BUILDING RESILIENCE IN CHILDREN OF POVERTY AND TRAUMA

CLARE E. DILLARD
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Reviewed and approved* by the following:

Kira Baker-Doyle
Assistant Professor of Education
Thesis Supervisor

Sandy Feinstein
Associate Professor of English
Honors Advisor

* Signatures are on file in the Schreyer Honors College.
ABSTRACT

My study is participatory action research because I performed research while engaging in community service in a teaching internship in Rwanda, Africa (McIntyre, 2008). My thesis goal was not only to strive to build resilience and a sense of hope for a promising future in my Rwandan students, but also to learn valuable lessons that would be transferable to my future students in America. Through my research, I examined how increased literacy and positive reinforcement can affect children’s resiliency and engagement in school. This activity involved a week-long literacy project during which my students and I created a collaborative children’s alphabet book. This research enabled me to develop a greater understanding of and connection with the children I taught and the satisfaction of being able to share with them the exciting possibilities that increased literacy can generate for their futures.
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Introduction

On July 11, 2011, I stepped from a plane that had departed 13 hours earlier from Washington, DC and began a month-long adventure in the magical “Land of a Thousand Hills,” the central and eastern African country of Rwanda. This previously unimagined opportunity and journey began when I was accepted to do participatory action research as a student educator in the Association REFUGE Internship Program in Rwanda. My role there would be to promote education to school children by teaching language, coordinating sports and life-skills programs, and serving as a mentor. The experience of working one-on-one with students in Rwanda helped me develop a better understanding of how difficult it must be for a child to place a priority on education when the daily necessities of life are so uncertain. Prior to departing on my first journey to a developing African country, I was both excited and anxious about immersing myself in the lives of children who have endured unspeakable tragedy and daily hardship. To me, this experience would be about engendering a passion for education and a sense of self-confidence in the children with whom I worked. I hoped to share my own enthusiasm and love for education so that these gifts would grow in the hearts of others long after I had returned to the United States.

My month-long stay in an impoverished African community allowed me to experience a culture and lifestyle radically different from my own. While working with the victims of poverty and trauma in Rwanda, my goal not only was to strive to build resilience and a sense of hope for a promising future, but also to learn valuable lessons that would be transferable to my future students in America, some of whom must also cope with poverty and trauma in their daily lives.

My study was considered participatory action research because I was doing community service through my research work (McIntyre, 2008). Through my research, I examined how increased literacy and positive reinforcement can affect children’s resiliency and engagement in
school. My research involved a week-long literacy project during which my students and I created a collaborative children’s alphabet book. This research allowed me to develop greater understanding of and connection with the children I taught and the satisfaction of being able to share with them the exciting possibilities that increased literacy can generate for their futures.

Literature on child poverty, trauma, and resiliency has shown that children who have experienced poverty and possible trauma are often disconnected from school and lack formal literacy experiences and knowledge (Jensen, 2009). Learning this provided me with a deeper understanding not only of how the victims of poverty and trauma are affected on a personal and intellectual level, but also how increased literacy and positive reinforcement can provide direction and guidance for a more promising future.

**Review of Literature**

In order to develop an understanding of what resilience is and how to effectively promote resilience, I often referred to Edith Grotberg’s (1995) article, *A Guide to Promoting Resilience in Children: Strengthening the Human Spirit*. This article provides a framework to guide those who counsel children faced with adversity. Not only does this article explain the meaning of resilience, it also provides scenarios and in-depth explanations of how to guide those affected to overcome their obstacles and foster a belief that they are capable of success. Grotberg (1995) defines resilience as the following: “Resilience is a universal capacity which allows a person, group or community to prevent, minimize, or overcome the damaging effects of adversity” (p.3). Every child faces different situations of adversity such as divorce, poverty, war, illness, etc. It is important to promote resilience because “it is the human capacity to face, overcome, and be strengthened by or even transformed by the adversities of life” (Grotberg, 1995, p. 5).
While conducting my research in Rwanda, Africa, I used Grotberg’s framework to analyze my own practices of promoting resilience and to help the children develop an understanding of what they could accomplish. Grotberg (1995) explains that “…children draw from three sources of resilience features labeled: I HAVE, I AM, I CAN” (p. 5). Promoting this resilience factor fosters a sense of self-confidence in the children. The section titled “I HAVE” includes a checklist of the following: “People around me I trust and who love me, no matter what; People who set limits for me so I know when to stop before there is danger or trouble; People who show me how to do things right by the way they do things; People who want me to learn to do things on my own; and People who help me when I am sick, in danger, or in need” (Grotberg, 1995, p. 5).

The following checklist is provided for the section titled “I AM”: “A person people can like and love; Glad to do nice things for others and show my concern; Respectful of myself and others; Willing to be responsible for what I do; and Sure things will be all right” (Grotberg, 1995, p.5).

Finally, Grotberg (1995) provides a checklist for the section titled “I CAN,” which includes the following: “Talk to others about things that frighten me or bother me; Find ways to solve problems that I face; Control myself when I feel like doing something not right or dangerous; Figure out when it is a good time to talk to someone or to take action; and Find someone to help me when I need it” (p. 5). A child who is resilient does not necessarily need to demonstrate all, but some of the listed features. Grotberg proposes a valid statement, which I have reflected on multiple times during my research: “Children need to become resilient to overcome the many adversities they face and will face in life: they cannot do it alone. They need
adults who know how to promote resilience and are, indeed, becoming more resilient themselves” (Grotberg, 1995, p. 6).

Additional research supports the importance of secure relationships in order to help children to become resilient. Eric Jensen (2009) states, in his book Teaching With Poverty In Mind: What Being Poor Does to Kids’ Brains and What Schools Can Do About It, “Strong, secure relationships help stabilize children’s behavior and provide the core guidance needed to build lifelong skills. Children who grow up with such relationships learn healthy, appropriate emotional responses to everyday situations” (pgs. 17-18). Jensen contends that children who are raised in poor households often do not learn these responses, which can lead to poor school performance (Jensen, 2009). Furthermore, the author describes how teachers have the power to teach students emotional responses such as cooperation, patience, and forgiveness, which are crucial social skills (Jensen, 2009).

Linda Albert (2003) explains the importance of the “Three Cs” and the need to belong in her book, Cooperative Discipline. This framework provides valuable support and evidence that directly correlates with my research focus on building resiliency. Albert (2003) states, “There’s more to belonging than simply occupying a physical place in a classroom. The need to belong refers to the strong psychological and emotional need all students have to feel important, worthwhile, significant, and valued” (p. 13). In order for students to develop a sense of belonging in school, they need to fulfill the Three Cs: Capable, Connect, and Contribute. Albert (2003) explains,

They need to feel capable of completing tasks in a manner that meets the standards of the school. They need to believe they can connect successfully with
teachers and classmates. They need to know they contribute to the group in a significant way (p.13).

There are strategies that can be used to help students feel capable, which include noticing students’ improvements, contributions, and strengths no matter how difficult it is to find them (Albert, 2003). As well as making students feel capable, an effective teacher should seek to make students feel connected. Chapter 14 discusses how teachers should administer the “Five A’s” to help students feel connected through Acceptance, Attention, Appreciation, Affirmation, and Affection (Albert, 2003). In order to make students feel connected to their classroom community, teachers need to accept the students as they are, including their faults and flaws (Albert, 2003). Greeting students at the beginning of each class and taking notice of personal things about them such as a new haircut or clothes is one way teachers can give attention to students to make them feel connected (Albert, 2003).

Finally, educators should help students feel that they can contribute to the community. Encouraging students to contribute to the class and involving students in building the learning environment are two examples of helping students feel that they contribute (Albert, 2003). I agree with Albert (2003) who states, “Inviting students to contribute sends the message that we believe they have something of value to give to others” (p. 122). Giving students opportunities to state their opinion and assigning meaningful activities allow students to feel that they are contributing.

Once I was able to develop an understanding of the importance of promoting resilience and examples of how to do so, I researched different methods and strategies for reaching out to students of poverty. Martin Haberman (1991) provides examples of teaching behaviors in a section titled, “Good Teaching,” in his article, The Pedagogy of Poverty Versus Good Teaching.
Several examples that I found valuable included, “Whenever students are actively involved, it is likely that good teaching is going on”; and, “Whenever students are directly involved in a real-life experience, it is likely that good teaching is going on” (Haberman, 1991, p. 127).

The research conducted on promoting resilience and good teaching practices for working with students in poverty was the first step in understanding how I could effectively provide the best care and instruction for the students in Rwanda.

In order to fully understand the background and history of the students with whom I would be teaching, as well as the country where I would be teaching, I researched education in Rwanda and how it was affected by the 1994 genocide. According to Kirk’s (2011) *Educating children in conflict zones: research, policy, and practice for systemic change: a tribute to Jackie Kirk*, “During the genocide, approximately 800,000 people were killed, including at least 500,000 Tutsi, but a large number of ‘moderate’ Hutu as well (Des Forges, 1999)…While the genocide was led by Hutu hardliners, a significant proportion of the population participated in the killing” (p. 138).

In spite of Rwanda’s daunting past, the country has seen some significant improvements in the quality of life, especially in education. Kirk (2011) states:

> Despite this history of poverty and violence, Rwanda has been considered a model developing country and has made important advances in many areas, including education, both before and after the genocide….In the post-genocide period, Rwanda has often been praised for its developmental model. The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) specifically commends the education sector as ‘an example of what well-planned, coordinated and targeted investments
can achieve in terms of human and economic development’ (UNDP, 2007, p. 22)” (Kirk, 2011, p. 139).

Rwanda’s plan to increase the literacy rate will foster a sense of achievement and help build resiliency in Rwanda’s citizens. According to Charles Kwizera (2011), Rwandan Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Education, Sharon Haba, announced an initiative to encourage reading with a goal of improving the overall literacy rate from 75% to 85% for men and 80% for women by the end of this year.

Strategies to accomplishing this goal include making books readily available to children in schools and through mobile libraries. In addition, teachers and parents are encouraged to set an example by showing an interest in reading and helping children improve reading skills. A reading mentorship program will also engage senior learners with illiterate Rwandans. This program will focus on the rural communities where the illiteracy rate is higher than the norm (Kwizera, 2011). Kwizera (2011), for example, emphasizes that all Rwandans should participate. Edward Karimwabo, a semi-literate parent of three, says that though he is of little help, he encourages his primary school-going children to read whatever material they set their eyes on.

Rwanda’s educators strive to look for ways to improve the quality of education for students in their county. In November 2011, a resident of Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, Janet Brown, founder of the Cyakabiri School for Young Children in Rwanda, visited a Head Start school in Easton, Pennsylvania. She was joined by Louisa Batamuliza, a teacher from Rwanda, to garner ideas to improve the Cyakabiri School for Young Children in Rwanda. The Head Start school in Easton, along with other Lehigh Valley schools, served as a model for the Cyakabiri School for Young Children in Rwanda. These teachers hoped to bring their educational ideas back to schools in Rwanda (Laros, 2011). Janet Brown explains that the biggest challenge with
improving Rwandan education is the lack of resources. She describes how this issue affects the quality of education for children in Rwanda: “They have no workbooks….They learn by repeating what the teacher says, but they are not taught to use their imagination” (Laros, 2011). According to Brown, “The lack of resources at the Rwandan schools extends to a need for teacher education” (Laros, 2011).

Rwanda’s history of education has seen significant changes over the past few decades. According to BBC Worldwide (2011), children were taught by their parents and relatives in the past, an education, which included storytelling, dancing, and practical skills. BBC Worldwide states, “Missionaries introduced formal education in Rwanda in 1900. Their system was dominated by the ruling Tutsi. After independence, the country’s leaders recognized the need for education for all Rwandans. Primary education was made free and compulsory for six years” (2011). The 1994 genocide drastically interrupted education in Rwanda, damaging many schools and forcing teachers who were not killed to flee. Today, children start primary school at age six, and families must pay tuition fees for private school education (BBC Worldwide, 2011).

Research conducted by Dr. Randall Fegley, professor and advisor of the Association REFUGE Internship in Rwanda program at Penn State Berks, explains the effects that the 1994 genocide had on education and the changes made in the history curriculum. His research answered many questions I initially had about how events relating to the genocide are presented in Rwandan classrooms. Fegley (2011) states:

…a moratorium on teaching history was imposed to avoid inflaming the deeply held prejudices that were seen to be the atrocities’ root causes. Long discussions on how to present the past ensued. Following the introduction of the new curricula
in 2007, Rwanda’s public school students were allowed to study their history for the first time in 13 years. But controversies about what is taught remain (p. 2). After conducting research and with the help of grants, the MINEDUC (Ministry of Education) and National University of Rwanda established a collaborative project, “Education for Reconciliation in Rwanda: Creating a History Curriculum after Genocide.” This program was formed to initiate a process for restoring the teaching of history to Rwanda’s schools by bringing the voices of the communities to the table with historians, government bureaucrats, international curriculum experts and civil society. Its goals were to prepare curriculum and instructors’ materials that reflect what must be taught and learned about Rwandan history and to make recommendations to the MINEDUC to assist teachers and schools in the new curriculum (Fegley, 2011, p. 3).

With increased literacy and efforts made by educators to foster a sense of belonging and achievement in students, the country, which is affected by poverty and trauma, will continue to promote more resilient, educated citizens.

**Context**

In July 2011, I was presented with an opportunity to do participatory action research through the Pennsylvania State University Berks Campus’ participation in Association REFUGE Internship Program in Rwanda, Africa. Dr. Randall Fegley, Global Studies Program coordinator, had established contacts with the Association REFUGE pour les Enfants des Grands Lacs Africains (Children of the African Great Lakes), an organization which was formed in the aftermath of the 1994 Rwandan genocide. Fegley oversees this study abroad program in Rwanda
with up to twelve interns every other summer. The interns become accustomed to the land, culture, and society of Rwanda by traveling throughout the country for six days before they settle down in the community school in Kabuga, Rwanda, for three weeks of community service work (Penn State Berks Website, 2012).

The 2011 Rwanda Internship Program consisted of nine Penn State Berks students and two faculty advisors. Six of the interns were Global Studies majors; one was a Pre-Med major; and two were Elementary Education majors. Prior to departure, the interns were required to attend four lengthy preparatory sessions on Rwandan history, culture and practical matters, which included issues of safety, health, money, communications, etc. A mandatory group counseling session with a psychologist was required of all interns prior to departure in order to help prepare us for the societal impact of the 1994 Rwanda genocide and provide us with coaching on how to address this issue with cultural sensitivity (Penn State Berks Website, 2012). Our pre-departure courses and assigned readings instilled in us an understanding of the traumatic effects of the 1994 Rwanda genocide. We learned about the ethnic differences between the Hutu and Tutsi, what led to the cause of this war, and how Rwandan Society was shaken and changed forever. Having this background information was critical because it affected the degree to which I could ask certain questions during my interviews with the Rwandans.

During an interview conducted with Association REFUGE Icyugamo School’s founder, principal, and administrator, Blondine Uwimana Eya Nchama, I was able to gather background information about this school and education in Rwanda. Blondine, age 40, who holds a teaching degree from a university in Burundi and a Business Administration degree from the International University of Geneva, started the Association REFUGE Program in 1998, to serve as a vocational school. In 2005, the Association REFUGE center opened for primary school students.
Eya Nchama stated that her goal for starting the program was to “give access to children and young orphans to education.” She explained that when the center began as a vocational school, she remembered seeing young children walking the streets. She knew something had to be done, and she wanted to see those children off the streets and receiving an education. Now this center serves as both a vocational school for genocide orphans as well as a primary school for children two and a half to eight years of age. The students begin school in “M1” class and continue through “M2,” “M3,” “P1,” and, finally, “P2” before they move onto the next school. They attend school everyday from 8 AM-12 PM year round, with a break in October and January, a two week break in April, and a three week break in August.

Eya Nchama explained that a major drawback to education in Rwanda is the lack of teachers with certification. As a way of working to solve this issue, the government created an institute called Kigali Institute of Education to train teachers. Eya Nchama said that this institute is very expensive. Because of the lack of qualified teachers, she uses available government budgeted funds to underwrite the interviewing of prospective teachers from the community, who must then pass tests of basic English, French, and math proficiency.

The lack of government funding is another setback that affects the quality of education given to the students. Eya Nchama noted that Association REFUGE Icyugamo School, where my study took place, is a private, non-profit organization. Further, it is located in a poverty stricken area. She must buy the supplies for the school and, when there is no means, they get by with what they have.

Eya Nchama said that her most important goal was “to have the children off the street.” Parental involvement is an issue that affects the children’s education. There are a few factors that interfere with parental involvement. The parents, who may want to help, find it difficult because...
they work long hours trying to make enough money to buy food for their children. Also, most of the parents cannot help their children with homework or studying because of their level of education. Eya Nchama explained that a way of helping the students who cannot do homework at home is to provide after-school teachers, when funding is available. As a way of reaching out to parents, the school sends home a letter once a month to keep them informed about the school. The school also holds parent-teacher meetings once per term at the school. The parents receive their children’s work and progress reports at these meetings. Parents have the responsibility of paying for their children’s education and uniforms at this school.

Despite the daily challenges that some students face, education and a sense of belonging are benefits that these children receive from this school. Eya Nchama clarified that a way of reaching out to these students who experience adversity is to give equal access to education to everyone, rich or poor, as well as handicapped. For example, while another institution in Rwanda refused a handicapped child, she was accepted as a student at Association REFUGE Icyugamo School. Eya Nchama stated, “Before, this child could not walk or speak. Now she is improving.” The teachers are able to provide more one-on-one instruction with the students because this private school has a small enrollment of fifty students.

Eya Nchama, who has many roles at this center, including supervisor, principal, educator, social counselor, and activities coordinator, tries her best to see that every child is receiving the best quality education as well as emotional and social support. She explained that since she is the guidance counselor for the children, there have been times when she has helped to resolve students’ family issues. Moreover, though she is aware that these students suffer from poverty, the school cannot provide meals for the children because of the limited budget. Eya Nchama has
future plans of starting a small coffee shop with internet access. The idea behind this is to provide jobs for families that need support.

The children who are affected by poverty, and the vocational students who are genocide orphans, need to be encouraged, loved, and supported. Eya Nchama explained that although she was trying to start a reward system at the school, she often felt that she was the only one who praised the students when they succeeded. She explained that Rwandan teachers do not have the training to work with students who are affected by poverty and trauma, and, therefore, do not fully understand the importance of positive reinforcement.

Although the 1994 genocide is not spoken about nor taught in schools, Eya Nchama stated, “All Rwandans are affected by the genocide.” Each year in April, when the schools are closed, two weeks are dedicated to the genocide. Children hear about the genocide on the radio, and they are aware of how traumatic it was. The vocational students at the school have been directly affected by the genocide because they lived through this period. The school is doing everything within its means to provide support for these students to help them succeed.

Methodology

I spent three weeks teaching English in the M3 “top class” classroom, which were kindergarten-aged students. During those three weeks, my students were engaged in a week-long literacy project of creating a collaborative children’s alphabet book using words they learned in English. The activities involved in creating this book provided assessments of the students’ literacy knowledge as well as valuable qualitative data. I made daily observations of how this project and increased literacy served as tools for building resilience in my students and making them feel capable, connected, and contributing.
Through my participatory action research, I gathered qualitative data through videotaping activities, written reflections, general field observations, and interviews of Rwandan students, teachers, school workers, and Penn State intern teachers. As a requirement of this internship, I kept a daily journal with reflections on my observations and interactions with the students. I observed daily language speaking progress, increased confidence with learning a new language, how the students responded and adapted to the literacy, academic, sports, and life-skills activities, and how receptive they were to their American teachers. Many literacy activities, which I implemented, were recorded by my fellow interns.

I conducted a total of 19 interviews during my month-long stay in Rwanda. These interviews included eight Penn State interns, four Rwandan teachers, one school worker, the program administrator and founder, and four Rwandan students. The interviews conducted with the Rwandans were translated into both English and Kinyarwanda by the teacher translator. I received permission from all interviewees to include their names for research purposes. All interviews were conducted during July 2011.

Findings

On Friday July 22, 2011, the lives of nine interns from Penn State University were about to change forever. For several weeks, primary school students at Association REFUGE Icyugama School in Kabuga, Rwanda anxiously awaited the arrival of their new American teachers. The interns from Penn State had no idea what awaited them and how significantly their lives would soon be affected. Teaching English, coordinating sports and life-skills programs, and serving as a mentor to primary students in Rwanda were their assigned tasks. Only two of the seven interns had any type of professional teacher training. Six Global Studies majors and one
Pre-Med student hesitantly asked for guidance and leadership from the two elementary education majors.

The following sections illustrate the findings from the interviews conducted with the Penn State interns, Rwandan students, teachers, and school principal, as well as my personal reactions and reflections of how I worked to build resilience among my students in Rwanda. I was able to identify recurrent themes while analyzing the results of the interviews conducted and making personal observations.

i. Challenges of Promoting Resilience in Students

Lack of professional preparation for one of the most challenging tasks in their lives was an obstacle the interns had to overcome. The pre-departure course prepared them intellectually by teaching them about Rwanda’s daunting past. Several pre-departure classes were focused on the 1994 Rwanda genocide and the history of the Hutu and Tutsi. The interns gained a sense of understanding of how Rwandan society was decimated by this tragic event. The interviewees knew it was inevitable that they would be interacting with people who had faced unspeakable adversity.

The assigned reading, A Guide to Promoting Resilience in Children: Strengthening the Human Spirit (Groberg, 1995), was selected by the course instructor to prepare the interns to work with children of poverty and trauma. Of the eight interns interviewed, only two had read the article and had a strong understanding of what resilience means and how to promote it. Seven interns, who had never had professional teacher training, were faced with a great challenge--not only would they be educating students, they would be teaching poverty-stricken students who need unconditional love, support, and encouragement. Once the interviewees developed a better
understanding of the concept of resiliency, they were able to provide examples of how they had 
used positive reinforcement in their classrooms.

Interviewee Collin Haas, a junior Global Studies major, who taught the M1 class in 
Rwanda, explained that if he were to repeat this experience again, he would make several 
changes, including being better prepared, and gaining an understanding of the curriculum and 
how students in Rwanda are taught.

The interns also mentioned that the lack of materials and supplies was a surprising and 
challenging factor that affected their ability to reach out to the students. Paige Breneiser, a 
Sophomore Pre-Med major, who taught the cooking class (vocational students) in Rwanda, 
stated, “The thing that surprised me the most was the lack of appropriate materials. It was hard 
starting with nothing.” Similarly, Erin Wade, a senior Global Studies major, who taught the M2 
class in Rwanda, stated that the most surprising thing upon entering the classrooms was “the fact 
that the children did not even have pencils to write with.” Liz Martinez, a junior majoring in 
Global Studies and minoring in Spanish, who taught the cooking class (vocational students) in 
Rwanda, noted a better sense of the need for preparation would have been helpful in reaching out 
to these students. She explained that if she knew what materials her students needed prior to 
departing the United States, she could have brought more, and planned her lessons better.

ii. Overcoming the Language Barrier Through Positive Reinforcement

Other than lack of supplies and teacher preparation, the greatest challenge of all was the 
language barrier. A few interns sought to clarify the meaning of resilience and how to promote it 
given the language barrier. Although verbal communication was a difficult task, the interns 
found alternate ways of providing the support and encouragement the children needed through 
non-verbal reinforcement, such as high-fives, hugs, and even through the distribution of material
reinforcements such as stickers or pencils. The most common positive reinforcement used was a universal language—a simple smile. Interviewee Jessica Ashworth, a senior majoring in Elementary Education who taught the P1 class in Rwanda, shared how she promoted resilience in her students:

> With such an extreme language barrier I had to turn to the only language we shared, which is body language. I showed love and respect through my eyes and gestures. This is where I was able to implement positive reinforcement to all of my students. High fives and thumbs up were consistent in my classroom. My goal was to make each of my students feel capable and connected (Interview with Jessica Ashworth, July 2011).

Jessica felt that if she were to repeat this teaching experience, she would push for better preparation. Djamilla Cassidy, a senior Global Studies major who taught the P2 class in Rwanda, believes that positive reinforcement was key to promoting resilience in her students. She stated:

> I gave out some rewards and I praised them a lot for their behavior. We also played games that they were very receptive to. They were educational games with a purpose, just to make them feel special. When I communicated with them, I looked at them, so they knew I was focused on them. I gave them my full attention to validate who they were and what they were saying (Interview with Djamilla Cassidy, July 2011).

Haas, who said his biggest challenge was dealing with the language barrier and adapting to cultural norms, tried to overcome the language barrier through positive reinforcement and by “celebrating their accomplishments instead of punishing their shortcomings.” When asked how he made the children feel as though they could succeed, he stated, “I tried to emphasize the
importance of education in not only the students, but also in the teachers. I let the teachers know that they have future generations of the country in their hands.”

Owen Reitenauer, a senior majoring in Global Studies, who taught the M3 class in Rwanda, found that although the language barrier was his biggest challenge in teaching the students, he was able to reach his goal of connecting with the students by encouraging them with stickers, “high-fives,” and hugs. The interns knew that the students needed their support, and they worked to the best of their ability to provide encouragement, despite the language barrier. Graduating senior and global studies major, Jennifer Screvane, who taught M1 class in Rwanda, explained that although the language barrier was a setback, she found ways of achieving her goal because “teaching the children English was a way to help them increase their level of literacy.” Jennifer explained her strategy: “…non-verbal communication was very effective in building relationships with the children. Laughter is the key.”

All interviewees, no matter how much professional education background they had, had similar goals for teaching their students in Rwanda. Every intern saw his or her students’ success as the most important objective. Some strived to help their students overcome the “robotic” memorization of the English language by teaching them the meaning behind each word through pictures, visuals, and real objects.

iii. Understanding and Supporting Rwandan Resiliency

In order to evaluate the progress of my participatory action research, I conducted interviews with both the students and teachers at Icyugama School. From the interviews conducted with the Rwandan students, I gathered that they all had dreams of further education and successful futures, which included occupations such as teacher, pilot, singer, and chef. What impressed me the most was that these students travel a great distance to school each day and take
on a lot of responsibilities at home. For example, a seven-year-old student in P2 Class is one of eight children in his family. At home he helps wash clothes, do dishes, and cook. He walks over an hour to school each day by himself. For many American students, this amount of responsibility at that age would be unheard of. I learned that one thing this student enjoys the most about school is studying because he loves to learn. He excitedly told me that his favorite thing about learning with the American teachers was making arts and crafts and reading children books. This confession reinforced my strategy that incorporating hands-on activities and access to literature will lead to a more enjoyable learning experience for the students.

An interview conducted with a five-year-old student in the M3 class revealed similar enthusiasms. This student reported that she loved school and enjoyed learning English. Her favorite thing about learning at school with the American teachers was working with those teachers. She stated that the teachers were her favorite part about school and she loved learning English from them.

Two particular interviews conducted were with two students in the cooking class, which consisted of genocide orphans. These students had colorful and exciting plans for the future. Gilbert Niyirema, age 21, confided that he wanted to continue his education at a university to become a chef. Niyirema, who loves learning history and geography, said that his favorite thing about working with the American teachers was being able to teach them traditional Rwandan dances. Chantal Muganwa, age 24, explained that she hoped to continue her education at a university to study economics. Muganwa, who lost both of her parents during the 1994 genocide, lives with her husband and one-year old daughter and walks an hour to school each day. She said that her favorite thing about working with the American teachers was learning English from them and playing soccer with them.
Reflecting on my observations and interviews, I concluded that incorporation of hands-on, engaging activities built rapport and fostered a love for education. This inspired students to follow their dreams and believe they are capable of success. The students displayed engagement in all activities and a sense of confidence within the work they presented.

I anticipated that the information I could gather from the Rwandan teachers would be just as important as the student interviews. As a future educator, I know that there can be obstacles to providing students the best quality education, because of lack of funding, lack of parental involvement, and even lack of professional training. My goal for the interviews conducted with the teachers was to gain a better understanding of their preparation as educators as they deal with students who suffer from poverty and trauma.

Teacher Justine Mbabazi, age 24, said that the biggest challenge for a private school teacher is the lack of support and funding from the government. Mbabazi, who holds a high school degree, has had no professional training as a teacher. She noted that there is not a high degree of parental involvement in the children’s education and there are no counselors trained specifically to work with students who have suffered poverty and trauma. A very small teacher salary makes it difficult for teachers to access extra resources for the students. Mbabazi explained that in 2008, the government mandated that instruction in English language be included in all student curricula. She also explained that the teachers want to improve their own oral and written English skills and that she, and all of the teachers, really appreciate the interns’ guidance and instruction.

Teacher Emile Nshimiyimana, age 22, who has also had no professional teacher training, plans on continuing his education at RuKara College of Education in Rwanda to pursue a degree in secondary education. Nshimiyimana stated that his biggest challenge as a teacher working
with such young children is his limited salary and lack of professional training. Nshimiyimana teaches in the “M1” classroom, which consists of students starting at two and half years of age. He finds it difficult to work with these children lacking parental involvement. Nshimiyimana feels better communication between teachers and the government regarding the teachers’ needs could lead to major improvement in schools in Rwanda.

When discussing the importance of positive reinforcement and encouragement in the classroom, Nshimiyimana stated that as a way of encouraging his students, he gives them hugs, candy, and will use verbal praise. His goal as a teacher is to “give quality education for students” (Interview with Emile Nshimiyimana, July, 2011).

Hitimana “Ronnie” Leonard, age 28, assisted the Penn State interns as a translator throughout their month long stay in Rwanda. He provided a great deal of assistance to the nine interns who relied on his willingness to help communicate as they provided English instruction to the students. Leonard, who studied nursing in secondary school, wants to continue pursuing a nursing degree at a university. He teaches English and tutors part-time at home. Leonard explained that this was his second time working with the Penn State interns at Association Refuge Icyugama School. He said that the Rwandan students and teachers have benefitted a great deal from the mentorship and instruction provided by the Penn State interns. Leonard said that he had seen improvements already with the Rwandan teachers’ instruction and the students’ engagement. Leonard said that he enjoys working with the interns and most of all “enjoys our friendship."

I also conducted an interview with an English teacher and two students at the College of Hope High School in Ndera, Rwanda, on July 29, 2011. Teacher Kaaya Siraje, age 42, and students Peter Muhire, age 25, and Twahirwa Modeste, age 21, provided me additional evidence
that education in Rwanda has been improving since the 1994 genocide. Siraje explained that the majority of the students who attend this school had lost their parents during the genocide and now suffer from poverty. As a way of encouraging his students and providing positive reinforcement, he shakes hands, gives “high fives,” claps for them, and gives verbal praise. As an English teacher, he encourages them to speak in English at all times. Muhire, who is studying accounting and plays on the soccer team, has dreams of becoming a teacher in another country, hopefully the United States. Similarly, Modeste, who is studying mathematics and also plays on the soccer team, has dreams of becoming a math teacher. Both students enjoy learning English in school and feel that they will one day be successful because of the education they are receiving and the support from their teachers.

One very touching interview conducted allowed me to gain a better understanding of how much of an effect the 1994 genocide had on education in Rwanda. Irakoze “Zoulou” Aubert, age 21, is the nephew of the school director, Blondine. Aubert, who was four years old during the genocide, explained some of the effects on education shortly after the genocide. He explained that people stopped going to school because they were affected psychologically. Also, the economy was affected, which led to families not being able to afford their child’s education. He continued to explain that although national education was affected for many years during his childhood, he has seen significant improvements. Aubert stated, “I’m always amazed by how people in Rwanda are trying to forget the genocide” (Interview with Irakoze “Zoulou” Aubert, July, 2011). He optimistically concluded that Rwanda has good leaders, and the country has a very promising future.

From the interviews conducted with the Rwandan students and teachers, I was able to conclude that although students and teachers deal with adversity, they have high hopes of better
futures. Positive reinforcement and encouragement to meet such goals is key to students’ success and achievement (Jensen, 2009). Thus, the teachers’ role in fostering resiliency through positive reinforcement can have a long lasting impact on not only students’ school experiences but also their future careers.

iv. Working Towards Building Resiliency in Rwandan Youth: My Story

My experience is not only a story about how I worked to develop resiliency in Rwandan youth, but also how it shaped me as a teacher and a person. In this section, I describe my journey, which will illustrate what I learned about myself, my students, and teaching for resiliency.

My journey began even before I left America. While preparing for my internship in Rwanda, I had no idea what to expect. Hundreds of questions and thoughts flooded my mind: “What will the weather and food be like? How will our group adjust to one another? What will I do if I’m homesick? What will the Rwandans think of us? What will the living conditions be like? How will I react to the genocide sites? What will the classrooms look like and how much English will the students and teachers understand? Will I be able to gather enough information for my research?” My total list of questions was far greater. I had no idea that I would be departing for a once-in-a-lifetime experience that would change my life forever.

The internship brought so much joy into my life. I truly believe that my life has been enriched in so many ways and that I have grown both personally and professionally. During that short month in Rwanda, I learned a great deal about myself as a person. One aspect that I’m most proud of, other than the impact I was able to make on the students and teachers, is how well I was able to adapt to the culture. I believe that my ability to acclimatize to the Rwandan culture led to a much more rewarding experience. The experience of living in a village community not
only gave me a better understanding of the living conditions of the students with whom I would work, but also helped me to gain a better appreciation for everything I have in life that I often take for granted.

Words cannot describe how much of an impact the Rwandan people have had on my life. They are by far the most humble, kind, respectful, and genuine people I have ever met in my life. From our first interactions with the teachers and students, they made us feel right at home and as though we were family. I was constantly in awe and amazed by how generous this community was to my fellow interns and me. It also amazed me how people of this country had such peaceful spirits, despite what their country faced just seventeen years ago. The kind hearts, smiling faces, and mutual respect reflect a very admirable trait—forgiveness. There is a certain peacefulness about the people in Rwanda that I truly admire. It is almost as if the country experienced a miracle. The fact that victims and murderers are able to sit down together and forgive each other, despite the horrific tragedies that tore them apart, inspired me. Through my interactions with the Rwandan people, I’ve realized how truly different our countries are. It is admirable that those who have absolutely nothing seem the most genuinely happy. The Rwandan children, who are rarely bathed and have very few personal possessions, have one thing in common—an unforgettable smile and joyfulness, which made me, as their teacher, fall in love with them each day.

For many months I had been anxiously anticipating my first international teaching experience. I had no idea what to expect: what would working with the Rwandan students and teachers be like? As a future educator, I wanted to be able to make the most out of this experience, as I knew that it would change my life both personally and professionally. It was difficult to prepare for because I had no pre-assessments of the children’s knowledge and no idea
what their English speaking and reading ability would be. Also, I did not know what materials I would have access to, other than the supplies the Penn State interns and I would bring.

Through my participatory action research, my goal was to build resilience in my students and model for the teachers how positive reinforcement and increased literacy in the classrooms could lead to continued education and more promising futures. Upon arriving in my classroom, the first thing I noticed was the group of kindergarten-aged students excitedly welcoming me with a monotone, rehearsed greeting—“Good morning teacher. How are you?” I could not help but smile while looking at a classroom filled with smiling students wearing ragged, dirty uniforms and shoes. These children looked genuinely happy and full of love. I was so excited and proud to introduce myself to them for the first time as “Teacher Clare.” The second thing I took notice of was how extremely bare the classroom was—no children’s artwork, no educational materials or supplies, just plain, brick walls. Teacher Justine, who spoke very little English, had no desk and very few supplies for her students; what she had included a torn up box of pencils, each about an inch long, and a few pieces of scrap paper. Although I was anticipating a poverty-stricken environment, I had no idea it would be this extreme.

During my first day in the classroom, I had, indeed, learned a great deal about Rwandan education. Initially, I was impressed by how much English vocabulary the students were able to recite as their Rwandan teacher pointed to the colors, and alphabet letters, and objects labeled on the board. Upon reflecting, I realized that the students learned through memorization and by repeating everything the teachers said. There was no creativity or imagination involved. This type of learning inhibits critical thinking and problem solving skills. Aside from the fact that the students were not surrounded by a print-rich environment, they were also not surrounded by positive encouragers. There were a few instances where I was taken aback by how the Rwandan
teachers responded to undesirable student behavior. For example, I could not help but gasp when I saw a teacher strike a student for talking during her instruction. I had to remind myself that this was a cultural difference and that I had the power to model the improvements I wanted to see. In order to build resilience in the students, I knew I had to start by believing that every child was capable of success.

I began my second day by distributing hand-shaped name-tags to the students that were to be taped to the table where they sat. Having these name-tags helped me to remember their names, especially the students with more challenging names, such as N’anji and J’Damore. Addressing students by name was one way of demonstrating that I cared about them.

The students, who learned primarily through memorization, would now be encouraged to learn the meaning behind the words they were speaking. One strategy I used to break the habit of memorization was reorganizing the charts on the board. The students were used to skimming down the color chart and saying, “red, orange, yellow, green, blue, purple.” I arranged the colors in a different order and continued to rearrange the colors until the students knew the colors no matter what order they were arranged in. I made sure to praise the students each time they demonstrated their knowledge or made an effort to participate. I used both verbal and non-verbal praise to encourage the students. I hoped that modeling this reinforcement for the teacher would encourage a change in her classroom management strategies. As a way of reaching out to my students and making them feel as though they could succeed, I provided one-on-one assistance and learned each student’s strengths and weaknesses (See Figure 1).
Figure 1: As a way of building resilience, I provided one-on-one instruction with each student and learned about their strengths and weaknesses.

Another way of building resilience was by creating a classroom community, which would improve the students’ social skills. I was able to effectively create a sense of community by incorporating collaborative group work in literacy activities. One activity involved creating a classroom banner with the words, “M3 Top Class: Hands of the Future,” in both English and Kinyarwanda. Each student stamped his or her hand on the banner using a different color, which eventually formed the shape of a rainbow (See Figures 2 and 3).
Figure 2: M3 Class students created a banner for their classroom, an activity that helped build a classroom community of learners.

Figure 3: Teachers promote a community of learners by involving students in a collaborative art project.

The classroom banner added to the sense of a positive learning atmosphere. The classroom, which was originally bare, began to develop character, beginning with this banner. I continuously displayed children’s artwork and class work around the classroom to develop a sense of pride in the students (See Figure 4).
Figure 4: Students were encouraged to use their creativity and imagination during literacy activities. Students’ work was always displayed around the classroom.

Involving my students in a week-long project of creating a collaborative children’s alphabet book was the most effective way of building a classroom community of learners as well as serving as positive reinforcement. Each day I would teach students new letters of the English alphabet and corresponding words to help them remember the sound of each letter. After learning the sounds the letters make, I taught different words that start with each letter using pictures and visuals. The pictures and visuals were very helpful to the students because of the language barrier (See figure 5).
Figure 5: Students learned the English alphabet and words through visuals and pictures displayed in a collaborative children’s alphabet book.

I would use a children’s alphabet book as a means of pre-assessment, formative assessment, and summative assessment. Pre-assessment allowed me to understand what the students already knew about the subject matter. Formative assessments provided me with information needed to adjust teaching while the students were learning. Summative assessments gave me an understanding of what the students were able to retain and comprehend after I had taught the material. Each day I reviewed the words and letters they learned the previous day, which would allow me to pre-assess their knowledge and understanding. I would use the activities involved in creating the children’s book as a means of assessing their progress of the English alphabet and vocabulary (See Figure 6).
Finally, the students presented their finished product of the alphabet book to their parents and the community during a farewell ceremony. I was able to assess the students’ overall comprehension of the words they were taught as well as the sounds each letters make as they presented their book to their audience.

The students benefited from this project in many ways. It served as an engaging activity that not only promoted increased literacy and a sense of community, but also as a means for positive reinforcement and a sense of ownership in the students—their hard work was providing a tool used for learning. Everyday the students looked forward to coloring the pictures that represented the different English words and pasting the cutout pictures and stickers into their book (See Figures 7 and 8).
Figure 7: Students practice written English by writing English vocabulary in an English alphabet book.

Figure 8: Students enjoy engaging with their peers in the activities involved in creating their class alphabet book.

Overall, the children’s alphabet book provided positive learning experiences for the students, which, in turn, developed their resiliency as learners. It also played a vital role in my own learning. As a teacher, I was forced to make adjustments and changes on my feet. I incorporated many lessons and activities that I felt would benefit the students and help them to be more engaged thinkers. I provided the students with a classroom bulletin board, which
incorporated everything they had learned during my course of teaching. I included many visuals as well as words written in both English and Kinyarwanda. This bulletin board was displayed in the classroom (See Figure 9).

Figure 9: Classroom bulletin board created for M3 Class. The bulletin board includes vocabulary in both English and Kinyarwanda.

I learned to adapt to the diversity within the community of learners while keeping the learning objective in mind. I wanted to be able to take a new approach and present the material to the students in a way that would complement every learner, no matter their learning styles, abilities, and interests. I incorporated activities that involved the students in critical thinking. For example, instead of having the students learn the shapes by pointing to figures on the board, I had the students recognize the English word that matched each cutout shape through a matching game (See Figure 10).
Figure 10: A student participates in a matching game that incorporates critical thinking.

The most rewarding aspect of my teaching experience in Rwanda was that I was able to see an improvement in confidence with the English language in the students as well as the teachers with whom I worked. I was able to generate an enthusiasm for learning and engage the students in my hands-on, student-centered lessons. Most importantly, I was able to form an incredible bond with these students, and I felt so much joy in sharing my culture and experiences with them while learning about theirs at the same time. All of these experiences served to provide students with a strong sense that others cared for them, that they had the ability to achieve, that they could navigate challenges, and that they were part of a loving environment. These factors reflect the elements of the resiliency framework (Grotberg, 1995), and, thus, suggest that similar hands-on, culturally responsive literacy projects can support resiliency in youth who have experienced trauma and poverty.

Conclusion

Prior to departing for my first international teaching experience in Kabuga, Rwanda, my two-fold aim was to provide literacy instruction that would help students become engaged in
school and develop resiliency in the face of poverty and trauma; and to develop techniques that other teachers could use to support children in similar circumstances. I hoped to develop a sense of how to reach out to these children and introduce them to possibilities, through literacy, of what they are capable of achieving in the future.

I learned that, despite the backdrop of poverty and trauma, Rwandan students and their teachers possessed high hopes for their future. I learned that a lack of classroom resources, while a decided handicap, was not an insurmountable obstacle to reaching, engaging and inspiring students to pursue their dreams. What was important was a sincere desire on the part of teachers to connect with, affirm, and encourage students’ innate desire to learn and improve. I learned that to reach a child, one must first demonstrate sincere interest in that child and make that child feel valued. This was most dramatically evidenced by how smiles, hugs, and positive reinforcements were able to compensate for communication challenges presented by language barriers.

Through my internship in Rwanda, I have concluded that future study abroad experiences to Rwanda and similar locations could be improved for both interns and students if all participating interns, regardless of major, were adequately prepared with both basic teaching skills and a factual awareness of the culture and society they will visit. For example, we were sensitized to the impact of the 1994 Rwandan genocide, but were amazed to learn, upon arriving, that these were people who shared a positive outlook for their future and who had moved beyond the tribal hatred that led to this atrocity.

Finally, I find that this experience has armed me with both the confidence and specific skills to reach-out to and engage my future American students who suffer from poverty, possible neglect and, trauma. In summary, I feel that our short month teaching in Rwanda has resulted in an enlightened vision of effective educational practices for the Rwandan teachers we mentored,
an increased conviction of our Rwandan students to learn and advance themselves, and a new series of skills for us interns to apply to our future life endeavors.

A number of my findings identified in the previous section presented significant future implications for both this and other similar international teaching programs as well as for teaching students in America who deal with issues of poverty, trauma, and hardship in their past and present daily lives. These issues can and should be approached from the perspective of improved preparatory instruction and the orientation of future interns together with post-experience debriefing of interns who plan to pursue a career in education.

With regards to pre-experience orientation, special emphasis needs to be placed on adequately preparing non-education major interns with the fundamental skills needed to teach children at the grade and experiential level with whom they will interact. Additional pre-departure time is needed to prepare the interns for working with students and making them familiar with basic teaching methods. Perhaps a mentorship program teaming an education and a non-education major would be helpful in providing coaching of teaching strategies and protocols.

The outcome of my experience with employing hands-on, student-centered literacy activities has reinforced my belief that these skills are not only effective in working with impoverished children of other societies, but also effective techniques to be utilized within American classrooms.
References


Appendix A: Interview Questions Posed to Penn State Interns

1. What was your biggest challenge working with the students?
2. Did you read the “Resilience in Children” article prior to teaching in Rwanda?
3. What were your goals as an English teacher in your classroom?
4. Upon arrival in your classroom, what surprised you the most?
5. What ways did you work to promote resilience in the children?
6. Did you use positive reinforcement? If so, what were some examples?
7. How did you make the children feel as though they could succeed?
8. Did you meet your goals? If so, how?
9. What was the most rewarding aspect of teaching English to students in Rwanda?
10. If you had the opportunity to have this experience again, what changes would you make to your work/teaching ethic?
Appendix B: Interview Questions Posed to Rwandan Students

1. What are your hopes and dreams for the future?
2. What is your favorite school subject?
3. What do you like most about school?
4. What responsibilities do you have at home? (How do you help at home?)
5. What are your hobbies?
6. How do you travel to school? How far do you travel?
7. How many brothers or sisters do you have?
Appendix C: Interview Questions Posed to Rwandan Teachers

1. What professional training do you have for teaching?
2. How many years have you been teaching?
3. How would you describe your everyday schedule at school?
4. What are the students’ favorite subjects or activities?
5. How do you communicate with students’ parents/relatives/guardians?
6. How would you describe the parental involvement at your school?
7. What forms of assessments do you use?
8. What is the average class size?
9. Are there school counselors that work with students who have suffered possible poverty or trauma?
10. How would you describe the support educators receive from the government?
11. Can you describe the curricula?
12. What message would you have for a possible contributor/donator in the United States or another foreign country?
13. Where do you get books and supplies? Any government funding?
Appendix D: Interview Questions Posed to Association REFUGE Icyugamo School Principal/ Supervisor

1. Why did you start this school and center?
2. What is your main goal for this program?
3. How do you select your teachers?
4. Do you witness a lot of poverty among the students here?
5. How do you afford books and supplies? Do you receive any government funding?
6. How would you describe the parental involvement at this school?
7. How does this school community promote resilience among the students?
8. How do you reach out to children of poverty?
9. Are the students praised when they succeed?
10. Do the teachers have any training to work with students who have suffered from poverty or trauma?
Academic Vita

Clare E. Dillard

1830 Second Street, Bethlehem, PA 18020 · (610) 248-9027 · ced@psu.edu

Education

The Pennsylvania State University, Berks Campus

B.S. in Elementary and Kindergarten Education

Reading, PA

Honors in Elementary and Kindergarten Education

August 2008-May 2012

- Instructional I Certificate

Honors, Recognitions, Leadership, and Awards

- Dean’s List
  Fall 2008- Fall 2011
- Schreyer Honors College
  Fall 2010-Present
- Lion Ambassador
  Fall 2010-Present
- President and Captain, Cheerleading Club
  Fall 2009-Present
- Finalist, 2011 Mr. & Ms. Penn State Berks
  Spring 2011
- Homecoming Court Finalist
  Fall 2011
- Penn State Walker Award Finalist
  Spring 2012
- Campus Life Award
  2010-2011
- Campus Community Award
  2010-2011
- Boscov Academic Excellence Award
  Spring 2011
- Berks Campus Honors Program Award
  Spring 2011
- Commonwealth Award for International Study
  Spring 2011
- Hoffert Memorial Scholarship
  Fall 2010-Spring 2012
- Pi Lambda Theta Honor Society
  Fall 2010-Present
- Phi Kappa Phi Honor Society
  Spring 2012

Teaching Experience

Tyson Schoener Elementary School

Reading, PA

Student Teaching, Fourth Grade

Spring 2012

- Designed differentiated standards-based lesson plans and assessments in all subject areas
- Developed and implemented an interdisciplinary thematic unit on communication
- Created and administered an after-school newsletter club program
- Coordinated a pen pal program with students in Taiwan
- Established a strong rapport with a diverse student population
Field Experience, Fourth Grade  
- Created and implemented a discipline and behavior plan  
- Developed and delivered subject-based lesson plans  
- Provided one-one-one instruction for struggling learners

Lincoln Park Elementary School  
West Lawn, PA

Introductory Field Experience  
Fall 2010-Spring 2011
- Observed effective teaching and classroom management skills in both a first and fourth grade classroom  
- Administered reading and writing assessments  
- Developed and delivered subject-based lesson plans

Glenside Elementary School  
Reading, PA

Introductory Field Experience  
- Observed effective teaching and classroom management skills in a third grade classroom.  
- Assisted cooperating teacher with lessons and activities  
- Mentored and encouraged all learners

Related Experiences  
The Penn State Educational Partnership Program (PEPP)  
Reading, PA

PEPP Learning Assistant (PLA)  
Fall 2008 – Fall 2010
- Encouraged underrepresented youth to fulfill their academic potential  
- Delivered academic lesson plans  
- Provided a student perspective on learning and school success

Co-Facilitator, PEPP Summer Program  
Summer 2011
- Mentored Reading High School students and encouraged the pursuit of higher education  
- Provided program coordination  
- Assisted with research study

Cambridge Day School  
Bethlehem, PA

Teacher Assistant  
Summer 2011
- Provided care and instruction for pre-school aged children

International Teaching Experience in Yilan and Loudong, Taiwan  

International Teaching Experience

Study Abroad Internship, Rwanda, Africa  
Summer 2011
- Taught English to primary school students  
- Mentored native teachers
- Conducted research for undergraduate honors thesis which focuses on building resilience in children of poverty and trauma
- Provided life-skill coaching for genocide orphans

**Study Abroad Honors Course, English 297H: Venice’s Monsters and Monstrosity-- Venice, Italy**  
- Conducted research and kept daily journals on findings

### Professional Development

*Conferences*
- PCSS

*Presentations*
- Penn State University-Wide Acceptance Program—Student panel: *Study Abroad*
- PCSS—*Toothpick City II*

*Publications*

### Professional Affiliations

- PSEA
- AAE
- Pi Lambda Theta
- Phi Kappa Phi

### Activities

- Lion Ambassadors, THON, Student Government Association, Cheerleading club,
- Campus Activities Board, Education Club, Honors Club, PEPP