes and beliefs resulting in focusing less on their needs, shortcomings, and “doing things the right way” (FN) and more on the needs of their students and student learning. In some instances participants were somewhat ambiguous in describing this maturation process. After several semesters teaching, Paula indicated, “But this semester it’s better. I’m not sure why but I feel more confident in everything. I know the material. I can do this (PSI2-12, Lines 231-232). In other instances references to this phenomenon were more explicit, “From the beginning as a teaching assistant to now I just seemed to grow as a teacher understanding more and more about the needs of
students, how they learn, and the purposes of teaching. I am much less self-conscious now” (XLI1).

Hala, like Xuelun was very much aware of evolving and growing into a teacher. In addition to acquiring confidence in her teaching abilities, Hala also described developing a philosophy of teaching and definition of a teacher rooted in her experiences as a learner and teacher. She explained:

When I first began teaching, I was thinking I had to know—I had to have the answer for everything—just the way I am in my classes. I was afraid of being wrong of not getting things just right (HAFN).

I just found my confidence and that took a while to come. I’ve gotten use to teaching and you know, I feel more comfortable in my class. I really enjoy teaching now. My best time during the day is when I teach, when I have my lab and I feel real comfortable in this setting now (HAI1-9, pg. 184 – 187).

I think a teacher is a very important individual in a student’s education life—whether they are here in the United States or at home in my country. It does not matter. The relationship between teacher and students here and in my country it is the same, if you think about that deeply somebody is training, somebody is teaching, somebody is learning. The same relationship but on two different continents. Teaching and learning is significant regardless of the place. What it is supposed to do crosses cultural boundaries (HAFN).

Okpeke’s process of growing into a teacher provides an intriguing addition to this phenomenon. In the participant profiles, Okpeke recalled her extreme frustration and anger at being asked to teach without adequate training or subject knowledge. These two
emotions punctuated her words throughout the interview conversations and appeared to color her behaviors in the classroom. In the following passage, however, Okpeke’s anger and frustration appeared to have dissipated and are seemingly replaced with a degree of resignation as she illustrates moving from a simplistic perspective of teaching and teacher to one that is decidedly more complex.

At some point I had to decide which way I wanted to go. Whether I wanted to make an impact or survive. Because there is a difference. You can decide to make an impact in the sense that your students at the end of the term will feel they learned something from you. Or you can survive whereby you are just going to give them an assignment, give them the grade and you know this is all about getting the paycheck every two weeks and that is fine with me. So I had to make that decision regardless of the challenges I faced when I started—the question was what did I want to do? Did I want them to learn or did I want just to survive. Because you do have that choice as a teacher. So when I decided I wanted to make an impact, I then had to decide in what way was I going to make an impact. Was I going to make it in my style of teaching? Was I going to make it in how I graded assignments? Was I going to make it in terms of how I taught and wanted my students to approach the course and then how I wanted them to apply it later as in when this class is over—is this ever going to be relevant to them again? Things like that. So when I made that decision—I took just one pedagogical class. And then what I decided to do was basically determine what was working for me in my teaching. What techniques were I using that were good? Was it necessary to make changes or not (OPI2-17, Lines 369-386)?
Summary

The final research question guiding this study was to determine the process that participants engaged in to develop an identity as teacher. To that end the following research question and sub-questions will be addressed:

- How do international teaching assistants construct an identity as teacher?
- What informs this construction?
- How is this construction implemented in the classroom setting?

From the participants’ perspectives on their process of constructing an identity as teacher three themes emerged. Firstly, identity development occurred as participants interpreted their current teaching experiences through the lenses of their role as a student/learner, essentially melding current and past experiences as student/learner with the new experience of teaching. Whether the student/learner experience occurred in the home country or at the site institution, participants used these experiences as a tool to shape both their approach to teaching and their teaching philosophy.

Secondly, identity development involved cognitive and affective components. As participants began to think and feel that they were teachers they began re-presenting, re-creating themselves as teachers. Thus, acts of teaching were rooted in whom the participants perceived themselves to be.

Finally, identification as teacher occurred as participants experienced a maturation process moving from a narrow, simplistic perspective concerning what a teacher is and does to a broader, more complex perspective. Initially, participants indicated that motivation for teaching behaviors were driven by a need to be perceived as confident, knowledgeable, and competent by their students, faculty members, and peers. Participants
appeared overly conscious of their particular needs and less concerned about those of their students. However, as they evolved in the teaching role, participants acknowledged being less motivated by external factors, less focused on performing correctly and having correct answers, and more focused on student need and student learning. Moreover, participants reported re-aligning their thoughts and beliefs to intentionally create environments within the classroom to promote student understanding, learning, and ultimately student success.
CHAPTER V. DISCUSSION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

Throughout this study a photography metaphor has been used as a descriptive framework for the inquiry. The intent has been to use the written word to provide a photomontage or collage of selected pieces portraying the experience of international graduate teaching assistants learning to teach. The participant portrayals in the first section of Chapter IV serve as an idiosyncratic description and introduction of the men and women prominent in the foreground of the photograph. The camera lens is positioned to provide a close-up, focused description of the characteristics and uniqueness of the international teaching assistant experience and to provide an opportunity for what Geertz (1973) refers to as thick description.

In Chapter V the photograph and artist-cum-photographer metaphors are once again employed. This time a wide-angled camera lens is used to capture the background setting and broader scope of the participants’ experience. To that end, this chapter has a threefold purpose. Firstly, the discussion will provide the final portrayal of the experience of international teaching assistants learning to teach. The camera lens, here, depicts a wide-angled viewpoint, to move beyond description to interpretation. Eisner (1991) contended that interpretation is, “to place in context, to explain, to unwrap, to explicate. It is, as some might say, a hermeneutic activity of decoding the message within . . .” (p. 97). For this inquiry, the interpreting is accomplished through propositions. Propositions are “general statements of fact grounded in the data” (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984, p. 134).
These statements of facts or theories are the result of “going beyond the data, thinking creatively with the data, asking the data questions, and generating theories and frameworks (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996, p. 30). Moreover, the propositions demonstrate the interrelatedness of the themes presented in Chapter IV, speak to their relationship to the research questions, and provide a response to the questions, “What is the significance of this study?” Excerpts from research interviews, examples of theoretical models, and examples from the existing body of literature are used to illustrate the interconnectedness of the data.

The Propositions in the Aggregate

The following propositions emerged as a result of questioning and re-questioning the data to decode the messages beyond the data. The five propositions listed below support the specific insights articulated in Chapter IV and further inform the study’s guiding research questions. The outcome propositions for the study were as follows:

- International teaching assistants’ preconceived expectations about their role as a teacher were incongruent with the reality of the teaching experience. Socialization played a critical role in helping participants initially shape and then modify these preconceptions while developing a clearer understanding of the teaching role.

- The process of learning to teach is inextricably intertwined with the activities of teaching. Essentially, international teaching assistants learn to teach by participating in acts of teaching.
• The international teaching assistants’ beliefs about teaching influenced classroom behaviors. These beliefs, acquired from previous educational experiences, were the result of cultural imprinting and were frequently in conflict with what was valued in the classroom setting.

• International teaching assistants incorporate knowledge and information about the teaching context by constructing understanding through a process of integrating new information with what is already known.

• International teaching assistants’ process of learning to teach is complicated by the necessity of integrating multiple intersecting role identities as they attempt to reconcile their perceptions of self with the perceptions’ of others.

The propositions take the pieces that have been laid out individually in previous chapters and highlight the intersections where the stories overlap and intertwine; in essence, they bring together the disparate pieces to craft the collage. The purpose here, at this juncture, is to provide texture, depth, and richness to the study while illuminating the international teaching assistant experience from the viewpoint of those individuals immersed in the day-to-day activities of learning to teach. In the following section, each proposition and its significance are discussed.

Proposition One: International teaching assistants’ preconceived expectations about their role as a teacher were incongruent with the reality of the
teaching experience. Socialization played a critical role in helping participants initially shape and then modify these preconceptions while developing a clearer understanding of the teaching role.

The work of Weidman, Twale, and Stein (2001) on the socialization process of graduate and professional students provided a lens to explore the international teaching assistants’ process of learning to teach. Weidman, et al. (2001) defined socialization as “the process through which individuals gain the knowledge, skills, and values necessary for successful entry into a professional career requiring an advanced level of specialized knowledge and skills” (p. iii). To achieve these advanced levels, graduate students progressed through developmental stages of socialization (Thornton & Nardi, 1975). Weidman, et al. (2001) opined that these developmental stages were interactive rather than linear, resembled an “‘upward-moving spiral’” (p. 5) toward role acquisition, and as individuals progressed through periods of stability and uncertainty, change occurred. In the following sections three stages of socialization are discussed; anticipatory, formal, and informal are discussed.

*Anticipatory Socialization*

The international teaching assistant participants arrived at the site institution with preconceived expectations about the teaching assistantship and their role as teachers. This phenomenon reflects the first dimension of socialization, the anticipatory stage (Feldman, 1976; Tierney & Rhodes, 1994; Weidman, et al., 2001). During this stage individuals imagine the experience they are seeking while envisioning themselves as key players in their new roles.
Socializing agents such as family, peers/role incumbents, print and electronic media, and education/schools inform this envisioning. In the following sections, excerpts from the participants’ research interviews are presented illustrating the particular socializing agent. Also provided are discussions of how the participants interpreted the information they received and the assumptions they made about the assistantship as a result.

From previous discussions, it may be recalled that most of the participants perceived the assistantship as an internship or apprenticeship experience. An apprenticeship, as they interpreted the term, suggested a relationship between a master craftsman or craftswoman – in this case a master teacher – and a novice. To that end, the participants believed that they would work closely with a faculty member who would supervise their practice as a teacher and provide guidance as they learned to teach. Initially, family members and peers/role incumbents were influential as socializing agents during the anticipatory stage. International teaching assistant participants relied on these individuals as information sources as they attempted to make sense of their new role. For example, Simon based his perception of the assistantship on an apprenticeship program that his sister and friends had been involved in during their graduate programs at other institutions in the United States. He indicated that these individuals had been assigned to assist faculty members in their respective departments and that they were guided through their graduate programs. Simon believed his sister’s experience as a teaching assistant was richer because of the support and shepherding she received from her faculty advisor. On many occasions, he called her for advice as to how
to handle classroom management issues or for support and encouragement when his spirits sagged. Believing that his experience at the site institution would be similar to that of his sister, Simon was understandably disappointed that the hoped for relationship with a faculty mentor did not materialize.

Hala mentioned that a cousin, a faculty member in Canada, was key in providing her with information about the assistantship role. He described her teaching responsibilities and helped her developed strategies to balance the multiple priorities that she would face. She also recalled seeking his advice as she attempted to understand instructional strategies and other classroom nuances. For example, she indicated that in her educational experience summative evaluations conducted by students were the norm and multiple measures to assess student performance seemed peculiar. Hala indicated that she was disinclined to ask questions of others about things that seemed strange since she was reluctant to reveal any shortcomings to others within the department. Her cousin, then, served as an informant guiding her through the assistantship experience.

Lastly, Xuelun recalled using his father, a teacher in China, as a role model for what he thought he would do in the classroom. He recalled his father telling him, “Sometimes in teaching, you just do the best you can. They can’t hold that against you if you do your best and demonstrate that you are trying” (XL11-2, Line 12). Xuelun indicated that during the times he struggled with his teaching he was reassured by his father’s words.

In addition to family and friends operating as socializing agents, other participants indicated that their previous educational experiences were
instrumental in shaping their perceptions of the assistantship role. Omukambi recalled that as an undergraduate student enrolled in teacher preparation courses, preceptors assisted faculty members with teaching and grading tasks, kept office hours, and conducted small group discussions. In his experience faculty members closely supervised and mentored these individuals. Most preceptors would eventually seek future teaching positions as a result of their experience. Omukambi based his concept of the assistantship on this model.

Okpeke’s concept of the assistantship as apprenticeship was based on what she deemed, “good common sense” (OPFN). She recalled learning about higher education in the United States while an undergraduate student. Universities, such as the site institution, were reputed to be places where efficiency and effectiveness were emphasized and teaching was a highly skilled activity. For her, the teaching and research functions were distinctly separate, faculty members did one or the other based on experience and interest but seldom both. Based on this assessment, Okpeke believed that it was highly unlikely that she would be teaching since she had never taught before. Moreover, she reported being confident that her assistantship assignment would be that of researcher or at the very least she would serve in some administrative capacity.

Okpeke recalled that when she was notified that she would be teaching she believed she had been assigned this role in error based on how she perceived the role. She commented, “It was inefficient and ineffective to have me as a teaching assistant. It didn’t make good common sense. At the very least I expected to teach with a faculty member—not be expected to do this thing by myself” (OPI1-4,
Lines 30-31). This appointment was incongruent with her expectations and conception of the teaching role.

In addition to family, friends, and previous educational experiences influencing preconceptions, print and electronic media also played a key role in shaping perceptions about the teaching assistantship. Omukambi gleaned information about the assistantship from letters he received outlining responsibilities for the teaching appointment. He observed that written materials from departmental faculty and the Graduate College contained consistent information. These documents outlined departmental expectations of him as a teaching assistant, provided contact information about faculty members within the department, indicated the financial support provided by the appointment, and delineated the courses he would be teaching. Omukambi maintained that the information was reassuring, comforting, and indicated that, “people knew what they were doing” (OM11-3, Line 47).

Moreover, the information helped establish a positive tone about the institution and the assistantship. He recalled that it was at this point he began to believe that he could handle the responsibilities related to the appointment. The differences in Omukambi and Okpeke’s anticipatory socialization perhaps reflects divergences in attitudes towards teaching assistants, as they panned out, in the different colleges and departments in which the two student-teachers served.

Paula indicated that her preconceptions about the assistantship and higher education in general were initially shaped by exposure to television broadcasts and print media. She recalled believing that the images depicted in these media
outlets were an accurate portrayal of university life in the United States. In recalling one of her earliest perceptions about student-teacher interactions, Paula pointed out:

   Just as it was on television that is how I thought it would be. In the pictures and things students were always talking and working with a teacher—it just looked different—you know—like the teacher was always helping the student. I thought it was going to be like that—but that is not how it really is. You have to learn to do things on your own” (PSI2,-10, Lines 207 – 210).

   In addition to these images as socializing factors, Paula’s concept of the assistantship developed further during the application process. As she reported in the research interviews, “a week before classes started, I was told that I would be teaching” (PSI1-2, Line 46). Paula recalled that when she was notified about her appointment she was initially very excited since this employment would support her graduate work. Although she had not functioned as a teacher before, she was confident that training would prepare her for this role. Paula was convinced that with proper training she would succeed as a teacher. She recollected:

   Well, I mean I was really relieved that I didn’t have to pay this bill that I had just received . . . . But when I heard it was teaching that I was going to, I was kind of scared. I was scared but I expected to get trained. So I was like, oh my god, this is going to be a huge challenge but I’ll be ready for it because of the training. I didn’t expect to come here and to be told that I would be teaching the next week (PSI1, Lines 56 – 62).
Without training or an opportunity to adequately prepare for the tasks awaiting her, Paula decided that the faculty in her department and the university as a whole placed little value on the assistantship, on her, and on the students she would be teaching. This disappointment, coupled with the incongruence between her preconceptions about the appointment and the reality of her new environment, were not without consequences. Paula observed that she spent most of her time as a teaching assistant feeling frustrated and alienated. Moreover, she had difficulty determining the purpose of her tasks, venturing so far as to remark, “You could train a monkey to do what I do” (PSFN).

As a novice teacher, Paula wanted to know the rationale behind the teaching tasks that she was asked to perform. She experienced little connection or intentionality between the instructional methods she used and the course material. Paula sincerely believed that since her appointment was in teacher preparation, her classes should provide exemplary examples of teaching behaviors.

The preconceptions formed during the process of anticipatory socialization were challenging to overcome. Socialization at this point was tacit, pervasive, and usually conducted by socializing agents who the individual on the receiving end trusted. Participants frequently commented, “that is just the way it is” (PSFN) by way of explanation when asked to explain their perspectives. Anticipatory socialization, then, is a period when the international teaching assistants learned about their new experience, anticipated their role, anticipated what would happen, and developed stereotypes and preconceived expectations as a result, with the difficulty of being able to articulate how this learning occurred.
Hofstede (2001) indicated that these preconceived expectations were the result of “mental programs” (p. xix). He writes:

“People carry ‘mental programs’ that are developed in the family in early childhood and reinforced in schools and organizations . . . . They are most clearly expressed in the different values that predominate among people from different countries (p. xix).

Consequently then, faced with new experiences, the international teaching assistant participants initially relied on what was familiar, their previous experiences and knowledge base, to inform teaching behaviors. However, as a result of continued immersion in the new environment and exposure to different socializing agents within the institutional setting, participants began to modify their initial perceptions--their mental programs--of their teaching roles and expectations leading to an additional component of socialization, the formal stage.

**Formal Socialization**

Formal socialization refers to experiences that are structured and are intentionally designed to achieve a particular set of objectives (Tierney & Rhoads, 1994; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979; Weidman et al., 2001). Tierney and Bensimon (1996) referred to these experiences as rites of passage that begin in the pre-professional phase, concluding once full membership into the profession has been attained. International teaching assistants participated in activities such as completing coursework and comprehensive examinations, opening ceremonies, convocations, and graduation ceremonies. These activities, according to Staton (1990), validate the teaching assistant in their role as a pre-professional and
indicate progression towards degree completion and graduation. During this phase of socialization, the primary socializing agents are faculty members (Bowen & Rudenstine, 1992; Kirk & Todd-Mancillas, 1991; Tierney & Rhoads, 1994; Weidman, et al., 2001). These individuals were critical in providing instruction about “normative role expectations and how they are carried out” (Weidman, et al., 2001, p. 13). The concept of normative role expectations, as it is used here, implies that participants began learning and then adopting behaviors that were supported and encouraged by faculty members within their respective departments while discarding behaviors outside these parameters.

The international teaching assistants participated in a number of formal events leading to greater awareness of their new environment. Ngugi was invited, perhaps because of his long association with his department and college both as an undergraduate and master’s student, to attend faculty meetings where he was often called upon to share his perspectives about course content, textbook selection, and instructional strategies. On several occasions faculty members would provide him with tidbits of information that he was then able to incorporate into his teaching. He believed that his students benefited from these exchanges. Ngugi acknowledged that this opportunity was a privilege and viewed this experience as an indicator of the value that the institution placed on collegiality, which defined as “sharing of information so that everyone can be more successful and effective” (NGFN).

In addition to faculty meetings and casual, interpersonal interactions with faculty members, other participants recalled that pedagogical courses were
key to helping them understand what to do in the classroom. Simon acknowledged that the instructional strategies and learning theories that he was exposed to in his required courses were invaluable, both for what he learned and how this knowledge helped him feel more competent. He explained:

That class helps me a lot. I’ve become aware of the students more—audience awareness—communication skills and I’ve tried to improve the communication between me and the students. And I try to understand the undergraduate students—what they expect. And, although there are a lot of things for me to improve, I think I am moving toward that direction (SM12-5, Lines-91-96).

In these small, intimate group settings, the participants indicated they were able to form relationships with faculty members and other teaching assistants. These interpersonal interactions were just as beneficial as the discussions about instructional strategies and classroom management issues. Notwithstanding these positive outcomes, socialization did not always occur as the socializing agents intended. The desired outcome from participating in a formal, structured activity was not always initially evident to the teaching assistant participants; sometimes sense making occurred later. For example, Xuelun commented that participation in an orientation program for new assistantship appointees was beneficial but also disappointing. As he recalled,

I participated in [the graduate student orientation] in August. In many ways the orientation was beneficial, but in many ways it was not. The orientation is beneficial in that it helps the international students
understand the university at a broad level but provides little in the way assisting us in learning how to teach. The orientation comes at a time when everything about the U.S. is so new. There are no points of reference to understand the context of the training. There is no contextual basis for the information that is being dispensed. Since there is no relevance, it is easy to forget what is learned (ZLI1, p. 22).

Xuelun continued by explaining that when he began teaching, his greatest concern was learning the appropriate means to accomplish this task; therefore, he was disappointed in the training believing it to be ill-timed and something other than what it was. Two things occurred that eventually helped provide clarity. Once he became more confident, Xuelun began having informal conversations with faculty members in his department about the orientation program’s purposes and discovered that its primary objective was to provide a broad overview of graduate life at the institution. Secondly, after several semesters of teaching, Xuelun was asked to assist in planning the orientation program for his department. As a result of being on the planning side, Xuelun indicated that his perspective changed about his department, the orientation program, and his role as a teacher.

Informal Socialization

The international teaching assistant participants involved in this study indicated that they learned aspects of teaching through informal means. Weidman, et al., (2001) explained that learning as a result of informal socialization occurred “through adept communication and immersion in the new culture.” During this
process, “students receive behavioral clues, observe acceptable behavior, and, it is hoped, respond and react accordingly” (p. 14).

Faculty members played a critical role as informal socializing agents. The participants in this study reported observing departmental faculty and patterning their behaviors after these individuals. For example, Xuelun initially struggled with conveying and responding to questions so that students understood him. He recalled watching one of his teachers, noticing how “smooth” (XLFN) he performed in the classroom, and determined to pattern his own behaviors after him. Other participants reported periodically having conversations with faculty members that they admired about how best to approach their teaching tasks.

The benefit of these interactions varied. Paula found support and guidance from a faculty member within her department she described as “motherly” (PSFN), a faculty member who was quick to give advice about teaching, classroom management issues, graduate courses, and life in general. On several occasions, Paula indicated using this faculty member as a “sounding board” (PSFN) to check her perceptions about teaching, her students, and her classroom performance. On the other hand, Simon recalled an incident when a faculty member casually entered the classroom while he was conducting an experiment, corrected a point he was making, then, left the classroom. To Simon’s recollection no follow-up conversation occurred. Although perplexed by this spontaneous interaction, Simon indicated that he was pleased that at least, “someone took the time to notice what I was doing” (SIFN).
From faculty members, participants learned that self-reliance, resourcefulness, and the ability to resolve problems without little guidance or direction was valued in their role as teaching assistants. Although the participants could not recall an incident or conversation with a faculty member where they received advice along these lines, examples of this phenomenon were sprinkled throughout their stories and in the phrases they used. Phrases such as “figure it out on your own,” “sink or swim,” “plunging into the deep-end,” and “just having to do it” (FN) were repeated frequently in the research interviews. With few exceptions, the participants recounted stories about having to learn teaching tasks such as determining course content in addition to learning how to teach once the content had been decided. Paula was particularly concerned about having to facilitate discussions when she knew little about the education field or teacher preparation. Upon realizing that she was expected to be self-reliant and be capable of solving classroom problems, she also realized that her lack of content knowledge would be reflected in teaching poorly. Her solution, then, was, “just to do the best I can” (FN).

Other teaching tasks such as developing learning objectives, syllabus construction, or creating assignments were also fundamental duties that the international teaching assistants indicated they were expected to learn how to do without guidance or direction. Ngugi pointed out that much of what goes on in the classroom is, “somewhat of a private affair—between you and the student. No one cares—unless there is a problem” (NGI2-23, Line 531).
Additional key players in the participants’ socialization experience were undergraduate students. This observation confirms Staton and Darling’s (1989) findings about international teaching assistant training. They discovered that undergraduate students were viable socializing agents, often time more so than faculty members in helping teaching assistants understand institutional and classroom culture. For example, student evaluations were frequently mentioned as one of the tools that participants used to inform their teaching. The participants could not recall any explanations about the intent of summative evaluations prior to administering them in class for the first time. Nor, did they recollect evaluating their teachers back home. Participants used a combination of summative and real-time evaluations to gather feedback about their teaching and the class format.

Simon and Hala, concerned about their students’ poor performance on assignments, decided to periodically conduct brief assessments to determine how their students were making meaning from the work they were doing and also to determine what information needed clarification. Both indicated that as a result of student feedback, in real-time as opposed to summative evaluations, they decided to adjust their approaches to teaching when it was needed most, not at the end of the semester.

Weidman, et al. (2001) indicated that pre-professionals remain idealistic during the informal stage of socialization. However, as understanding about the new environment deepened, idealism gave way to more realistic perceptions. For example, Okpeke described an interaction when she began to view her teaching and her students quite differently. As Brookfield (1995) encouraged educators,
she began seeing herself and her practice through the eyes of her students. Okpeke
recalled being frustrated because she expected her students to perform as she did
while an undergraduate. She believed that while in college she was a good
student. A good student was “expected to study and research beyond the required
reading—in many ways we were expected to really delve into a subject. We were
expected to go deep and participate in discussions” (OPI1-27, Lines 571 - 573).

In contrast, she believed her students who did not share this approach to
their learning, were “anti-intellectual and child-like” (FN). Her expectations were
based on her own educational experience and personal concept of what teaching is
and what a teacher does. After a particularly frustrating class period, Okpeke
decided to poll her students, demanding that they tell her “how they thought the
class was going and how they thought I was doing as a teacher” (OPI1-27, Line
574). Although she acknowledged that it was uncomfortable at times as she
listened to her students’ comments, she began to see a different world—that is—
she began to see her self, her students, and her classroom practices from the
perspective of her students. She noted that this realization reflected a turning point
in her understanding of her students and her teaching style. Okpeke used a
metaphor of her and her students existing in two different worlds as they
perceived and attempted to make sense of the classroom setting. In this instance,
Okpeke and her students held disparate perspectives on her performance as a
teacher and their performance as students. She, then, indicated a willingness to
modify her preconceptions about students, thus modifying her day-to-day
classroom practices.
From the foregoing, it is clear that the process of socialization for international teaching assistant participants was an on-going, active one. As participants strove to gain the knowledge, skills, and values necessary to be successful in their new role, their ultimate desire was to be a “good” teacher. The process of learning to teach—of becoming a good teacher—was not without its challenges. In addition to straddling multiple worlds because of differences in culture, language, nationality, ethnicity, and educational background, the international teaching assistant participants in this study also navigated the different, often times competing worlds, of being both student and teacher. Success in one area did not automatically indicate success in the other. The participants found the role of a student to be a familiar one, and one where they had clearly demonstrated a certain level of competence hence their enrollment as graduate students. However, with few exceptions, the role of teacher at the university level was unfamiliar and far more complicated. Nevertheless, as idealism faded and participants attempted to match their values with those espoused by the department, the desire to be successful as a teacher was fueled by the same commitment used to become an effective, competent student, hence the five propositions mentioned earlier.

The transferability of this proposition is contingent upon acknowledging the disparity between the participants’ expectations of the assistantship role and the reality of the actual experience. Additionally, it provides a framework for understanding the influence of socialization as a critical component in the process of learning to teach. International teaching assistants’ perspectives on the teaching
setting were developed prior to their arrival at the site institution. These personal beliefs governed behaviors and attitudes towards students, learning, and teaching. International teaching assistants wanted to do well at teaching; however, meaning making was hampered as they moved through the socialization process.

With these points in mind, this proposition has implications for international graduate student service providers, administrators responsible for designing and executing graduate orientation and training programs, and departmental faculty members. Individuals concerned about improving teaching quality could create a mechanism to identify international teaching assistants’ belief systems. Once identified, this information would be useful in intentionally designing orientation activities and transition programs that would assist international teaching assistants in aligning their expectations with the reality of their current circumstances. Moreover, this proposition calls for intentionally determining the teaching attributes that are most desirable for individuals whose language and cultural orientation differ from that of the students they teach. The proposition also calls for designing an environment to help develop these qualities.

Additionally, this proposition has implications for supervision of international teaching assistants. To some degree these individuals were suspended between two worlds, that of both teacher and graduate student. Consequently, they were less likely to exhibit confidence in their knowledge and ability to function effectively. In an unfamiliar role, the international teaching assistants expected more guidance and direction and were desirous of a close
working relationship with a faculty advisor or teaching mentor. They believed these individuals would instruct them on appropriate teaching techniques, learning theories, and teaching philosophies. The assistantship, as a transitory position, is one of the traditional tools in preparation for a faculty position. It stands to reason, then, that those individuals most involved in acts of teaching would teach novice teachers the art and craft of teaching. Furthermore, since this study examines aspects of the process of socialization in relation to the assignment of teaching roles, what individuals are best equipped to provide guidance about teaching effectiveness, than the individuals responsible for teaching undergraduate students?

Proposition Two: The process of learning to teach is inextricably intertwined with the activities of teaching. Essentially, international teaching assistants learn to teach by participating in acts of teaching.

Repeatedly throughout the research interviews, participants’ indicated that they expected the teaching assistantship to be structured as an apprenticeship. At the very least they expected to receive extensive training prior to assuming—what they deemed—“such an important role” (FN). Formal training; however, was the exception rather than the rule. In light of this, learning to teach occurred through a process of learning while doing. Support for this finding can be found in Eble’s (1988) work on the relationship between the practice of teaching and the learning that occurs as a result. He indicated, “Learning and teaching are constantly interchanging activities. One learns by teaching; one cannot teach except by constantly learning. A person properly concerned about education will come to
grips with the practical realities of both teaching and learning” (p. 9). Deeper analysis of the participants’ stories revealed that the international teaching assistants cared deeply about their development as effective teachers. Their process of learning to teach was very much in keeping with prevailing notions about the value and interconnectedness of learning to teach while teaching.

Additional support for this finding can be found in Kolb’s (1984) four-stage process of experiential learning based on the work of Dewey (1958), Lewin (1951), and Piaget (1967/1971). Learning, according to Kolb (1984), is “the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience” (p. 38). This transformation takes place through a series of steps, one step leading to another. Through concrete experiences, international teaching assistants interacted with their environment forming new perspectives as a result of immersion, observation and reflection. The process of observation and reflection provided participants with an opportunity to develop informal theories or generalizations which were then used to guide the next course of action, active experimentation (Kolb, 1984). During this step, participants tested their newly formed informal theories, to different, albeit more complex, concrete experiences. The inquirer’s observation of participants together with interviews forms the basis of the discussion which follows, illustrating the process of learning to teaching through the act of teaching.

Essentially, the participants were involved in an informal, on-the-job-training program involving several critical, incremental steps. Firstly, the international teaching assistants attempted to learn subject content as quickly as
possible. Recall from previous discussions, that when Paula discovered she would be teaching; she spent weekends reading the assigned texts trying to become knowledgeable about the subject she would be teaching. Okpeke, too, indicated that her first tasks upon being notified that she would be teaching was to scour the library and the Internet looking for resources about the interpersonal communication field. Her strategy, like Paula, was to immerse herself in the field to become as knowledgeable as possible, as quickly as possible. Other participants, such as Simon, Xuelun, and Hala, expressed confidence in their knowledge of the subjects that they would be teaching, but indicated spending time re-reading and reviewing textbooks, lecture notes, and examinations from their undergraduate courses to refresh their memories.

Perhaps because of his previous training as a teacher combined with his experience and knowledge of the department, Ngugi adopted a more holistic approach to his initial class preparation. He indicated:

I had to read again, you know review the book, the text because even though I’m familiar with the content area of a particular text, I had to be able to follow so I had to look at the text again in detail. I had to do some assignments—actually to do the assignments myself, as it where, to get a sense of the time that the students would take. I had to create or modify some Power Point presentations that I inherited. But then, you know, I made modifications where necessary to reflect me, my thought process and that is basically, with the exception of grading papers, what I do for preparation (NGI1-11, Lines 214-221).
What I did initially was to get with the existing professor. I looked at the existing syllabus, course outline, and decided to work week-to-week. I had the general outline. We put it together systematically and then we worked on a week-to-week basis in terms of instruction; so we synchronized. So for the first semester, basically, week-to-week, all of us got together and decided what we would do, what we planned to do and that type of thing. That was good. (NGII-10, Lines 199-203).

Immersion in the subject content, gave way to determining the most appropriate instructional strategy for conveying the knowledge they had acquired. The next step in the process was learning effective instructional methods. Participants admitted imitating or modeling their behaviors after respected faculty members. Simon, for instance, admired one of his faculty member’s ability to explain and organize difficult material. He indicated that he was able to grasp challenging concepts even though the lectures were in English. Impressed by this skill, Simon recalled that when interacting with his students, he attempted to emulate this individual.

Similarly, Hala acknowledged modeling her instructional strategies after a respected, former teacher. She indicated, “When I teach I try to imagine what she would do and then I do that” (HAFN). She was most intrigued by the faculty member’s ability to create an environment in class where students’ wanted to learn a challenging subject. Hala was well aware that many of her students were enrolled in her course to fulfill a general education requirement. She acknowledged that most of them would not enroll in another Physics course
during their undergraduate degree program. Emulating her former teacher, her goal was to use Physics as an instrument to help her students realize, “that everything that happens in the world can be traced to Physics” (HAII).

The final step that participants employed in their learning by doing process was simply to practice teaching, to practice instructional methods based on what they were learning and experiencing. Uncertain of appropriate behaviors, participants would attempt a solution and then make modifications if they did not receive satisfactory results. For example, Xuelun observed that he preferred using lecturing as an instructional tool for several reasons. In addition to this pedagogical strategy being preferred because it was familiar, he also indicated that he preferred this tool because it provided him some degree of control in the classroom. He could compile notes and read them verbatim to compensate for his less than proficient language skills, which also accounted for his reluctance to entertain students’ questions. However, Xuelun indicated that his students, much to his surprise, asked him to structure classes differently. He then began exploring other options for conveying information. Paula indicated that she used summative performance evaluations to revise her approach to teaching, although she didn’t agree with her students’ assessment, their feedback provided something tangible for her to use to fine-tune her teaching skills.

Additionally, throughout his primary, secondary, and post-secondary school years, Ngugi was educated in a system using a standardized curriculum. He indicated that at each level there were clearly defined learning outcomes and the curriculum was “... very structured—straight-jacketed in terms of social
science, natural science, engineering, not much in the way of multi-discipline or interdisciplinary” (NGI1, Lines 64-65). Students were required to demonstrate proficiency in these areas in order to move to the next level and national examinations were used to assess student performance. As a result of this system it was reasonable to assume that students possessed similar, basic knowledge of a subject. However, at the site institution because of the unevenness in his students’ knowledge and skill, Ngugi reported that it was often difficult to determine a starting point in creating lesson plans or determining what to emphasize in a lecture. He explained:

One of the things about this course is that because it’s at the introductory level, the students are very wide. There are some students who are knowledgeable and others who are not. I wonder, am I too easy for the faster students—am I too hard and that type of thing (NGI1-15, Lines 306-308).

As a result of the ambiguity, Ngugi maintained:

It’s hard to know exactly what to do so I often wind up trying different things—hoping that it will be effective. I want to make sure that the students not just grasp the concepts but also become autonomous, independent learners capable of guiding and creating the direction for their own learning. This is my goal for them (NGFN).

Quite clearly, the on-the-job training model for both the international teaching assistant and the employing academic department came with advantages and disadvantages. When done well, this type of training provided opportunities
to orient and assist the new person in the transition to the new environment. Progress and improvement, or lack thereof, could be quickly assessed making intervention, problem identification, and problem resolution swift. International teaching assistants were afforded an opportunity to learn, autonomously, from their mistakes, to self-correct, and to engage in problem solving with little intervention from others. Perhaps the most beneficial aspect of on-the-job training was the practical, experiential learning that occurred; essentially learning in the midst of the doing. For the institutions concerned, this practice is, financially speaking, an inexpensive alternative to the costs associated with a faculty member employed full-time.

On the other hand, allowing international teaching assistants to learn the skills and knowledge necessary to teach by primarily engaging in teaching acts in isolation was often times ineffective, irresponsible, and impractical. For all intents and purposes, this practice was ultimately more expensive in terms of providing the international teaching assistants with an environment most conducive to learning, and for the institution concerned, reduced prestige as an educational facility. Teaching and learning in this way occurred in isolation resulting in few opportunities for communication with others about what was being taught or learned. Consequently, participants reported feelings of alienation and aloneness. Paula, for instance, indicated that as an international teaching assistant, she was invisible on campus. Ngugi recalled that, “as long as there were no problems--as long as students didn’t complain--no one cared what occurred within the classroom” (NGI1, Lines 50-53); except perhaps the novice teacher.
Ngugi’s perspective was shaped by his training in quality management principles. He strongly believed that teaching standards should be determined and assessed by department faculty and was critical of the department’s practice of students evaluating faculty performance, particularly when students were not instructed on the purpose of instructor evaluations. Ngugi favored peer-to-peer accountability and creating teaching and student learning benchmarks designed to provide some degree of consistency in subject content and faculty performance. These measures, he believed, would help to alleviate an additional disadvantage to learning while doing, infrequent or nonexistent performance evaluation. Ngugi indicated that in his experience, teacher performance was only evaluated by students. These evaluations coincided with the onset of end of term examinations making it impossible to correct deficiencies to benefit those currently enrolled students. Thus, if teaching behaviors were ineffective and were not aligned with the boundaries of normative culture, replication of undesirable teaching habits were likely to occur. With this critique, Ngugi was certainly not suggesting that a lockstep approach to teaching was necessary or desirable or that creativity and innovation are not critical for undergraduate student learning; rather that irrespective of the particular course or teacher these objectives were desirable.

Proposition Two is interconnected with Proposition One. Findings associated with Proposition One brought to light the role of socialization in bridging the international teaching assistants’ expectations of the assistantship appointment and the reality of the teaching function. As neophyte teachers, the assumption was that teacher training would be provided; however, learning
actually occurred as international teaching assistants determined what to do independently of formal preparation. Proposition Two then, suggests that in learning to teach, participants traversed this process by engaging in teaching behaviors even when uncertain about appropriate actions. Paula put it this way: “[W]e just fake it until we make it” (PSI1, Lines 30-33). In other words, initially lacking in confidence and competence, participants operated as teachers as best they could until they acquired the desired knowledge and skill set.

This proposition reflects existing literature on the traditional path followed by international graduate students as they prepare to teach. As indicated previously, socialization was a critical factor in the process of learning to teach, participating in acts of teaching was equally as important. This being the case, what are the implications of learning to teach by teaching? In the absence of clearly defined role expectations and a shared definition and understanding of the teaching assistant concept, international teaching assistants will rely upon guesswork, experimentation, and familiarity as tools to inform teaching behaviors.

Consequently, with little training, supervision, mentoring, or guidance it is difficult to determine the quality of learning that is occurring for both the international teaching assistant and the undergraduate student. It is also difficult to determine the skill set acquired by international teaching assistants as they learn to teach by engaging in teaching behaviors. Several questions worthy of exploration in the future include: What are the desired learning outcomes for international graduate students as teachers during the teaching assistantship period? How are these outcomes and performance indicators measured or
evaluated and by whom? What is the product or outcome of teaching when those doing the teaching are left to “figure it out” on their own and thus define for themselves just what it means to teach?

An additional implication of this proposition concerns the private nature of teaching. Teaching is an activity that occurs in the relative privacy of the classroom setting. Initially, autonomy only heightened feelings of isolation and alienation for these novice teachers and reinforced the belief that both they and their work were marginal to the institution’s purposes, thus emphasizing their outsider status. In light of this, additional questions are offered for consideration. What is the purpose of the graduate teaching assistantship? Does the assistantship meet the University’s or department’s academic mission and educational philosophy? What are the assumptions that underlie international students’ perceptions of this position? What are the assumptions that underlie faculty members’ perceptions of this position? Are these perspectives congruent? What role do academic administrators play in preparing undergraduate student educators? Answers to the above questions can be determined by a reflective examination of the teaching environment in light of seminal research encouraging transformation of undergraduate education.

Proposition Three: The international teaching assistants’ beliefs about teaching influenced classroom behaviors. These beliefs, acquired from previous educational experiences, were the result of cultural imprinting and were frequently in conflict with what was valued in the classroom setting.
Participants were confident in their knowledge of the learning environment in their home countries. However, when faced with the unfamiliarity of their new setting, they were less certain of their ability to perform, less certain of cultural nuances in the classroom, and more aware of the overall differences between the teaching and learning environment at the site institution when compared to that of their respective countries. Consequently, international teaching assistants relied heavily on their previous experiences as learners, their cultural script, in determining teaching behaviors and classroom expectations. They learned to teach through the experience of teaching and patterned their teaching behaviors primarily after former teachers “back home” (FN). More often than not, these behaviors were incongruent with the expectations held by students and department faculty members. This is borne out by excerpts from the participants’ research interviews and examples from the literature which provide evidence in support of Proposition Three.

Irrespective of the country of origin, participants reported transmitting information through teaching methods that allowed them to exercise a great deal of control over the classroom environment. Initially, Hala, Simon, and Xuelun acknowledged that because of their mediocre language skills, they discouraged questions and discussions, preferring to follow a script to conduct class sessions. Paula and Okpeke recalled using the textbook chapters as the course outline and until they became comfortable with their teaching role, they were reluctant to deviate regardless of their students’ need.
Omukambi demonstrated teaching methods that were in conflict. On the one hand he explained that teaching in his country was analogous to “a conductor leading an orchestra—guiding individuals who knew their parts” (OMI2-10, Line 194). This is the environment he sought to create in his classroom believing that he and his students were partners in the learning process. On the other hand, he admitted that because of his uncertainty about appropriate behaviors and the subject content, he sometimes structured classes more rigidly believing that students wanted to be “spoon fed information,” that they lacked the ability to analyze information thoughtfully, and were entirely focused on receiving a grade of excellence for mediocre work and minimal effort.

As Omukambi’s confidence grew, he acknowledged that his assessment of his students’ academic readiness and motives had more to do with his lack of confidence than any deficiency on their part. Secondly, international teaching assistants reported being educated in systems where uniformity in educational policies and practices were commonplace. Governing boards or governmental appointees determined the curriculum, determined what textbooks to use, and often oversaw the administration of yearly summative evaluations. Omukambi recalled that although he eventually learned to appreciate the freedom associated with teaching at the site institution, back home it was comforting knowing that many of these decisions were made for him. Both he and Ngugi indicated that a standardized curriculum, with students progressing through in a lockstep fashion, made it far easier to determine students’ academic preparedness, skill levels, and knowledge of course content. The decision making, autonomy, and ambiguity
associated with teaching a group of students possessing an uneven range of subject knowledge and skill level was in conflict with the participants’ ordered world.

Thirdly, the participants noted the value of learning to teach in an environment that supported collaboration and relationship building. One of Paula’s major criticisms of her teaching experience was the emphasis on individualism and competition. She preferred opportunities for sharing and collaboration and expressed a desire for a greater sense of community. Based on her educational experiences ‘back home,’ where students were expected to help each other, “just short of cheating” (p.27), she was disappointed by the individualist ethos at the site institution. According to the tradition of collaborative learning in her home, group participants shared notes and knowledge in order that all members could be successful. Paula recalled that,

It was important to us that everyone did well in class. It was just as important that all of us get a good grade by sharing what we knew and doing our homework together—not like here where everyone is just looking out for themselves and not concerned with the person sitting in the seat next to them. I don’t get it (p. 27).

Paula’s perplexity stemmed from a belief system about students and the classroom environment acquired from years of cultural orientation that dictated attitudes and behaviors. Behaviors, then, were the result of what Stigler and Hiebert (1998) referred to as a “cultural script, generalized knowledge about the
event that resides in the heads of the participants”. Delpit (1995) referred to this scripting in this manner:

We all interpret behaviors, information, and situations through our own cultural lenses; these lenses operate involuntarily, below the level of conscious awareness, making it seem that our view is simply “the way it is” (p. 151).

The cultural script is contextual. Van Maanen (1984) indicated that individuals, “Leaving one setting for another does not mean that the cultural premises of the first are abandoned for those of the second” (p. 217). The participants brought their originary cultures of learning with them to the site institution. Even as they strove to achieve teaching competency according to the new rules of teaching and learning at the site institution, they never, consciously, quite abandoned the modes of teaching and learning from their home cultures. Consequently, they were often unaware of the conflict and tensions between their previously acquired cultural habits of teaching and learning until problems surfaced at the site institution. This is how Harman (1988) aptly frames the resultant strain and stress:

Every society ever known rests on some set of largely tacit basic assumptions about who we are, what kind of universe we are in and what is ultimately important to us. [These assumptions] are typically not formulated or taught because they don’t need to be—they are absorbed by each person born into the society as though by osmosis (Harman, 1988, p.10).
The participants experience supports Harman’s perspective. The teaching assistants demonstrated that in spite of wishing they had more faculty contact and instruction in their process of learning to teach, most learning occurred through observation and practical experience.

An additional point to consider in relation to the conflict between originary and new teaching cultural scripts is that international teaching assistants are tacitly expected to develop adaptive behaviors. In essence, teaching specifically and education in general derive from complex and highly organized systems imparting and imbibing knowledge (Stigler & Hiebert, 1998). Individuals within the system, through immersion and inculcation learn what is valued and reinforced within the system. They learn appropriate behaviors and instinctively know when and how to avoid those acts that are inappropriate. As a cultural activity, teaching reinforces elements of the system necessary to ensure its efficiency and continued existence. Members within the system are quite astute at discerning actions that deviate from, or threaten continuation of, the system. The participants reported frequently being reminded of the conditions of their non-member status and provided instances when they believed their status as outsiders was emphasized and were in sharp contrast with their perceptions of themselves.

Having received their primary, elementary, and secondary education in countries where English was the official language in government, administration, and business, Okpeke, Omukambi, and Ngugi were required to learn to speak and write English during their “primary school years” (FN) and consequently, were fluent English language speakers. Thus, the institution’s requirement that
international teaching assistants demonstrate language proficiency by passing oral and written examinations reinforced their outsider status.

Not surprisingly, other participants, with lesser facility with the English language, indicated that student evaluations and complaints frequently focused on their “foreignness” as the reason they were not effective teachers. Additionally, the participants indicated that terms used for the purposes of categorization were difficult to understand and even more difficult to accept. Okpeke maintained that, “It was difficult to wrap my mind around these terms. What am I? While I am in America and because I am African, does that make me an African American? In this place, I don’t know what it means—to have all of these labels” (OPI2-16, Lines 331 - 333). Labels, such as ‘minority’, ‘international’, and having to identify with a racial group were contested. The teaching assistants reported failing to understand the importance placed upon these identifiers and consequently were even more uncertain of their place at the institution.

From the foregoing, it is clear and can be surmised from the first three propositions above, that embedded throughout the participants’ stories about the experience of learning to teach was evidence that their teaching philosophy, presuppositions about undergraduate education, and their beliefs concerning student learning were interconnected and influential in governing teaching behaviors. This is not to imply that participants were a collective, holding identical viewpoints, but rather that these preconceived notions existed for the teaching assistants individually. Moreover, these notions governed thoughts, feelings, and behaviors in the classroom. These belief systems did not occur in a
vacuum; rather they reflected the educational framework and cultural orientation of the participants’ country-of-origin. The international teaching assistants’ perspectives were frequently in conflict with what was valued at the site institution.

However, as the participants progressed in their appointment, their approach to teaching changed. Senge (1990) indicated that although difficult to do so, individuals can begin to modify their preconceived expectations and stereotypes that were rooted in mental programming. This step is necessary, according to Weidman, et al., (2001) in order for growth to occur and for individuals to develop “a clearer understanding of what they need to know and be able to do to be successful” (p. 12). In essence, as international teaching assistants were immersed in new experiences, they began to shed preconceived ideas and began to develop new mental programs based on the reality of their new experience.

The participants’ perspectives provide a framework for reframing or recasting the international teaching assistant experience. In Chapter II research on this graduate student population was highlighted. Much of this body of literature examined problems associated with graduate students from other countries teaching introductory gateway courses. Recommendations to standardize United States English language proficiency, concerns over cultural comprehension, and tensions associated with utilizing taxpayer dollars to finance international student education were but a few of the topics of research. However, the concept of reframing encourages moving beyond what in the literature is referred to as ‘the
TA problem’ to adopt a position that is less adversarial and fault finding.

Moreover, this proposition encourages an examination of institutional practices which operate under the assumption that participation in an undergraduate program is adequate preparation for teaching and suggests that an exploration of the role of cultural scripting in the process of learning to teach is in order.

International teaching assistants brought their unique cultural perspectives with them. One of the underlying assumptions upon which this study is based is that the participants’ experiences of learning to teach and the way they approached their teaching was rooted in their life experiences prior to coming to the United States. Hence, the participants approached their teaching responsibilities, making meaning of the assistantship experience, using their experiences and perceptions as learners to guide their behaviors in the classroom. This proposition approximates what Hofstede’s (2001) described as the programming of the mind. This programming was shaped by family and friends, social organizations, and educational institutions and influences what international teaching assistants believe about themselves as teachers, learners, and influences their interactions within the classroom setting. Moreover, many of these beliefs are implicit.

This finding, then, has implications for constituents involved in the supervision of international teaching assistants and individuals charged with developing orientation and training programs. Is it possible to determine what international teaching assistants’ believe about the teaching environment as a component of the teaching preparation process? Is it possible to determine the
instructional behaviors that are most valued in the classroom and then to assist the international teaching assistants in aligning their beliefs to achieve the desired results? This proposition also has implications for those interested in determining how the unknown becomes known. Increased awareness about the role that culture plays in how international teaching assistants perceive themselves in their new environment would be beneficial in the supervisory relationship and in the design and execution of training programs. It would be equally beneficial in influencing how they perceive others and how they perceive their teaching role in the classroom setting.

Proposition Four: International teaching assistants incorporate knowledge and information about the teaching context by constructing understanding through a process of integrating new information with what is already known.

This proposition encourages an understanding of the process that international teaching assistants utilized to make meaning of the teaching environment at the site institution. From the participants’ stories it was revealed that each individual approached the teaching assistant role with preexisting notions about teaching, learning, and the undergraduate college experience. Proposition Three suggested that these assumptions, many of them tacit, were the result of cultural imprinting. Proposition Four, closely related to Proposition Three, addresses the internal process that participants experienced as these assumptions shifted in order to accommodate new knowledge and to reorganize existing belief systems.
In an attempt to understand the process that participants experienced as these assumptions about teaching and learning shifted, learning theory (Fosnot, 1993), specifically constructivism (Grennon Brooks & Brooks, 1993) served to illuminate how participants made meaning of the experience of learning to teach. Most importantly, learning theories help describe how meaning making occurs, essentially describing how individuals create new understandings. Although there are several commonly accepted learning theories rooted in current work in educational psychology, cognitive psychology, anthropology, and philosophy, the tenets of constructivism most accurately reflect the participants’ meaning making process, particularly since participants appear to rethink and reformulate their prior ideas about learning and teaching (Jackson, 1986). This constructivist-learning theory is discussed below, followed by examples of participants’ meaning making process.

**Constructivism**

Constructivism, as a theory of learning, has its roots in the educational philosophy of John Dewey, Jerome Bruner, the Gestalt psychologist Lev Vygotsky, and primarily the child development research and cognitive learning theories of Jean Piaget (Grennon Brooks & Brooks, 1993). The foundation of Piaget’s (1973) view of constructivism is grounded in research on the psychological development of children and the belief that learning and deep understanding are about creativity and the process of discovery and rediscovery. Piaget contended that “to understand is to discover, or reconstruct by discovery, and such conditions must be complied with if in the future individuals are to be
formed who are capable of production and creativity and not simply repetition” (p. 1).

Similarly, Novak (1986) defined constructivism as the “notion that humans construct or build meaning into their ideas and experiences as a result of an effort to understand or make sense of them” (p. 356). Simply put, as they learn, individuals—in this case, international teaching assistants, actively construct their own understandings of the world in which they live by integrating “new experiences into what [they] have previously come to understand” (Grennon Brooks & Brooks, 1993, p. 4). Accordingly, individuals construct and re-construct their own meanings as they attempt to make connections between prior learning and newer learning. Thus, individuals “are constantly engaged in a grand dance that shapes [their] understanding” (Grennon Brooks & Brooks, 1993, p. 4).

Learning then, according to Ormrod (2003), “involves constructing one’s own knowledge from one’s own experiences” (pg. 227) through a process that is active, personal, and continually shifting as individuals encountered new phenomena and attempted to reconcile new ideas and concepts with past knowledge. Individuals organize and interpret information based on a particular cognitive construct or schema. As outlined in Proposition Three, these constructs are multiple, and socially and culturally constructed. However, when confronted with phenomena that initially appear to be in conflict with existing schema, individuals attempt to synthesize or reconcile this discrepant information.

According to Jean Piaget, credited with formalizing constructivist learning theory, this synthesizing or reconciliation was a function of learning or what he
referred to as adaptation. Adaptation occurred as the result of three complementary components: assimilation, accommodation, and equilibrium. Grennon Brooks and Brooks (1993) indicated that when faced with data or perspectives that either confirm or disconfirm existing constructions of meaning making, individuals:

- Interpret what we see to conform to our present set of rules [assimilation].
- . . or we generate a new set of rules that better accounts for what we perceive to be occurring [accommodation]. Either way, our perceptions and rules are constantly engaged in a grand dance [equilibrium] that shapes our understandings (pg. 4).

Assimilation refers to the process that occurred as individuals’ interpreted new experiences to closely align with their preexisting perspective of their internal world. Thus, the individuals’ constructed reality was re-confirmed and found additional buttresses in their new experiences. Accommodation refers to the process whereby individuals, actively constructing understandings that differed from their original leanings, were challenged to accommodate new and unfamiliar experiences. Individuals thus determined that previous ways of understanding and organizing the world were no longer as effective giving way to new interpretations. Finally, the third component of constructivist learning theory, equilibrium, refers to the inter-relatedness between assimilation and accommodation and suggests a desire for stability. Equilibrium encompasses both assimilation and accommodation and refers to a desired state that individuals strive to achieve in the meaning making process.
Essentially, when faced with unfamiliar experiences and new information, individuals seek to order their world in such a way that congruency develops between their constructed realities and the unfamiliar. For example, the participants were educated in systems where the relationship between the faculty member and student was a formal one. Students were expected, “at all times to show respect and appreciation to the teacher” (HAI1-5, Line 80). Hala indicated that respect was demonstrated by using the label professor to denote and acknowledge a teacher’s status, to stand when the teacher entered and exited the room, to express appreciation for the professor’s willingness to impart knowledge, and to avoid situations that might appear to challenge the professor’s authority.

For the international teaching assistants in this study, the informality and lack of social distance between student and teacher in the classroom was unsettling. While teaching, Hala could not figure out how to replicate the classroom formality and social distance of her home country. Reluctantly resigned to this, Hala determined that in her role as a student, in her attitude towards her teachers and in her classroom interactions, she would operate, as much as possible, as if she were at home, essentially arriving at a state of uneasy equilibrium.

It is important to note that as participants attempted to make meaning of their teaching environment, they appeared to weave back and forth between assimilation and accommodation as they sought stability. These components of learning or adaptation occurred simultaneously. Through the stories they told and classroom observations participants revealed that learning to teach in an
unfamiliar environment required reflection and analysis to determine personal belief systems and assumptions about teaching and learning. Learning to teach, then, was an active process and one that was constantly changing as perspectives and behaviors changed. Furthermore, the participants were called upon to negotiate and bend previously constructed beliefs while nesting the unfamiliar experiences with existing constructions. Quite evidently, assimilation, accommodation, and equilibration occurred simultaneously. These concepts can however be disaggregated to provide descriptive examples of the phenomenon.

Assimilation

As a descriptor of how learning occurs, assimilation refers to an individual’s process of internalizing knowledge. New or unfamiliar experiences are filtered through a pre-existing set of assumptions and are judged to be in alignment with these assumptions, confirming the individual’s perspective. Confronted with customs and approaches to teaching and learning that differed from their own, international teaching assistants indicated that modifying what they believed to be true was challenging. As a result, they often attempted to mold their new environment to fit their pre-existing perspectives.

Okpeke and Paula demonstrated this as they described characteristics of an ideal classroom setting, a place reminiscent of home. Perplexed by an emphasis on competition and her students’ tendency to favor their individual success irrespective of the consequences to the group, Okpeke recalled that back home, “self-serving competition or hoarding information for the sake of one-upmanship” was de-motivating in a classroom.
Paula shared a similar perspective, referring to competitiveness as “a student having all the information but refusing to share it” (PSFN) and also believed that learning was severely diminished as a result. She explained that she could not recall, through all of her years of being in school, when she and her classmates did not work together, sharing notes, sharing answers to tests and quizzes, and generally working together so that everyone in the class was successful. She ended by indicating that this was just the way it was. Both Okepke and Paula operated from the perspective that an individual’s success was important but not at the expense of others in the class. As a result, they took pains to reduce competition between students by refusing to grade on a curve, structuring assignments to reward collaboration, and requiring that students evaluate group members’ contributions and performance.

Operating from the position that knowledge belonged to everyone, not just the teacher, early in the semester Paula and Okpeke attempted to help their students assume responsibility for their own learning. Their intent was to function more as a facilitator of the learning process and to help their students become less dependent on the teacher to achieve learning outcomes. Their preference was not to provide students with instructional tools such as a course outline, course syllabus, or to have assignments or a regular basis. Using these tools was tantamount to “spoon feeding” (FN) students and reflected an emphasis on the teacher driving learning rather than the student. The expectation for students back home was that they were to be responsible for relevant and supplementary reading
materials and were encouraged to drive classroom discussions and learning by posing provocative questions. Okpeke remembered:

Going above and beyond the assigned readings. We were expected to become very knowledgeable about a subject and then we were to use the teacher to test our learning—to determine whether we were on the right track. Here the students are always asking what is that we (the teacher) want them to know. I don’t get it. (OPI2-22, Lines 476-479).

Accommodation

Accommodation, another internal, cognitive mechanism, differs somewhat from assimilation. Accommodation provides additional insights as to how international teaching assistants began to understand their new surroundings. When participants were confronted with new and unfamiliar perspectives that differed from their original leanings, they essentially reframed their cognitive structures and modified behaviors to mesh with their new understandings of their environment. For example, teaching was a profession highly regarded in their home countries requiring training, skill, and years of preparation. Consequently, the participants believed that the assistantship would be structured as an apprenticeship and that they would work closely with a faculty member to learn appropriate teaching behaviors. They expected to receive adequate training and to be provided with the necessary resources to be effective as teachers.

Failing to have their expectations met concerning training, international teaching assistants responded in various ways. Xuelun and Simon modeled their teaching behaviors after family members back home and their current faculty
members. Both of them reported that courses designed to help them become proficient in English were beneficial providing them with a mechanism to practice teaching skills. Ngugi and Omukambi relied heavily on their teacher training back home, modifying techniques and their own perspectives when necessary. Paula and Hala, resigned to the isolation of college teaching, adopted an attitude of survival. In their research interviews they used similar metaphors such as “thrown in the deep end” (FN) or “just having to figure it out on my own” as they determined what to do. Paula read her textbook from cover to cover in the weekend prior to her first class, role played, and used visualization activities to aid in her learning process. Hala used the internet to locate resources on teaching and student learning and attempted to pattern her teaching techniques after a former teacher.

Participants also encountered ideological differences about the role of teachers, students, and practices in the classroom. For example, Simon and Xuelun recalled the challenge they encountered when their students posed questions in class seeking clarification on discussion points. Xuelun relayed his frustration over what he called “native student’s tendency to talk” and desire for discussion. They both indicated that in their home country rarely did students pose questions to the instructor, that the preferred method of teaching was lecturing, and that students were expected to consult with fellow classmates to resolve issues prior to the lecture. Both Simon and Xuelun possessed a clear definition of what they believed a teacher to be and what a teacher does. This definition was often in conflict with their students’ expectations. Although
initially perplexed about the ineffectiveness of their teaching behaviors, yet desiring to be good teachers, Simon and Xuelun adopted an approach involving a new way of thinking that eventually prompted different behaviors.

The international teaching assistants began to examine what they believed about how students and teachers should perform and how these beliefs shaped power and relationship dynamics in the classroom. Moreover, they discussed realizing that teaching practices, which were very effective back home, might not be as effective in a different educational and cultural setting. At one point, Xuelun commented that he decided that students asking questions helped him to learn the subject better by the questions they posed.

As they developed new ways of thinking concerning teaching and learning, Simon and Xuelun’s behaviors also began to change. Xuelun began seeking assistance from others, particularly other teaching assistants with more experience. He also indicated making a conscious decision to “pay attention to the way his teachers performed” (FN) and to emulate their behaviors. Simon, on the other hand, adopted a more structured approach. While enrolled in a pedagogical course, he was required to provide his students an opportunity to evaluate his performance. He credits this exercise for helping him to determine that there was a marked difference between his students’ expectations and his attempts at teaching. Eventually, Simon and Xuelun reached the conclusion that it was acceptable to modify their teaching behaviors and attitudes without compromising who they were as individuals. They rationalized that there was nothing wrong
with their pre-existing belief system about the teaching environment only that modifications were necessary for effectiveness at the site institution.

Hala described her initial struggle with the informality of the classroom at the site institution. Her educational experience in Iran was traditional, structured, and very formal. Faculty members were esteemed for their role as purveyors of knowledge. They were held in high regard because of their willingness to teach and for sharing this knowledge with others. She reported that it was quite common for students to stand when a faculty member entered the classroom at the beginning of the period and “at all times we show deference and gratitude for their willingness to teach” (HAI1-4, Line 47). When several faculty members from a neighboring institution visited her classroom, she became upset that there was no place for the visitors to sit and neither she nor the students in the class offered their seats for the guests’ convenience.

Hala reported being ashamed of her behavior and that of her students. She acknowledged that her behaviors were incongruent with what she believed. She indicated that she was forced to analyze her role as a teacher in this new setting to ascertain how she wanted to be perceived and treated by her students. Hala indicated that she had numerous conversations with other international and domestic teaching assistants about this incident. They assured her that modifying the customary classroom practices of her home country would not diminish her at all. As far as they were concerned she was just adopting and adapting a new set of skills to accompany what she already knew.
The upshot of the above is as follows. International teaching assistants incorporate new knowledge and information about the practice of teaching through a process of integration. Assimilation and accommodation, two aspects of learning theory, describe how individuals confirm or disconfirm their existing beliefs, values, and perspectives as they attempt to make meaning of their current environments. Constructivist learning theory illuminates this meaning making process indicating that people learn by actively constructing their own knowledge, by comparing new information with their previous understandings, and by using all of this to work through discrepancies to come to an understanding of a new reality.

Sense making of information occurred as participants synthesized what was unfamiliar—their current educational experiences—with the familiar, that of their previous educational experience. As participants defined themselves as teachers, their experiences as learners served as a point of reference philosophically and pedagogically; thus, teaching represented the nexus between the past experiences as learners and the current reality as teacher (synthesis of the past with the present).

Proposition Five: International teaching assistants’ process of learning to teach is complicated by the necessity of integrating multiple intersecting role identities as they attempt to reconcile their perceptions of self with the perceptions’ of others.

The preceding propositions suggested that learning to teach involved participants attempting to mitigate role ambiguity, suggested that acts of teaching
were critical in learning to teach, proposed that knowledge acquisition was the result of synthesizing new information, and suggested that cultural imprinting strongly influenced teaching behaviors. These propositions served to deepen understanding of the process that international teaching assistants engaged in while learning to teach.

Proposition Five encompasses these universal concerns but also aids in illuminating additional complexities associated with this learning process. Deeper analysis of the participants’ stories revealed that international teaching assistants possessed multiple intersecting role identities. The most apparent identities were that of student and teacher, roles that by their very nature were often in conflict. The demands of teaching frequently interfered with the participants’ desire to study and conduct research. Conversely, the desire to be successful academically was blamed for the inability to practice the art and craft of teaching effectively. Moreover, the process of learning to teach was further complicated since not only were participants required to learn the necessary skills to be successful in their conflicting roles as student and teacher, they did so, according to Collins (1990) as “outsiders within the academy” while negotiating these multiple identities.

Proposition Five reflects Althen’s (1991) work, as noted in Chapter I, on international student role identity. Althen used the descriptor of concentric circles to depict multiple roles or identities held by international students. Each circle represented a particular culturally influenced role. The center circle represented the individual or self and their particular values and belief systems. Within this circle, their students, other graduate students, department faculty, and others that
they encountered in the university community perceived the participants as foreigners as they attempted to adjust to the new environment. Subsequent circles included the personal circle, followed most immediately by the circle of the classroom. Within the circle of the classroom, which is the focus of this study, participants confronted a number of additional culturally-influenced factors. In this setting they encountered stereotypes about foreigners, wrestled with difficulties associated with language and comprehension, encountered pedagogical and learning style differences, and were exposed to world views about the classroom that were incongruent with the beliefs they held.

In addition to dwelling within multiple micro-cultures, international teaching assistants attempted to integrate these multiple role identities, essentially seeking understanding and cohesion of the multi-dimensions of self. It is important for the purposes of this proposition to provide an explanation for integration as different from integration in the Piagetian sense. There were two dimensions evident in the participants’ experience. Firstly, integration described participants’ attempts to develop congruency between their perceptions of themselves and the perceptions that others held of them as individuals, graduate students, and teaching assistants. As cultural beings with membership in multiple groups, international teaching assistants brought their respective personal, family, and national values with them deriving a sense of personal identity, to some degree, from membership within these respective groups.

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4 Microcultures are described in Chapter 1, page 7.
In the context of the classroom, for those individuals interacting with the international teaching assistant, the sources of personal identity mattered little. For example, the participants told stories of receiving recognition for academic success, such as graduating from their undergraduate institution with a superior ranking, or being one of only a few students in their village or city to be selected to participate in a competitive program, or of graduating from an elite school in their home country. These accomplishments, a source of pride for them and their families and evidence of hard work, created an additional dimension to their personal identity. However, to undergraduate students, graduate students, and faculty members at the site institution these accomplishments mattered little. Participants found themselves granted membership in a different group—that of stranger, foreigner, sojourner. Integration, then, refers to the participants’ attempts at creating harmony between their self-definition derived from membership in social groupings back home to an all-together different identity based on cultural and language foreignness.

Secondly, integration describes the participants’ attempts to develop congruency between their ideals concerning teaching and learning and the reality of their existing environment. Confronted with perspectives about the teaching environment that differed from their own, international teaching assistants’ belief systems were called into question fostering self-doubt and uncertainty about who they believed themselves to be and what they believed to be true. Throughout the experience of learning to teach then, the participants experienced a continuous process of shifting back and forth between who they believed themselves to be
and how others perceived them. These dimensions of integration, seeking harmony and overcoming dissonance, are tightly coupled. In the section below three examples of this phenomenon and the tools used in the integration process are discussed.

To varying degrees, all the participants described the experience of existing in multiple intersecting roles and in describing attempts to create harmony within these identities. Some were more explicit, however, in illustrating both the cognitive and affective tools used in the process of integration. Paula, for example, recounted wishing that her students could see her for who she really was and expressed a desire for her students to see that she was more like them than they perceived. She relied heavily on her family in Europe for affirmation and to gain a sense of wholeness and emotional health. It was important for readers to know that she arrived at the site institution with the blessings of her parents and other family members and to know that “back home” she was “connected to someone” (PSFN). She elaborated by explaining that in addition to being a teacher and graduate student, she was highly competent, possessed a number of interests not related to the academy, was multi-lingual, and “generally a nice person” (PSFN). Moreover, she stressed the fact that she was someone’s daughter, and sister, and that although she used words such as invisible or stranger to describe how she felt at the site institution, in her other metaphorical circles—she mattered. Paula quite forcefully declared that she was multidimensional, possessing far more facets to her life than what were demonstrated in the classroom. She stressed,
I am really somebody—more than what the students think they see. When I am here, I am considered weird, a foreigner in everything that I do, but at home this is not the case. I am a good person. I know what to do. My family—they help me to remember that I am okay (PSI2-25, Lines 540 - 541).

Paula’s declaration that she was a good person was in direct response to her belief that she was, in some way, a bad or weird person by her students’ assessment because of her struggle understanding language and cultural differences in the classroom setting. Frequently, during the research interviews she recalled her dismay upon receiving poor teaching evaluations. She reported being equally dismayed to discover that her students used these evaluations to express a preference for being taught by English-speaking teachers despite the fact that she was multi-lingual. A coping strategy she used to blend the person she believed herself to be and the one she thought others believed her to be was to reject her students’ assessment of her competence and knowledge base. Recalling positive experiences and reflecting upon the support and encouragement provided by family members back home allowed her to affirm the person she believed herself to be. Moreover, she was able to accept a definition of self while rejecting others’ perceptions that helped her to tolerate her students’ misconceptions.

Omukambi was reluctant to discuss anything about his experience as a teaching assistant and his process of learning to teach that could be construed as a negative critique. On numerous occasions he remarked how appreciative he was of the opportunity to study at the site institution and how to do so would benefit him and his family in the long run. However, as he shared his experience of
learning to teach he described numerous examples of attempting to reconcile multiple identities irrespective of their less than complimentary nature. Omukambi, as the only participant who indicated that he was married and had children, spoke of the pressures associated with being student, teacher, foreigner, spouse, father, and breadwinner. He also revealed how growing up in poverty in his native country shaped his life back home and colored how he believed others at the site institution perceived him, particularly his undergraduate students.

Omukambi explained that growing up with limited financial resources was in stark contrast to the perceived affluence of his students. On a number of occasions he indicated that the poorest student at the site institution was wealthy compared to the poorest individual in his home country. This divide, coupled with cultural and language differences, led him to believe that he and his students had little in common. He believed that his undergraduate students were perplexed by these multiple differences, including that of class and social economic status. He was equally perplexed by them. Consequently, he described the classroom setting as a place of “mutual intimidation” and struggled with determining what he had to offer (OMFN).

As Omukambi spoke of the multiple facets of his life and who he believed himself to be, he used terms such as fractured and splintered to describe his feelings and thoughts most of the time. He was equally descriptive in outlining the strategies he used to maintain some degree of harmony and balance. For example, Omukambi recalled that spending time with individuals from other countries, both faculty members and graduate students, afforded him opportunities to compare
stories and learn strategies on classroom management, teaching methods, and tools for balancing the responsibility of being both student and teacher. He also recalled that eventually, he began to focus less on what was dissimilar between him and his students and more on what they had in common. He explained that at times,

. . . [I]t was as if I was going to splinter apart—then what would have become of me—to my family in Kenya. I had to work hard—everyday—to keep from splintering away to connect the many pieces of me. I found that with music—teaching my students about music of world cultures—I found solace in the music—with the students and we had this in common. The music does not care that I am Kenyan (OMI1, Lines 53-54).

Okpeke provided a provocative illustration of residing in multiple intersecting identities. As was previously indicated, Okepke spoke of her experiences as an international teaching assistant with a great deal of clarity, candor, and as she confessed early on “anger” (FN). In the following interview excerpt, Okpeke describes several of the complex, interconnected facets of her life. Moreover, she conveys her method of creating harmony and overcoming the dissonance she describes as she wrestles with crystallizing a definition of self. Okpeke exemplified this point by recalling:

So many things are connected, you know, and there always seems to be so much to try to understand. Sometimes I have to think about how I am going to be today or at this moment in this place? Am I going to be very Nigerian even though until I open my mouth to speak people assume that I am African
American? Am I going to be a woman who will be the youngest in her provincial district to have earned a Ph.D. and what does that mean for me? Will I be the person who speaks many languages with a heavy British accent and whose students and the people at church think is different, exotic—especially when I wear my native garb? Am I going to act like a teacher and focus on my students and, because I focus on them and not myself, do I have greater compassion and sympathy for them when they complain about having so many assignments and can’t get their work done. On this day am I my father’s daughter? Dutiful. Who came to this country to study because he said it was my destiny. Or on this day, am I the student trying to understand what seems so familiar to everyone else. I ask myself—how will I be today (OPFN).

To expound further on the phenomenon of international teaching assistants dwelling within multiple micro-cultures and integrating these various identities, Turner’s (1987) work on social identity theory provided additional insights. Similar to Althen’s (1991) description of role identity as a set of concentric circles, Turner (1987) posited that individuals possess multiple personal selves and that these multiple selves correspond to widening circles of group membership. Thoughts, feelings, and behaviors were tailored to fit a particular culturally influenced social context, such as the family unit or educational setting. In addition to multiple idiosyncratic “selves,” individuals possess multiple social identities. Hogg and Vaughan (2002) indicated that social identity was an individual’s self-concept obtained from inclusion in a social group. Members of
the group determined and internalized the unifying attributes necessary for membership. Faced with tensions associated with the process of learning to teach international teaching assistants found comfort in reaffirming who they believed themselves to be by reaffirming membership in the social groups where they were most comfortable.

The transferability of Proposition Five is contingent upon acknowledging several critical points. International teaching assistants experienced multiple role identities simultaneously. Teacher, graduate student, foreigner, husband, daughter, and friend were just a few of the role identities evident in their research interviews. These identities were molded by the cultural milieu of their respective home countries. Decisions concerning philosophies of teaching, learning, and appropriate teaching behaviors were culturally influenced. Based on these viewpoints participants believed their perspectives on teaching and learning were appropriate, *the right way to do things*, and reasonable until juxtaposed with their experience at the site institution. Consequently, during the research interviews, participants used terms such as fractured, splintered, and invisible to describe their sense of self as they attempted to develop congruency between their beliefs about themselves and others’ beliefs about them. Efforts to lessen this sense of disconnection were often idiosyncratic. International teaching assistants looked to family members back home for support and affirmation and to remind them that what was considered different or weird at the site institution reflected normality at home. Other international students and faculty, as colleagues sharing common experiences, helped lessen the sense of disconnection as well.
International teaching assistants as learners, teachers, and cultural beings must negotiate identity influenced by larger cultural issues. They bring their respective values, behavior patterns, cultural artifacts, ideals, language with them. They believed that what they brought with them is the proper and correct way to be. Thus, their foreignness is only foreign when juxtaposed with their new environment. Recall from previous discussions Paula’s exasperation at being able to speak multiple languages and her students’ evaluations and criticism that she was weird. Through the cognitive (the mind) and the affective (the emotion) they must work through their cultural identity and often times suspend their belief systems in the process of learning to teach.

Moreover, through the lens of their personal experiences as a learner, international teaching assistants formed impressions of undergraduate students by essentially comparing and contrasting their experiences with that of the students they teach. As learners they must figure out how to function in a classroom and must become skilled at learning classroom cues to help them to understand what to do as both teacher and student. Developing an identity as a teacher is intimately intertwined with perceptions about what it means to be a good student.

Summary

This chapter has been crafted to move beyond the constructions that emerged in the data analysis process to interpret the findings. This process, referred to as “data complication” by Coffey and Atkinson (1996), was hermeneutic in nature, designed to interpret research findings and to increase understanding of meanings embedded within these findings (p. 29). According to
these researchers, data complication is employed to, “[E]xpand the conceptual frameworks and dimensions for analysis. Coding here is actually about going beyond the data, thinking creatively with the data, asking the data questions, and generating theories and frameworks” (p. 30). With this in mind, the propositions outlined in Chapter V were also hermeneutic in nature and thus deepen understanding of the research findings. Specifically, the propositions provide a cogent illustration of a select group of international teaching assistants’ experience of learning to teach. For the participants, learning to teach required self-direction and self-reliance. Teaching, as a cultural practice, was best learned by participating in acts of teaching while suspending previously held assumptions and beliefs about teaching in order to incorporate and acquire new perspectives. These participants demonstrated that the process of learning to teach, complicated by multiple role identities, required constructing a sense of self and an identity as teacher independent of others’ definition. In the following chapter, Chapter VI, the final portrayal of the experience of international teaching assistants learning to teach is provided. Implications, recommendations, and concluding thoughts are discussed providing the last picture to complete the photomontage.
CHAPTER VI: IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSION

What does this particular study contribute to the base of literature about international teaching assistants? What conclusions can be drawn from this inquiry to inform teaching practice that will expand the scope of this study? What differences do the findings from this study make to international teaching assistants, faculty members, administrators, and undergraduate students? The following discussion is framed to respond to these questions by discussing the implications of the study, recommendations for future research, and conclusions flowing therefrom.

The Completed Photomontage: The Process of Learning to Teach

What can be gleaned to deepen understanding about the process of international teaching assistants learning to teach from the intersection of the literature review, data analysis, and the international teaching assistants’ stories? The participants’ stories, in concert with data analysis, reveal that this process was both complex and evolutionary, that it was a multifaceted phenomenon involving both cognitive and affective variables, and, that as learning took place, so did changes in attitudes and behavior on the part of the participants in the study. The strategies adopted by participants to this end are discussed in what follows.

First, international teaching assistants had to learn “what” to teach, course content, and “how” to teach, pedagogical strategies. Becoming proficient in course content was the first critical component in the process of learning to teach.
Those individuals teaching courses in the disciplines in which they had previously earned degrees were inclined to feel a greater sense of confidence in their ability to master course content and convey and impart the relevant knowledge to their undergraduate students. However, individuals teaching courses outside the scope of their educational training were required to not only learn the content on their own, but then were required to “figure out” how to transmit such content to their students. Immersion in the course material, whether in the past or currently, was instrumental in the learning process. Knowing “what” to teach extended beyond just learning content. International teaching assistants also had to determine the most appropriate means of achieving course objectives and had to determine exactly what to cover during class periods.

Learning to teach also required learning effective pedagogical strategies; the “how” in the process of teaching. Initially, teaching assistants functioned as technicians, uncomfortable with the autonomy and flexibility commonly associated with college teaching and preferring a more methodical approach. International teaching assistants were initially inclined to teach the way they were taught during their undergraduate classroom experience. Over a period of time, teaching assistants reported adopting additional teaching strategies. Other than summative examinations and lecturing, tools for teaching reflected willingness to surrender some degree of control over the classroom environment.

Secondly, the process of learning to teach required becoming skilled in intercultural, interpersonal interactions. International teaching assistants were required to learn the nuances of conversing in the classroom and required to learn
the cultural rules of conversation. Confident of both what to say and how to say it in their home country, it was necessary to learn additional skills in order to understand others and to be understood themselves. This was particularly challenging in light of the heterogeneity in the classroom. Undergraduate students varied in degree of academic preparedness, skill level and ability, major course of study, and motivators for enrolling in a particular class. Consequently, the participants struggled with communicating, understanding student culture, and determining teaching strategies that would meet the needs of such diversity within their respective classrooms.

Thirdly, international teaching assistants practiced teaching as part of the process of learning to teach. Without adequate training or supervision, teaching assistants were left to their own devices to determine appropriate teaching behaviors. Experimentation and a trial and error approach ensued as a result. Teaching was an activity conducted in private away from the scrutiny of others except students. In the unfamiliar terrain of the classroom, undergraduate students functioned as cultural informants for the international teaching assistants who taught them. Teaching, then, was a bi-directional activity with international teaching assistants attempting to deliver course content and undergraduate students providing instructions and insights as to how they believed this should be done.

Fourthly, introspection and self-reflection played a key role in the process of learning to teach. In this new environment, international teaching assistants were compelled by circumstances to examine their perceptions about what
constituted effective teaching. Moreover they examined what they believed about student learning and about higher education in the United States. In this introspection, self-reflection and critical auto-critique, the participants tended to identify the skill sets they had acquired as expert learners to determine the applicability and transferability of the insights thus acquired to function as classroom instructors.

Finally, as international teaching assistants, crafted their teacher-identities, acquired experience in practice teaching—with a greater degree of comfort with course content, and language acumen—they expressed and exhibited a greater degree of confidence in their ability to transmit knowledge and in their identities as teachers. Consequently, they were less inclined to focus on their own deficiencies and were more inclined to express a desire to see their students succeed academically.

Lessons Learned: Implications for Practice

The metaphors that international teaching assistants used to describe their process of learning to teach demystify what occurs in the undergraduate classroom between these novice instructors and the students they teach. Even as they quite clearly were often irritated by what they considered “disrespectful” and “inconsiderate” behavior on the part of the undergraduates they taught, all participants successfully resisted the apparent temptation to take such disrespect personally and avoided blaming their travails on their students. Directly or indirectly, they laid their concerns at the doorsteps of departmental and institutional administrators, to whom they referred, often in the passive voice.
Thus, they consciously or inadvertently acknowledged the institutional character of the origins of their troubles. Embedded in this acknowledgment was an allusion, no matter how circuitous, to a perceived imbalance in relations of power between themselves, as international teaching assistants, and the faculty and administrators at whose behest and pleasure, they implicitly recognized, they served as teachers-in-training. Some international teaching assistants remained in fear of losing their assistantships if they did not perform well according to the sometimes summary judgment of student evaluations. Simon in particular directly and explicitly voiced this sense of helplessness and terror. Ngugi spoke of the tendency for university authorities appearing at least not to care until there was a problem in an international teaching assistant’s class. Furthermore, Paula was bewildered by what she thought was the excessive individualism of her students.

Moreover, in alluding to their disappointment at the lack of adequate support from faculty members and administrators, these inexperienced teachers used expressions such as “being thrown into the deep end,” “having to learn to sink or swim,” “being alone and feeling abandoned” and “just having to figure it out or our own.” These metaphors reflect a sense of isolation, role confusion, and uncertainty. In spite of their participation in formal orientation programs and socialization sessions designed to assist with the teaching process, international teaching assistants found little in this training that aided their development as teachers. Even as their tenure as teaching assistants continued, feedback or input from faculty advisors or mentors remained slow in coming or non-existent.
The metaphors listed above draw attention to the international teaching assistant perception of the effort at learning to teach as an activity conducted in private, far removed from supervisory evaluation, scrutiny, or supervisory review. As mentioned previously, the international teaching assistants expected a mentoring relationship or an apprenticeship experience as they learned to teach. The reality of the experience was incongruent with their expectations. An examination of the experience of international teaching assistants sheds some light on these private acts, illuminating the differences in the expectations and assumptions of non-native English-speaking novice teachers and the students in their classrooms. This illumination exemplifies the process whereby the tacit and the commonplace become unfamiliar; what Whitt’s (1993) work on organizational culture conceptualizes as the “making [of] the familiar strange” (p. 82).

Teaching is an activity rooted in the larger national culture, where culture, as defined by Hofstede (2001), is the “collective programming of the mind” (p. 1); a collective programming of the mind described by Banks and Banks (1997) as the sum of what is “in us and all around us, just as the air we breathe. It is personal, familial, communal, institutional, and societal in its scope and distribution” (p. 33). Yet, this being the case, novice teachers, whose native language, educational training, and cultural orientation differed significantly from the students they were expected to teach were also expected to quickly, in a few weeks and months, acquire cultural knowledge that took their students born and bred and immersed in such culture all their lives to imbibe and internalize.
Clearly, as outsiders to the collective programming of the mind evident within the United States and its institutions of higher education, international teaching assistants were greatly disadvantaged.

This disadvantage has arisen because international teaching assistants have been less skilled and less knowledgeable of the institutional values and assumptions that they were, nonetheless, expected to be conversant with, or even, to have internalized by the time they appeared in class and took charge of various sections of introductory undergraduate classes. Yet this expectation—this cultural obligation of sorts, this often unconscious collective programming of the mind—was never clearly articulated and communicated to them, as they clearly thought ought to have been the case.

In this regard however, the following point cannot be overemphasized. At no point in the close readings, re-readings, and interpretations of participant narratives as they emerged from the transcripts of the interviews did any of the participants express the thought, perception or fear, that there was some kind of a conspiracy against them. They mostly expressed frustration that their superiors did not seem to be aware that they were often in the throes of deep angst about their teaching responsibilities. It is this absence of communication (or, perhaps relative non-availability of information) about the cultural values that undergird, inform, and lubricate the processes and practices of formal instruction that is the source of most of the difficulties international teaching assistants faced.

Since an understanding of the collective programming of the minds of the two constituencies in any learning situation is critical for the effective
collaboration between the teacher and the taught, the question arises, naturally and logically: Is there, in the United States academy, an interest in the collective programming of the mind with which international teaching assistants arrive from their home countries? If no, why not? If yes, why and to what purpose? This quite obviously is potentially the burden of a totally different study.

Suffice to say for now that the anecdotal evidence seems to suggest that the attitude in the academy, albeit unconscious perhaps, is one that places the onus on the individual international teaching assistant to find their own means and methods of cultural cognition of, and auto-integration into, the already established collective mental programming of their respective postgraduate institutions. If such institutional mental programming turns out to be at variance with that of the particular international teaching assistant it is their responsibility to figure out how, on pain of losing their position as a teaching assistant—or worse—without the financial support afforded by this appointment—their studentship, to deal with the resulting conflict. These unrealistic expectations are what seemed to have fueled international teaching assistants’ acute frustrations.

Limitations of the Study

In several ways, interpretation and application of the study’s results were limited by the methods selected to carryout the research. One of the study’s limitations was related to sampling. At the onset of the study, the intent was to select a pool of participants reflecting multiple countries of origin and representing various academic disciplines. The goal was also to select participants at various stages in the length of their assistantship appointment and to choose
individuals whose teaching preparedness ranged from the very inexperienced to the very experienced. Although the original and subsequent calls for participants resulted in several international teaching assistants responding and expressing a desire to take part in the study, some declined for fear that their candor might result in the loss of their assistantship funding, others chose not to be involved because they believed that participating would hamper future employment efforts, while others chose not to participate because the busyness of their lives—as student, teacher, and researcher—afforded them little opportunity for anything else. Even though the purposive sampling did not reflect desired goals for the participant pool, Figure 1, provided in Chapter III, outlines the heterogeneity that was achieved amongst the actual individuals participating in the study and reflects the most diverse participant pool possible in spite of the aforementioned conditions.

Member checking in naturalistic inquiry is an important mechanism for establishing credibility. Frequently during the data collection and analysis phase of the study, participants were afforded opportunities to examine the preliminary analytical interpretations and conclusions to ensure that these constructions were accurate representations of the realities of their lived experiences. However, the teaching assistantship appointment is a transitory role. Data collection, analysis, interpretation, and crafting the portrayals spanned a period of four years. One of the goals in this study was to craft the participants’ stories accurately and with great care. At the time the last portrayal was crafted the participants were no longer available to attest to the accuracy of the final general constructions. All had
left the site institution and efforts to remain in contact were not successful. In spite of this challenge, member checking throughout the process of the study provided opportunities for the participants to co-craft their stories, raise questions, dispute the portrayals, or to provide additional information as they deemed appropriate.

The third limitation of the study was related to its intentional, narrow focus. The purpose of the study—to explore the experience of international teaching assistants learning to teach—of necessity focused attention on some elements of the classroom environment to the exclusion of others. For example, although data concerning faculty members and undergraduate students’ perceptions about international teaching assistant effectiveness were obtained, this information was ancillary to this purpose and consequently, was not factored into data analysis and research findings. Certainly, these areas warrant critical exploration in the future.

Lastly, the researcher as human instrument also influenced the outcome of the study. The issue of conducting a study at an institution where the researcher and the participants were significantly invested resulted in unwillingness, on occasion, to critically evaluate the site institution’s policies and practices that were perceived as adversely affecting international teaching assistants. This was further complicated by a tendency, on the part of the researcher, to avoid any actions that might place the participants in harms way; ever mindful of the vulnerability of these individuals who stood within multiple, competing worlds, that of foreigner with temporary status, student, teacher, researcher, informant,
and for some, seekers of employment as a faculty member upon completion of their studies. Consequently, there was a continual struggle involving loyalty to the site institution, self-protective actions, and loyalty to the participants. Nevertheless, candid conversations with the peer debriefer and periodic, reflexive evaluations to examine how the researcher’s perspectives and biases influenced the research findings helped to mitigate these tensions.

A second limitation related to the human instrument was a heightened sense of connecting or bonding that the researcher experienced with several; but not all, of the participants. Throughout the course of the study, the intent was to establish a relationship with all of the participants based on respect fueled by unwillingness to harm the individuals involved and to re-tell the stories of their lived experiences as accurately as possible. However, the researcher was ever mindful of the need to negotiate language and cultural differences while attempting to develop a relationship with the participants, establish trust, and be granted permission to enter their respective worlds. For the participants from Africa and the Caribbean this seemed easier to do so. Perhaps this was the case because of an assumed kinship or perhaps it was because in their words and in their sometimes pained expressions, I saw a shadow of myself reflected in their experiences. After all, Okpeke, who defined herself as a woman of color, agreed to participate in the study because I was also a woman of color. The humanness and challenges faced by all of the participants were poignant, but for these individuals the researcher’s level of empathy was particularly high. Upon discovering this reaction to Omukambi, Okpeke, and Ngugi, the researcher began
to explore and to account for this particular lens to ensure a reasonably balanced re-telling of all the international teaching assistants’ stories. However; the reader, while reading the accounts of the teaching experiences of this select group of participants will undoubtedly notice that some of the stories are deeper, richer, and markedly more complex and sophisticated.

Recommendations to Inform Practice

Two sets of recommendations, practical and theoretical/philosophical in nature, flow from the analysis above. The first set relates to pragmatic considerations arising from the import of the five propositions previously discussed. The purpose of these pragmatic considerations, would be to ensure a more efficient and cost-effective institutional management of international teaching assistants’ time and intellectual labor. The structuring of these practical measures would call for:

- the investment of conscious and consistent institutional effort in the human resource management of the international teaching assistant workforce; and

- the formalization of socialization strategies that have become indispensable for international teaching assistants in their quest to learn how to teach.

Since one of the most common international teaching assistant concerns uncovered by this study was inadequate communication, or even miscommunication, of their assistantship responsibilities, administrative measures aimed at improving communication would go a long way in addressing this issue.
As an integral part of the application and admissions process the institution could solicit information about the specifics of international students’ motivations for applying for graduate study and their aspirations for post-graduation employment. Such information could then be used in the assignment of assistantship responsibilities and appointments. Thus, instead of waiting until a week or so before classes begin to assign these individuals to their assistantship responsibilities, they could be informed, right from the moment that their admission to the institution was confirmed and their assistantships were awarded, the exact nature of the assistantship responsibilities. Implementation; however, would necessitate re-envisioning the relationship between the international teaching assistant and the department faculty to that of a master teacher and apprentice.

These conscious and intentional institutional administrative measures would then become the principal buttress for the professional development of international teaching assistants. Additionally, conscious and intentional efforts would also need to be made, perhaps at the instigation of institutions and with their support, to encourage international teaching assistants to establish an organization of their own. The main purpose of such an organization would be to facilitate their socialization as teachers-in-training. International teaching assistants could then, under the aegis of such an organization, have formal channels for the exchange of views and information among themselves as peers about how to deal with the challenges of their responsibilities as teachers-in-training. Besides helping, in practical ways, to acclimatize newly arriving
international teaching assistants to a new and somewhat strange environment, the organization could also put together programs and activities designed to promote the professional development and personal well-being of international teaching assistants in far-flung places, thousands of miles away from home. Such an organization could, for example, organize award ceremonies at which members who have excelled in various spheres of endeavor in the institution could receive due recognition. Instead of just addressing international teaching assistant concerns on an individual or departmental bases, such an organization could be of tremendous help in aiding the institution in its formulation and execution of policy, be it in the assignment of responsibilities, or socialization, or training, mentoring, and supervision as teachers-in-training.

A systematic investigation of the motivations of international students in seeking opportunities for advanced study in the United States and the factors contributing to the admission of such students have, by and large, remained outside the purview of this study. Yet the studies’ findings give the researcher ample reason to suggest a linkage between international teaching assistants’ desire for American higher education and a larger range of economic and political reasons why their sojourn is desired by various entities, besides university administrators, within the United States establishment.

Recommendations to Inform Future Research

Before proceeding with recommendations for future international teaching assistant research, it is worth emphasizing that the researcher is rather keenly aware that wide-angle and close-up telephoto shots presented here in this
photomontage of international teaching assistant experience at the site institution are incomplete in the absence of foreground and background picturing of higher education in the United States as a whole, an endeavor that is beyond the scope of this particular exercise. Even so, in the realm of the training and functioning of university teachers, the findings of this study could bear further testing in comparative studies of domestic and international teaching assistantships. Could it be the case that the international teaching assistant experiences captured here are markedly different from those domestic graduate assistants only in degree and not in kind? Anecdotal evidence suggests that notwithstanding their fluency in United States English and greater conversance with the culture of American college life, domestic graduate assistants from say New York or Los Angeles are sometimes just as perplexed as their international colleagues about their responsibilities in universities like that of the site institution. As such, it would be worth the effort of future research to establish the extent to which the findings of this study differ from comparable studies of domestic teaching assistants. In other words, what aspects of college teachers-in-training projects share similarities and differences with the training of international teaching assistants? What kinds of similarities? What kinds of differences? Only then can anything approaching the exact specificity of the international teaching assistant experience be incontrovertibly established.

With the above in mind, there are indeed some very clear differences between domestic and international teaching assistants. The latter are, for example, not citizens of the United States and this fact alone provides one critical
element to an understanding of their sojourn and the benefits accruing to the United States as a result. According to *Open Doors 2004*, the Institute of International Education’s annual report on international academic mobility for the 2003-2004 periods, international students:

Brought over $13 billion dollars to the U.S. economy in money spent on tuition, living expenses, and related costs. . . . Nearly 75% of all international students reported that their primary source of funding comes from personal and family sources or other sources outside of the United States (p. 3).

Even though the bulk of international teaching assistants are unlikely to fall into the category of fee-paying students, they nevertheless represent a potential revenue-generating source for United States institutions and the economies of the localities in which they reside. According to Department of Commerce data, higher education in the United States constitutes “the country's fifth largest service sector export” (p. 4). The question therefore arises, and deserves to be investigated, as to the extent to which a commercial attitude towards international students affects and infects the experiences of international teaching assistants.

While international teaching assistants may not be full tuition-paying students, their work as teachers-in-training contributes to the bottom-line of the institutions that admit them, just as the admission of domestic teaching assistants does. Their engagement as trainee-teachers relieves institutions of the burden of hiring part- and full-time instructors to teach the introductory lower-level courses typically assigned to teaching assistants. Consequently, the comparative
performance of international teaching assistants, domestic teaching assistants, and adjunct professors would be well-worth investigating. However, when performing at their best and when truly satisfied with the value they get in the United States; international teaching assistants could potentially perform a service whose importance is presumably much higher than the saving of resources spent on them. In the aftermath of the changes put in place by the Department of Homeland Security following September 11, changes that made it more difficult for international scholars to obtain student visas, Undersecretary of State for Consular Affairs, Maura Harty (2004) wrote:

We at the U.S. State Department are keenly aware that fostering academic and scientific exchanges is crucial to the national security of the United States. . . . The loss of even one qualified student to another nation is one too many. When a student goes elsewhere, we haven't lost only the student. We have lost his or her parents, who have clearly decided to spend their money elsewhere. We have very likely lost younger siblings, who will follow in the footsteps of an older brother or sister. Most important to me, though, we have lost the chance for a student to see the wonders of America through his or her own eyes, rather than through the prism of a foreign news-media outlet that may be biased. When a student grows up and becomes a social, civic, political, or perhaps religious leader at home, we want that leader to have had the quintessential experience of life on an American college or university campus. A young person's positive experience in America strengthens and enriches our nation. And
we are informed every day in what we do by our desire to welcome those students to our shores (p. 10).

Quite clearly then, for policy makers, the cost of bringing and retaining international students for the duration of their sojourn as compared to their potential political and cultural value for the United States is “chump change,” and from this perspective, international teaching assistants who, by the very nature of their teaching assignments are required to get to know their undergraduate charges relatively well in order to teach them adequately, occupy a critically strategic position in the scheme outlined by Harty (2004). What better advocate for American values abroad than the international teaching assistant who besides, merely living and studying in the United States, has the obligation to have a fairly intimate knowledge of the country’s youth as represented in introductory undergraduate classes? And how intimately indeed does the international teaching assistant know the average undergraduate she or he teaches? We can perhaps only have answers to these questions in the form of narratives of the experiences of international teaching assistants in this regard; and the writing and re-telling of such narratives should be vigorously encouraged. Not only would such memoirs, in their totality, give us a more accurate sense of the international teaching assistants’ experiences; they would also allow us to determine whether the research and writing protocols that have so far been applied to the study of these sojourners are adequate. This last point certainly requires future elaboration.

Finally, this study has been carried out deploying the protocols of qualitative research, a methodology that was developed to supplement other
methods that are less than adequate for providing depth in the study of human participants. Nevertheless, these protocols of qualitative research emerged from anthropological and ethnographic studies of non-Western societies; this is exactly the critical point that Smith (1999) makes. Do these protocols, as they currently stand, do sufficient justice to the study of international teaching assistants, the majority of whom come from non-Western societies? Harty, in the citation above, speaks of the “quintessential experience of life on an American college or university campus” as a critical source of inspiration for the representation abroad of the essence of American life and culture by those who have had the good fortune of receiving higher education in the United States. But does the corollary apply? Do the experiences of United States students in classes taught by international teaching assistants function as yeast that might leaven the bread of American life and culture? Studies of the subject might bear some surprising results.

Conclusion

This study was the outcome of an attempt to give voice to international teaching assistants who, collectively, have tended to be caricatured as foreigners with poor language and classroom management skills. The study found that international teaching assistants have their own complaints against institutional practices: inadequate communication concerning their assistantship responsibilities, non-existent training, non-existent mentoring and supervision, and the expectation of teaching underprepared, unmotivated anti-intellectual undergraduate students.
Arriving from systems of higher education administration that place the onus on students to learn by themselves with the guidance of instructors, international teaching assistants frequently found themselves thrown into the “deep end” and left to “figure things out,” to swim or to sink, while often homesick and struggling to acclimatize themselves to a new and unfamiliar environment. Often the inevitability of figuring things out by themselves with little institutional support, the necessity of sinking or swimming called into question their previous epistemological and pedagogical habits. Through trial and error, the solidarity of fellow international teaching assistants, family and friends, encouragement from well-wishers at home and abroad and the support of local peers and sympathetic senior colleagues, they found ways of beating the stress of it all. In the end; however, they usually succeeded in performing their tasks as teachers-in-training and accomplishing their goals as scholars.

It is hoped that the implementation of these recommendations will contribute to making teaching and learning a much less stressful and much more pleasurable experience for international teaching assistants, their undergraduate students, and higher education faculty members and administrators.
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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Call for Participants

V. Lynne Holland
Department of Higher Education and Student Affairs, 330 Education Building
Bowling Green State University
Bowling Green, OH 43403
Office phone: 419.372.6876
Home phone: 419.352.5784
e-mail address: vlynneh@bgnet.bgsu.edu

January XX, 200?

Dear << International Teaching Assistant>>:

Permit me to introduce myself, my name is Lynne Holland and I am a doctoral candidate in the Higher Education Administration Program at Bowling Green State University. I am currently in the process of identifying participants for my dissertation research focusing on the teaching experience of international teaching assistants. I am interested in identifying a small number of international teaching assistants for participation in an in-depth inquiry.

The purpose of this study will be to discover and develop a deeper understanding of how a select group of international teaching assistants learn to teach at the collegiate level. I am particularly interested in discovering your perspective on how you have acquired knowledge about what it means to be a teacher, and how you approach your classroom responsibilities.

Once participants have been selected and confirmed, I would like to conduct at least three (3) person-to-person interviews with each individual. The first interview/meeting will be for the express purpose of informing you about the study and providing you an opportunity to meet me and to ask questions about your involvement. I am anticipating that this initial meeting should last approximately 20 minutes. The two subsequent interviews should take approximately 90 minutes to two (2) hours. These interviews will be less structured. The purpose of the third interview is to confirm and clarify the content of the second interview and to seek additional information. With your permission, each interview will be audiotape recorded to facilitate gathering of accurate and complete data. A transcription and my interpretation of the second interview will be sent to you prior to the third interview for purposes of review, response, and revision as necessary.

In addition to interviews, I would like to conduct at least two (2)
classroom observation sessions. The purpose of these sessions is to help me develop a deeper understanding of your role as a teaching assistant by allowing me to experience firsthand your classroom setting. Notes will be taken during these sessions and used to inform interview questions.

Raw data (e.g., audiotapes, interview transcriptions, forms, and other documents) will be kept in my possession and secured in a locked file cabinet drawer located at my home office. However, interpretations and findings will be shared with my major professor, dissertation committee members, and a peer reviewer. Identifying markers, such as names, identities, academic departments, and institutional setting will be altered to protect your identity to the highest degree possible.

If you are interested in participating in this inquiry, please complete the attached Participant Information Form and return the form using e-mail by XX/XX/XX. You may also wish to review the attached Participant Consent Form and Lay Summary for additional information about the inquiry and my interest in the research topic.

Should you have any questions about this inquiry, please contact me at my home or office by phone or e-mail. You may also wish to contact the major advisor of my dissertation committee, Dr. Michael Coomes at 419.372.7157. Thank you for your consideration. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

V. Lynne Holland,    Dr. Michael Coomes,
Investigator     Chair, Dissertation Committee
Home Phone: 419.352.5784
Office Phone: 419.372.6876
e-mail address: vlynneh@bgnet.bgsu.edu
Appendix B: Participant Information Profile

If you are interested in being a participant in the study entitled Learning to Become a Teacher: Case Studies of International Teaching Assistants, please complete this form and either return it to me electronically (via e-mail) or in the enclosed envelope by XX/XX/XX. The purpose of this study is to discover and develop a deeper understanding of how a select group of international teaching assistants (International teaching assistants) learn to teach at the collegiate level. I am particularly interested in discovering your perspective on how you have acquired knowledge about what it means to be a teacher at a postsecondary institution in the U. S. and how you approach your classroom responsibilities. If you have any questions about the form or this study, please feel free to contact me, V. Lynne Holland at 419.372.6876 (office phone number) or 419.352.5784 (home phone number). My office address is 330 Education Building, Bowling Green State University. My e-mail address is <vlynneh@bgnet.bgsu.edu>.

Returning this form does not obligate you to participate in the study nor does it guarantee that you will be selected as one of the research participants. The information that you provide will allow me to make initial decisions about whom to contact to further discuss the research project and participant involvement.

The form is brief and should take no longer than 10 (ten) minutes to complete. Be assured that no one other than myself will have access to the personal information requested on page 1 (one). Information on subsequent pages will be shared in coded form with the chair of my dissertation committee. Please be sure that your contact information is accurate. Thank you for your consideration.

I. Contact Information

Name: __________________________________________________________

Phone number(s) where you may be contacted:

(______) ______________________________________________________

(______) ______________________________________________________

E-mail address: _________________________________________________

List the best time(s) to contact you?

(please continue on to the next page)
II. Teaching Information

Which of the following phrases best describes your graduate assistantship responsibilities?
I am responsible for laboratory sessions or study sessions
I occasionally teach a class.
I co-teach with a faculty member.
I have primary responsibility for a course section
Other (please briefly describe in space provided below)

How many semesters have you been a teaching assistant at this university?

In what academic department do you teach?

What courses do you teach?

How many lower division courses do you teach (course with a 200 or lower designation)?

How many upper division courses do you teach (courses with a 300 or higher designation)?

Do you teach any graduate level courses?
Yes
No

How many years teaching experience did you have prior to coming to the United States?

III. Personal Information

What is your gender?
Male
Female
(please continue on to the next page)
Describe your racial, ethnic, or national identification
What degree(s) are you currently seeking? (Check all that apply.)
Master’s
Specialist
Ph. D. or other terminal degree.

Which of the following phrases most aptly describes your experience with formal education in the United States prior to pursuing post-baccalaureate studies at BGSU?
I had no prior experience with formal education within the United States
I participated in a Study Abroad Program, Student Exchange Program, or similar program
I received a degree, certificate from an American University in my home country
I received a degree, certificate from a college or university in the United States
Other (please describe briefly in space provided below)

Do you intend to seek employment as a faculty member once you have completed your studies?
Yes
No

Please contact me to provide me with additional information about this study.
Yes
No

Thank you very much for your willingness to participate. Please return the completed Participant Information Form to me either electronically or by mail by XX/XX/XX. If you elect to mail your Participant Information, an envelope is provided for your convenience.

V. Lynne Holland
vlynneh@bgnet.bgsu.edu or 419.372.6876 or 419.352.5784
HSRB Project No. H02D184GE6
Appendix C: Inquiry Summary

Principal Investigator:
V. Lynne Bates Holland  Office: 419.372.6876
330 Education Building  Home: 419. 352.5784
Bowling Green, OH 43403  e-mail: vlynneh@bgnet.bgsu.edu

Dissertation Research: Learning to Become a Teacher: Case Studies of International Teaching Assistants

Dissertation Chair:
Dr. Michael Coomes, Dissertation Committee Chair
e-mail: mcoomes@bgnet.bgsu.edu

INTRODUCTION
This summary serves to inform you (the co-researcher) of the nature, purpose, and procedures involved in the research study entitled Learning to Become a Teacher: Case Studies of International Teaching Assistants. Additionally, the summary outlines your rights as a participant, states measures to insure confidentiality, and informs you of your level of commitment.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY
The purpose of the study will be to develop a deeper understanding of how a select group of international teaching assistants who are native speakers of languages other than U. S. English, and who have been formally educated in cultural and educational traditions other than those within the United States, learn to teach in a U. S. postsecondary classroom, particularly as they interpret and articulate their perspectives on this phenomenon.

NATURE OF THE STUDY AND TIME FRAME FOR STUDY PARTICIPATION
Qualitative research methods will be used to collect data for this study. Over a period of two to three months, interviews, document analysis, and participant observation will be used to capture the words, actions, and essence of your experiences as a teaching assistant.

DESCRIPTION OF YOUR INVOLVEMENT AND PROCEDURES FOR THE STUDY
Interviews: Three (3) interviews of approximately 20 minutes to 120 minutes in duration will be conducted. Interviews will be audio taped (recorded). Recordings will be transcribed and a written transcript will be created. You will be asked to review the transcriptions to verify an accurate reflection of your experience. With your permission, excerpts from interview transcriptions will be included in the dissertation.
Participant observation: Additional information will be collected through participant observation. I would like to observe your teaching in at least two (2) classroom sessions. The purpose of these observations will be to help me to develop a deeper understanding of the teaching assistant role by allowing me to experience firsthand your classroom setting. I will take notes during these sessions. With your permission, notes from these sessions will be used in my dissertation. These notes will be kept in a locked filing cabinet drawer in my home office.

Document analysis: Additional information will be collected through review of course materials used in your classroom. I would like to read course syllabi and other materials that you design for your classes. I would also like to review any training materials, either provided by the institution or your academic unit, which have been helpful as you have assumed teaching responsibilities. The purpose of my reading these materials is to learn as much as possible about your role as a teacher and the teaching methods you use in the classroom.

FINAL OUTCOME
You will have the opportunity to review the transcripts of your interviews, my interpretations of those interviews, and the written document containing the overall findings before submission of the final draft. This review will afford you an opportunity to confirm or deny my descriptions and use of direct quotations or summarized statements. If necessary you may negotiate the above with me. The information obtained during the study will be used in my dissertation. This dissertation will be read by the four members of my dissertation committee and will be available to the public in its final form. Segments of the research will be used in educational publications and presentations.

QUESTIONS
Should you have any questions concerning this dissertation research study or your rights as a participant during the study, please feel free to contact me or my dissertation advisor. Names, phone numbers, and e-mail address are included on page one (1) of this summary form.

CONFIDENTIALITY
Some measure of confidentiality will be maintained throughout the course of the study. Instead of your name, the name of your institution, or other individuals’ names mentioned during the interview, pseudonyms will be used. If you choose, you may select your pseudonym, which will be used in all phases of the research, in any and all records, and in all drafts of the dissertation.

The chair of the dissertation committee, Dr. Michael Coomes, (372-7157) will be serving as my advisor. Dr. Coomes will have access to interview transcripts and other primary data only after identifying information has been removed.

An additional faculty member will serve as a peer reviewer for this study.
This faculty member will have access to interview transcripts and observation notes only after identifying information has been removed.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL
   Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may choose to withdraw from the study at any time without prejudice or penalty. Should you decide not to continue, please notify me as soon as possible.

CONTACT INFORMATION ABOUT PARTICIPANT’S RIGHTS
   Should you have questions about your rights as a participant in this study, you may contact the Chair, Human Subjects Review Board, Bowling Green State University. Questions or concerns about the study should be directed to me or my dissertation advisor.

Thank you.

V. Lynne Holland,
Doctoral Candidate
Department of Higher Education and Student Affairs, 330 Education Building
Bowling Green State University
Bowling Green, OH 43402
Office phone: 419.372.6876
Home phone: 419.352.5784
e-mail address: vlynneh@bgnet.bgsu.edu
Appendix D: Research Participation Consent Form

Principal Investigator:
V. Lynne Bates Holland
330 Education Building
Bowling Green, OH 43403
Home: 419. 352.5784
Office: 419.372.6876
e-mail: vlynneh@bgnet.bgsu.edu

Research Title: Learning to Become a Teacher: Case Studies of International Teaching Assistants

Introduction
Before agreeing to participate in this research study, it is important that I provide you with an explanation of the purpose of this research, benefits of the study, procedures to be used in the study, measures to ensure confidentiality, risks, and benefits of the study. This form describes these components mentioned above. Please note that participation in this study is strictly voluntary and you may withdraw from the study at any time without repercussions.

Purpose and Benefits
The purpose of this research is to develop a deeper understanding of how a select group of international teaching assistants who are native speakers of languages other than English, and who come from non-U.S. cultural and educational traditions learn to teach in a post-secondary classroom in the United States, particularly as they interpret and articulate their perspectives on this phenomenon. This research may prove beneficial to you as you spend time reflecting on your teaching, teaching effectiveness, and the teaching methods chosen for use. Moreover, findings may be used to improve teaching assistant training programs and faculty preparation programs in the future.

Nature of the Study and Time Frame for Participation
Information gathered for this study will be obtained through person-to-person interviews, classroom observations, and through analysis of course materials. Over a period of two to three months, I will use these research methods to capture the words, actions, and essence of your experience as a teaching assistant.

Description of your Involvement and Procedures for the Study
You are being asked to participate in three (3) interviews, two (2) classroom observation sessions, and are being asked to allow me to review classroom materials used in the course(s) you teach.

Interviews: The first interview will be approximately 20 minutes in duration and
will be an opportunity to further discuss the research purpose and benefit, your involvement, procedures, measures to ensure confidentiality, and any risks associated with the research study.

In preparation for the second interview, you will be given an Interview Guide to review. The second interview will be approximately 90 to 120 minutes in duration. During this interview you will be asked to respond to a series of questions outlined in the Interview Guide. With your permission this session will be audio taped (recorded). Recordings will be transcribed and a written transcript will be created. You will be asked to review the transcription to verify an accurate reflection of your classroom teaching experience. Should you decide that you do not want the interview audio-taped, yet wish to continue in the research project, I will make notes of our conversation. With your permission, excerpts from interview transcriptions will be included in my dissertation. Notes and cassette tapes will be kept in a locked file drawer in my home office and will be destroyed three (3) years after the research project is completed.

Participant observation: I would like to observe your teaching in at least two (2) classroom sessions. My role in your classroom will be strictly to observe. You may decide the most appropriate time to conduct these observations. You may choose to participate in the study without the classroom observation sessions. Document analysis: You are being asked to submit course materials used in your classroom for instructional purposes. Documents such as your course syllabi, advanced organizers, or web site(s) used as teaching tools are requested. I would also like to review any training materials, either provided by the institution or your academic unit, which have been helpful as you have assumed teaching responsibilities.

Final Product
You will have the opportunity to review the transcripts of your interviews, my interpretations of those interviews, and the written document containing the overall findings before submission of the final draft of my dissertation. This review will afford you an opportunity to confirm my descriptions and confirm the use of direct quotations or summarized statements used in the final research product. If necessary you may negotiate the above with me. The information obtained during the study will be used in my dissertation. This dissertation will be read by the four members of my dissertation committee and will be available to the public in its final form. Segments of the research will be used in educational publications and presentations.

Measures to Maintain Confidentiality
Some measure of confidentiality will be maintained throughout the course of the study. Instead of your name, the name of your institution, or other individuals’ names mentioned during the interview, pseudonyms will be used. If you choose, you may select your pseudonym, which will be used in all phases of the research, in any and all records, and in all drafts of the dissertation.
The chair of the dissertation committee, Dr. Michael Coomes, (372-7157) will be serving as my advisor. Dr. Coomes will have access to interview transcripts and observation notes only after identifying information has been removed.

An additional faculty member will serve as a peer reviewer for this study. This faculty member will have access to interview transcripts and observation notes only after identifying information has been removed.

Voluntary Participation
Your participation in this study is strictly voluntary. You may choose to withdraw your consent to the research or discontinue participation at any time without penalty. Should you decide not to continue, please notify me as soon as possible by phone, letter, or e-mail.

Risks Associated with Participation
Risks associated with this study are minimal. However, “as in all research, there may be unforeseen risks to the participant. If an accidental injury occurs, appropriate emergency measures will be taken.” Should you believe that you have been or will be injured as a result of this research, contact me, V. Lynne Holland at the contact information listed below or contact Richard Rowland, Chair of the Human Subjects Review Board at 419.372.7716 or at hsrb@bgnet.bgsu.edu.

Contact Information about Participants’ Rights
Should you have questions regarding your participation in this study, feel free to contact me at the contact information listed below. You may also contact my major faculty advisor, Dr. Michael Coomes at 419.372.7157 or at mcoomes@bgnet.bgsu.edu. You may also contact Richard Rowlands, Chair of the Human Subjects Review Board, Bowling Green State University, at 419.372.7716 should questions or problems arise during the course of this study.

The procedures for participation in this study have been explained to me.

Yes ___________ (initials)

No ___________ (initials)

I am willing to participate in the research study entitled: Learning to Become a Teacher: Case Studies of International Teaching Assistants

Yes ___________ (initials)

No ___________ (initials)
Participant’s Name (Please Print)
________________________________________

Participant’s Signature
__________________________________________________

Date
_________________________________________________________________

I agree to conduct this research project by the terms and conditions designated above.

Researcher’s Signature
__________________________________________________

V. Lynne Holland
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Bowling Green State University
Bowling Green, OH 43403
Office phone: 419.372.6876
Home phone: 419.352.5784
e-mail address: vlynneh@bgnet.bgsu.edu

PLEASE SIGN AND DATE BOTH COPIES OF THIS INFORMED CONSENT FORM—RETAIN ONE COPY FOR YOUR RECORDS
Appendix E: Letter of Confirmation

V. Lynne Holland  
Department of Higher Education and Student Affairs, 330 Education Building  
Bowling Green State University  
Bowling Green, OH  43403  
Office phone:  419.372.6876  
Home phone:  419.352.5784  
e-mail address:  vlynneh@bgnet.bgsu.edu

January XX, 200?

Dear <<Name of International Teaching Assistants>>:

Thank you for your interest in my study on the teaching experiences of international teaching assistants, particularly the socializing process when learning to teach. After reviewing the Participant Information Forms, I would like to accept your offer to share your experience of being an international teaching assistant. In just a few days I will be contacting you to arrange a time for the first interview meeting to discuss the purpose of the study, procedures for the study, your involvement, and measures to maintain confidentiality.

In preparation for the interviews and observation session, I would like to become more familiar with the courses that you teach. To achieve this, I would appreciate receiving a copy of the syllabus and course requirements for the class that you currently teach. If you are teaching more than one course, feel free to provide materials for those classes as well. I would also like to review any training materials, either provided by the institution or your academic unit that you may have used that have been helpful as you have assumed teaching responsibilities. Should you so desire, feel free to send these documents electronically or use Campus Mail. My campus address appears at the top of this letter.

Thank you again for your willingness to participate in this study and for your willingness to help me complete my doctoral studies. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me. I am looking forward to meeting you and learning more about your experiences as a teaching assistant.

Sincerely,

V. Lynne Holland,  
Doctoral Candidate  
Department of Higher Education and Student Affairs, 330 Education Building  
Bowling Green State University
Appendix F: Letter of Appreciation

V. Lynne Holland  
Department of Higher Education and Student Affairs, 330 Education Building  
Bowling Green State University  
Bowling Green, OH  43403  
Office phone: 419.372.6876  
Home phone: 419.352.5784  
e-mail address: vlynneh@bgnet.bgsu.edu

January XX, 200?

Dear << Name of International Teaching Assistant >>:

I appreciate your interest and willingness to participate in my study on the teaching experiences of international teaching assistants. The response to my Call for Participants has far exceeded my expectations. Unfortunately, because of the nature of the study, time constraints, and limited financial resources I am unable to interview you and many others who graciously offered to share their perspectives with me.

I would, however, like to place your name on a reserve list for possible contact in the future.

Once again, I sincerely appreciate your interest and willingness to assist me in my research and in completing my doctoral studies. Please accept my best wishes for a successful semester.

Sincerely,

V. Lynne Holland,  
Doctoral Candidate  
Department of Higher Education and Student Affairs, 330 Education Building  
Bowling Green State University  
Bowling Green, OH  43403  
Office phone: 419.372.6876  
Home phone: 419.352.5784  
e-mail address: vlynneh@bgnet.bgsu.edu
Appendix G: Interview Guide

PRELIMINARY TASKS

Expression of appreciation: Thank you for agreeing to participate in this inquiry about international teaching assistants and their classroom teaching experiences. I appreciate your willingness to take time from your busy schedule to participate in this study.

Purpose: I am particularly interested in the socializing aspects of becoming a teaching assistant. In other words, how have you learned to teach, what influences your teaching, and what does teaching mean to you.

Procedures: I would like to engage in a conversation where you have the opportunity to talk about your experiences as a teaching assistant. I will be asking a number of open-ended questions, many of which have been shaped by the literature on college teaching and teaching assistants. As I mentioned in my e-mail memo, letter, and phone conversation, I would like to audio tape our conversation. Audio-taping will allow me to accurately capture your perspective. Additionally, I will occasionally take notes while we are talking. Please feel free to turn off the tape recorders if you would like to say something but prefer that it not be audio-taped. Tapes, notes, and transcribed notes will be coded and all identifiable personal or institutional information will be changed. These items will only be accessible to me and will be kept in a secure location.

Additional Tasks
Is there anything I need to clarify prior to beginning?
Review and sign consent forms—one for participant, one for me.
Ask permission to audio-tape session.
Recheck to ensure that audio tape recorders are turned on and ready.
Begin conversation by discussing information provided on the Participant Information Form.

INTERVIEW TOPICS AND FOLLOW-UP PROBES

Initial Perceptions
I am interested in learning about your decision-making process in selecting an institution in the United States to pursue your graduate students.

How did you first become aware of this particular institution?
Describe your first contact with this institution?
What key factors led you to select this institution rather than some other institution?

I am also interested in learning about your prior knowledge about and experience with higher education in the United States.
Prior to your enrollment at this institution what were your perceptions about higher education? What influenced these perceptions? How have they been modified over time? What accounts for these modifications?

Describe your previous experience(s) with higher education or education in general within the United States.

Thinking back, please describe for me your initial reaction when you discovered that you would have teaching responsibilities as a component of your graduate assistantship?

By what means were you informed about your teaching responsibilities? When did this occur? What were your initial expectations? To what extent have your expectations been met, and how? Have your expectations been modified, and why?

What does/did the term teaching assistant mean to you initially? Has your understanding of this identifier been modified over time? Can you tell me what may have influenced these modifications?

Describe for me what college level teaching is like in your country? Please give me examples of similarities between teaching at home and teaching here? Differences?

What modifications have you made in your teaching here based on these similarities? Differences?

**Preparation**

Once you discovered you were going to be a teaching assistant (TA), what did you do to prepare for your teaching responsibilities?

Describe for me your current responsibilities as a teacher? Have these responsibilities changed over time?

What teaching activities or methods do you engage in on a regular basis?

If you can think back to when you first began as a TA, which of these activities or methods were most familiar to you? least familiar? The methods that were least familiar to you, what did you do to learn these methods?

Reflecting back on your first semester as a teaching assistant, what training did you receive prior to assuming these responsibilities? (Probe for training at institutional level or academic unit level?) What follow-up training has occurred since that initial training?
Tell me about your perceptions of this training? How has this training influenced the way you teach?

What preparations do you make for your teaching prior to a class meeting? Is there anything you do now that is different from when you first began teaching?

**Support**
Thinking back on your experiences as a student, select a teacher from whom you learned particularly well and describe for me how he or she went about teaching.

What influence does this individual now have on your teaching activities? What influence would you like this individual to have on your teaching activities?

Tell me about support or assistance received from your academic unit that has been helpful in your teaching?

What challenges have/do you face(ed) as a TA? Explain what it is that you do to overcome these challenges?

Describe for me the measures undertaken in your department to aid you in this process? Describe for me the measures undertaken at the institution to aid you in this process?

**Philosophy about education**
I would like to understand your philosophy of education. What do you believe to be the purpose of education?

Have you always conceptualized education in this manner? If not, how is your view different than before?

Explain what led to this change?

How does your philosophy of education influence your teaching?

**Future faculty positions**
The teaching assistantship is often referred to as an apprenticeship to the professoriate. What do you believe to be the purpose of the teaching assistantship?

If you were to decide to pursue a faculty position at some point in the future; how well do you believe the teaching assistantship has prepared you for this profession?
General Issues and Concerns
How would you go about measuring your effectiveness as a teacher?
How would you go about improving your teaching?

What satisfactions do you derive from being a teacher? What are the
dissatisfactions? What suggestions do you have for your academic unit so that it
can become a better place for teaching?

CONCLUDING QUESTION
Are there any questions that I neglected to ask that you would like to address at
this time?

SNOWBALL SAMPLING QUESTION
Is there someone else on campus that you think I should speak with about their
experience as a teaching assistant?
What brought this individual to mind?

CLOSING COMMENT
Thank you for taking this time to spend with me to talk about your experiences as
a teaching assistant. In just a few days, I will provide you with a copy of a
transcription of our conversation along with my initial impressions.
Thank you again.

V. Lynne Holland,
Doctoral Candidate
Department of Higher Education and Student Affairs, 330 Education Building
Bowling Green State University
Bowling Green, OH 43403
Office phone: 419.372.6876
Home phone: 419.352.5784
e-mail address: vlynneh@bgnet.bgsu.edu
Appendix H. Sample Observation Protocol

Observational Activity # ______
Participant ___________________
Date _______________________
Setting _____________________
Length of Activity ___________

Descriptive Notes Reflective Notes

Appendix I.: Subjective Lens Statement

As a researcher of human behavior, my preferred posture for conducting this inquiry, or any inquiry for that matter, is one of transparency. Let me explain what I mean by this. I am about to embark on a study where I am asking research participants, specifically those individuals whose native language, culture, and educational traditions differ from mine, to allow me entrance, albeit vicariously, into their world. Moreover, I am asking these individuals to share their thoughts, triumphs, frustrations, and experiences as outsiders within the academy. In other words, I am asking them to become transparent by allowing me to see their world as they do. It stands to reason then that an initial step in asking others to share their stories is a willingness on my part to do likewise. So, one purpose of this particular section is to give an accounting of who I am as an individual and as a researcher.

Another intent of this section is to account for the subjective lenses or perspectives that I bring to the inquiry. To some degree, all research is autobiographical; the topic of inquiry and the inquirer’s life converge. Developing awareness of these converging points reveals perspectives that may inhibit me from asking particular questions or accurately analyzing or interpreting what it is that I see or don’t see. Recognition of these lenses and taking measures to monitor these perspectives leads to greater trustworthiness in the study. So, as a starting point in accounting for my subjective lenses a good place to begin is declaring how this inquiry intersects with my life by responding to the question: Why have you chosen this particular topic when there appear to be infinite topics from which to choose?
Why this Topic of all Possible Topics

As I think about who I am as a researcher and as an individual, I am very much aware that the lenses I use to view the world are those shaped by the African American experience; the experience of “twoness” of which Du Bois speaks:

. . . the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world, -a world that yields him no true consciousness, but only lets him see through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of the world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness, -American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder (Du Bois, 1903, p).

During my tenure in higher education I have had the privilege and pleasure of advising, mentoring, participating in research projects, and working with undergraduate and graduate students who were not born or reared in the United States, who use English as a second or even third language and whose educational culture and traditions have been vastly different from my own. I have often wondered about the experiences of these sojourners, these individuals who leave hearth and home and travel to a strange land in pursuit of higher learning. What do they think about the way we do the things we do in higher education? How do they make the strange familiar in the U. S. academy? What experiences mold, shape, inform, and socialize them so that they are successful in their coursework and in pursuit of their degree? What frame of reference do they have for
metaphors, similes, and idioms used during class lectures or discussions? Do these outsiders within the academy experience the peculiar sensation; this twoness of which Du Bois speaks? Is their experience within the academy like mine? So, the first lens which shapes my interest in international students is a personal lens and is very much autobiographical.

Several years ago while working on my master’s degree, I was appointed as a graduate assistant within The Graduate College and was responsible for recruiting and retaining graduate students of color. Early in my first semester of work, I expanded the targeted population to include retention of international graduate students. During the first few days of the semester, as I was attempting to make the strange familiar by trying to understand the office culture, a small group of international graduate students came into the office. Student foot traffic through the department was a common occurrence so I paid little attention to the group’s visit; however, the intercultural interaction between the students and the office secretary quickly captured my interest. The students, speaking English albeit with an accent that most folks on this southern, regional campus were unaccustomed to hearing, posed their questions or requested clarification about a Graduate College policy (the exact nature of their visit escapes me now). I was dumbstruck by the secretary’s reaction. While responding to the students’ initial questions the secretary spoke loudly and slowly. As the conversation progressed the secretary’s responses grew even louder, slower, more deliberate, and were often punctuated with exaggerated word pronunciation and pantomiming.

After the students left the office, the secretary remarked that she failed to understand why the Graduate College granted admission to international students who
could not speak English. During the course of my appointment in the Graduate College I was to repeatedly witness similar exchanges between the secretary and most international students who wandered into the office and used English as one of multiple languages.

Although puzzled by the secretary’s response, particularly since I perceived little or no difficulty in the students’ abilities in speaking and understanding the English language, I discovered that the secretary’s reaction (although thankfully not her behaviors) towards the international students was replicated across campus. Whether I was interacting with undergraduate students in the residence halls or teaching in my First Year Experience courses or studying with graduate students in my master’s courses or serving on campus-wide committees with administrative staff members, the complaints concerning international students were strident and had a similar ring. Folks appeared perplexed and exasperated by these intercultural interactions asking: What is wrong with these people? Why can’t they speak English so that I can understand them? Why don’t they speak English like me, the way that I do?

I have often wondered what those international graduate students thought of this exchange. I know what the secretary thought and how she perceived the interaction. I know how many of my students perceive these intercultural interactions; their perspectives have been well documented. But a voice that is missing, a perspective that is missing is that of the international student. I am convinced that the experience of being an international student and particularly an international teaching assistant is a story worthy of telling. So an additional lens that I use to shape my interest in international students is a lens of justice to give voice to those perspectives missing in the storytelling.

An additional lens that shapes my interest in international students and is
intertwined with both the personal and the justice lens is a caring lens. I am mindful of two particularly salient quotes that reflect my caring lens and reflect the essence of my desire to conduct this inquiry. Belle Hooks (although hooks uses lower case letters as an identifying symbol, I am choosing to use upper case letters in keeping with acceptable conventions sanctioned by the APA style guide) in Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom admonished educators that:

    . . . in the patient act of listening to another tongue we may subvert that culture of capitalist frenzy and consumption that demands all desire must be satisfied immediately, or we may disrupt that cultural imperialism that suggests one is worthy of being heard only if one speaks in standard English (p. 174).

    In other words we can understand if we exercise patience and set aside preconceived notions of otherness.

Although Nagel (as cited in Glesne, 1998) is addressing issues associated with a finished research project his words are significant when applied to conducting research or generally interacting with international students:

Writing about another person’s life is an awesome task, so one must proceed with a gentleness born from knowing that the subject and the author share the frailties of human mortality (p. 172).

So, as I reflect on my caring lens which influences my interest in international teaching assistants, I am mindful that international students are worthy of being heard, worthy of me practicing gentleness and consideration in the telling of their stories, and worthy of me remembering their and my own humanness.