

# 'TEACHING TO THE HALO-EFFECT': SOCIAL JUSTICE ISSUES AMONG TRAINEE-TEACHERS AT ONE TEACHER TRAINING INSTITUTION IN JAMAICA

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## **Abstract**

*Social Justice themes have dominated education discourses over the decade of the 2000s with ideas ranging from equality in terms of gender, access to resources, teacher quality and the quality of students. These debates are not easily resolved and whereas concerns from policy makers and teacher-educators were often spotlighted, the opinions of teacher-trainees themselves were more or less absent from the discourse. This research sought to find out the views of teacher-trainees about their training experiences and how their interpretations of these experiences lead them to feel and act. This exploratory study therefore was conducted by collecting data from 41 third year teacher-trainees enrolled in a four year teacher training programme in Jamaica. Data was collected through two focus group interviews which were transcribed, sorted, coded and themes identified. The study was framed in the context of Rotter's Locus of Control (1966) and Bourdieu's (1977) Institutional Habitus. The main findings reveal that local students feel international students are treated more favourably; adequate learning resources are not always available (for labs especially) and some students are believed to be disadvantaged by lecturers because of how they speak and how they carry themselves (physical appearance). The researchers conclude that these are social justice issues that must be resolved to ensure a system that is built on the values of enabling rather than constraining.*

**Key words:** *favouritism, exclusion, trainee-teachers, social justice, teaching quality.*

## **Introduction**

Social Justice means different things to different people in different contexts and under different conditions. As a result, the researchers do not proffer a definitive meaning for this concept. At the most basic level, social justice refers to notions of a just society, where 'justice' is concerned with more than the administration of laws. It is based on the idea of a society which gives individuals and groups fair treatment and a 'just' share of the benefits of society. In 1971 Rawls proposed that:

Each person possesses an inviolability founded on justice that even the welfare of society as a whole cannot override. For this reason justice denies that the loss of freedom for some is made right by a greater good shared by others (1971:3).

More specifically, Griffiths (1996:1) proposed that social justice is:

The general movement to a fairer, less oppressive society. This is a movement towards opening up from the few to the many the rewards and prizes and enjoyments of living in society.

Although most proponents of social justice have developed different interpretations of what constitutes '*fair treatment*' one acknowledges that, at the heart of any discourse on social justice is an understanding of power, inequality and injustice. Therefore, how these dimensions are coordinated, may help or hinder individuals or group, or system, in realising their 'full potential'. This research on teacher-trainees perceptions of their treatment in their programme of study, we use the term social justice to mean equal treatment without regard for the place of origin, race/ethnicity or gender of any individual. The researchers have used 'fair treatment' to mean equal access to opportunities and the quality and type of care received. When applied to teacher preparation the term social justice is taken to mean the provision of equal access to opportunities to construct teacher beliefs and identities regardless of context, conditions and cultures (Cochran-Smith, 2008). This then suggests that discussions about social justice in teacher preparation must be seen in light of achieving teacher quality. Teacher quality is necessary for an education system to flourish and quality provision by teacher-educators is a vital component of achieving quality in education.

In Jamaica, over the last decade, there have been several attempts at reforming education. At the heart of these reforms are the themes of increasing access, equity and quality in education. Consequently there have been policy implications for how teachers are prepared. Recent policy thrusts have therefore led to the upgrading of teachers who possess a Diploma in Teacher Education to the Bachelor of Education degree for new entrants (GoJ, 2011). Not only is it believed that this qualification will ultimately yield better outcomes for pupils, it is believed that teacher trainees will gain a greater range of competences, thereby making them better prepared to undertake social justice issues in the classroom. The purpose of an effective teacher-training system is to improve the quality of teaching, to raise the standards of teacher education to promote teaching as a profession, and to improve the standards of pupils' achievement and the quality of their learning (TTA, 1996).

An apparent area of apprehension regarding these stated purposes is not the actual content but what is implied. The implications surrounding the translation of such objectives into practice presents issues and concerns in relation to social justice both for trainees and teacher-educators alike. For example, in Jamaica, some teacher-training institutions are not properly resourced and therefore are not properly equipped; some face a space challenge due to the numbers of trainees applying, whereas the quality of trainees received by some institutions is a matter of great variability (Jamaica Observer, 2012). Interestingly, these circumstances are being enacted at a time when Higher Education, broadly, and initial teacher-training provisions, specifically, are in expansion mode on the island (Middlehurst & Woodfield, 2004; Vision 2030 Jamaica- National Development Plan).

The researchers do not regard the thrust of the government to have those entering the teaching profession to have an upgraded minimum qualification to be problematic; however, the researchers believe that where expansion of the teacher-training provision meets lack of resources and 'weaker' trainees thereby requiring more input from teacher-educators, likely side effects (or end results) are a range of social justice issues and challenges to their satisfactory preparation. These social justice issues enacted in everyday classrooms and other interpersonal relationships may see teacher educators teaching to the HALO effect. In the words of one trainee, "Lecturers need to stop teaching to the HALO effect<sup>1</sup>. We don't all look or dress the same... we are not all the same.

Such a reflection signals a degree of polarisation on the part of teacher-trainers that can become routinised in the daily patterns of interactions and behaviours exhibited towards teacher-trainees. Yet, such reflections render the debates around teacher quality somewhat flawed, suggesting urgent need for deep interventions at the preparation stage such that trainees can begin to model their future practice from current training experiences built on a solid foundation of knowledge, respect and emotional security. Simultaneously, these reflections also force a se-

ries of difficult questions. How widespread are these views among teacher-trainees in Jamaica? How are teacher-educators supported and held to account for their practice? Can a minimum standard (benchmark), be applied as regard the selection and deployment of facilities, personnel and support services? And, what opportunity for redress is available to teacher-trainees when these are not thought to be in place? These issues are compounded by their implicit and explicit relationships to quality and social justice. Taking action to promote equality and fairness, especially at the level of practice, is not just a matter of moral justice; it is good, sound common sense, and it makes good business sense too. This research sought to explore the motivation, experiences and perceptions of a group of teacher-trainees in light of social justice concerns experienced at a teacher-training institution in Jamaica.

### Teacher Education in Jamaica

Teacher education in Jamaica is offered through three or four year undergraduate programmes in teachers' colleges or universities. Course offerings may be pursued through seven government supported teacher education colleges and two universities as well as private institutions accredited by the Ministry of Education. This preparation entails student teachers being exposed to foundational education, content and pedagogical knowledge and supervised field practice (Kosnik & Beck, 2009). According to the Joint Board of Teacher Education (2012) teacher training in Jamaica is geared towards producing teachers who will demonstrate knowledge and understanding of their teaching subjects; appropriate pedagogical expertise and an understanding of their role as teachers.

#### *Theoretical Framework*

The issues of social justice advanced by teacher trainees in this study may be theorized through Rotter's (1966) theory of locus of control and Bourdieu's theory of institutional habitus (1977).

#### *Locus of Control*

Rotter's theory of locus of control (1966) suggests that individuals attribute the outcome of their experiences and events to external or internal factors. How teacher-trainees at one teacher-training institution in Jamaica view their academic outcomes and how they attribute their successes and failures, for example, is a feature of their self concept and motivation (Silverman and Casazza, 2000). Those individuals with a strong internal locus of control believe the responsibility for a positive outcome lies within them, whilst those with a strong external locus of control view their outcomes as controlled by outside forces such as luck, chance, or due to someone else's action- such as the view expressed by some trainee teachers in the sample. Whilst not seeing themselves as entirely powerless to influencing the attitudes of some lecturers and as a result their educational outcomes, they see their experiences with the lecturers as '*surviving up*' their internal locus of control, making them more determined to succeed. *Institutional Habitus*

Buddies (1977) notion of habitus is linked to his concepts of 'field' and 'capital' and is relevant to the issues discussed in this paper. Bourdieu's understanding of habitus is clearly intertwined with his notion of field, capital (particularly cultural capital), structure and agency. Capital, as Bourdieu describes (1986, p. 242) takes three forms: economic, cultural and social and it is the distribution of capital within individuals that determine their chance of success.

Habitus is a fluid concept, with individuals embodying their own habitus gained through

socialisation with family – primarily parents/caregivers-school and the social groups they occupy and with which they interact. Describing Reay's earlier works on this concept (1998) Reay et al. (2001) propose habitus to be 'a dynamic concept, a rich interlacing of past and present, individual and collective' ( p.1). In other words, habitus is a complex interplay of past and present experiences producing action in day-to-day life. In the case of the trainee-teachers in this study, their ability to thrive in their studies is challenged by the current experiences of their programme due to their perceived view of favouritism towards international students and due to their own relationships with lecturers.

Bourdieu (1990) suggests that much of the time those actions tend to be reproductive rather than transformative. That is, habitus is not simply a feature of one's family but also of their social class (King, 2005) and their social interactions (Gorder, 1980). Institutional habitus are the values, norms and practices of a cultural or social group that are embodied within an institution (Reay et al 2009). Higher education stems from an elitist middle-class system and the massification of Higher Education has led to a greater diversity of students entering universities for a range of programmes. These students are drawn from a compendium of backgrounds, cultures and practices (Miller and Shotte, 2010). This leads to a fragmenting of a dominant elitist habitus and as a result, an institution's habitus becomes more dissimilar across the student cohort (Trotter and Parmar, 2006) with some describing their experiences as feeling like a 'fish out of water' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p.127). In this study, it is not the international students who expressed feeling isolated, akin to the 'fish out of the water'; but rather, local students whose individual habitus is contested by a wider more diverse institutional habitus. Reay (2004) propose that when habitus (for example, working class habitus) encounters an unfamiliar field (elite university) the result could include transformation but simultaneously, could also result in ambivalence, insecurity and uncertainty.

The work of Bourdieu and Reay can be linked to Mackie's (2001) exploration of student decision-making and to the student-teachers in this study. The constraints Mackie identifies in respect of Social, Organisational and Individual factors (see Table 1) are consistent with and among a larger set of social justice concerns perceived by participants. The Social, Organisational and Individual factors are directly relevant to the study being reported here and will be discussed later.

**Table 1. Enablers and Constraints Affecting Student Decision-making Process.**

Factor	Enablers	Constraints
<b>Social</b>	Feeling belonging and participating in university social life.	Lack of friendships formed, little in common with other students, little identification with HEI.
<b>Organisational</b>	Enjoyment of programme, confident in studies, perceptions of progressing, identification with the HEI.	Dislike of course content, confused about academic processes, ineffective pastoral care, mass HE seen as unhelpful.
<b>Individual factors</b>	Students feeling in control, expectations are met, persistence is present.	Homesickness, doubts about course, influence from others (e.g. parents) is important.

Source: Adapted, Mackie, 2001

## Methodology of the Study

The methodology used in this small scale scoping study was qualitative in nature couched in the interpretivist paradigm. The main aim of the study was to ascertain the views of teacher-trainees about their training experiences and how their interpretations of these experiences lead them to feel and act. The study focused on teacher-trainees at one training institution in Ja-

maica. Fieldwork was undertaken in two phases. The 30 participants in the first phase (group interview) were self-referred. That is, they approached one of the researchers, as a unified group, with their issues and concerns. These participants were students enrolled in the third year of their four year teacher training programme. The group consisted of 16 males and 14 females. The researcher listened to the students as they 'aired' their views regarding their learning, teaching, and interpersonal experiences of their programme and more widely at the institution. Students' permission was sought by the researcher to document their views. This first phase of the data collection lasted for approximately 45 minutes and was conducted in April 2012.

The second phase of data collection entailed the researcher hosting a focus group interview with 11 participants. The participants were selected using a combination of convenience, purposive and deterministic sampling techniques. Six of these participants were students who were involved in the first phase of data collection while five students were new to the research. Nine of the students were females and two were males. The focus group interview was conducted in order to arrive at a collective perspective on the issue and as a means of triangulating the data. The session lasted for approximately 30 minutes and was conducted in May 2012.

Data collected in both phases was compiled, sorted and grouped in clusters based on similarity of issues. Each researcher independently assigned themes to the data after which both researchers met to decide on the emergent themes. The procedure of independently assigning themes was carried out to ensure that the themes when selected adequately represented the data.

### **Limitations**

The main limitation associated with this study is that it presents data collected at one institution in Jamaica. It therefore means that although the results provide an 'index for generability' (Miller 2012, p. 122) they cannot be generalised to other teacher-trainees in other institutions in Jamaica.

### **Results of Research**

Four clear themes have emerged from the research data: Course Offerings and Timetabling; Perceived Favouritism and Exclusion; Advanced Placement and Respect, Support and Role Modeling. The data is therefore presented below according to each theme.

#### *Course Offerings and Timetabling*

Several students felt the courses they were asked to undertake had very little relationship with their chosen careers and provided only limited or no benefit to them.

We are wasting time doing courses that do not coincide with our choice of careers (Jane).

We feel certain courses are a waste of time and are not relevant to our course of study. For example- some of us do Biology but it is too general and not specific. It is not specifically linked to Family and Consumer Studies; it is more for those who specialise in Science. After completing my degree I will not be using biology because it is not specifically aligned with foods, it's too general (John).

We believe time spent on some content could be spent on other courses that are more specific or show a more direct link to our course of study (Mark).

Linking the issue of what they perceive as 'ghost courses' with their outcomes and progress, two students reasoned:

Time spent on some Courses could allow us to get better grades in the core areas  
(Clair and Deandra)

Pointing to the opposite of this, one student suggested a more tailored approach to what was offered them would be more useful.

We are grouped to do research with students from all areas of the university and this cause a challenge when we are trying to decide what to do and then by the time we have the Integrative Study to complete we have to start all over as those persons are not from our specialisation. Why couldn't we do research as trainee-teachers together? (Monique)

Several students suggested they didn't feel confident and competent to teach in any specific area since the Courses they were being offered were so general.

We do not believe that we have enough knowledge in both areas as it relates to subjects because the course of study not taking into consideration entry level. We do not believe we are competent enough to teach (Xavier).

The fact that there is a generalisation we do not feel competent in any one area. If we specialised then we would be more competent. Also, teaching and learning resources need to be updated and it would help if practical Courses were scheduled earlier during the academic year (Patricia).

Extending the narrative beyond the curricular offerings, two students raised another concern which was well supported by the group. They felt the timetable was not arranged properly and had them at university from mornings to nights. They asked, "*If we are full time students, why do we have classes all hours, even at nights?*" (Cheryl and Dave)

#### *Perceived Favouritism and Exclusion*

Some students felt some of their lecturers showed favouritism towards international students and as a result they felt excluded.

Lecturers need to make local students feel as important and as brilliant as international and advanced students. This is only unique to some lectures. It is linked to making them feel well as international students (Deandra).

Citing a possible financial motive underlying the perceived behaviour of lecturers, Sara suggested "International students are given a lot of attention. Lecturers may want them to leave with a good perception of the university because they pay more". Citing what appears to be a clear Social Justice issue, one student opined:

Lecturers need to make local students feel as important as international students. International students are treated better and are provided with information that local students don't get. For example, international students get more resources and are the first ones to get handouts and other course material so they do better than local students (Blanche).

The grading of work and the granting of extensions for assignments and a chance to do over a piece of failed work also came under scrutiny.

Lecturers should have a set grading scheme and if other persons are given chances to do over a test, so should everyone else (William).

I think teachers grade students' work based on the short time they have for marking or based on the mood they are in. Sometimes it seems as if some work is just given a grade and not graded properly. Lecturers may also be tired so they just give a grade (Loretta).

Teachers need to have a set grading scheme; they should mark based on the ability of students. Sometimes outspoken persons are targeted and judged more harshly based on how they are perceived by lecturers (Several students).

Some lecturers are afraid of students (and what they may say) so they try to always be in that student's good book (Clair)

Quite worryingly, several students perceive the way they (and others) speak and the way they look to be a crucial factor in how they (and others) are treated by lecturers. This was mentioned several times during the group interview.

Teachers need to stop using the HALO Effect. Lectures sometimes use a person's appearance, level of speech, ability to influence others to determine how they are treated. This is really bad (Several students).

#### *Advanced Placement*

Advanced placement<sup>2</sup> students reported a range of concerns from being asked to take Courses not originally included in their programme structure; to having their programme duration extended, to the associated costs involved.

I am concerned about how [we] advanced students are treated [rather unfairly] in the sense that we originally bargained for two years to complete our programme. Upon entry to Institution X however, we were not given the relevant exemptions. Our expectations were not met. Students should be allowed to take as many Courses as they can over the two years. This is costing us (Jane).

The Courses we are taking are not sometimes what we expected to do. Sometimes Courses are removed from the original diet and we are not told. Sometimes, as advanced placed students, we have to even re-do Courses we did already just to pick up (make up) credits. There needs to be adequate screening of Courses already completed in college before assigning us other Courses (Carol).

Citing industry requirements as a possible reason for changes to the delivery of some Courses, one student reflects on an explanation she was given.

Students' course offering often change without discussion or adequate explanation. Lecturers justify this by claiming the university is going according to the demands of the work world. Sometimes this causes us to do things we do not like (Blanche).

One student describes the practice of changing Courses ad-hoc as akin to negligence on the part of Institution X.

Advanced placed students are not given two years to complete their programme as bargained for but have to spend longer. It is the institution's negligence [sic] causing persons to stay longer (Jane).

### *Support, Respect and Role Modeling*

There was a perception among students that they were not well supported by lecturers and as a result they did not feel they were doing as well as they would have liked. Additionally, some felt their lecturers did not adequately serve as a role model for them.

Some lecturers are not very accommodating. They give assignments and if something is unclear and you ask for assistance, their response is "you are here to read for your degree" (William).

Sometimes we are treated like children because the lecturer feels frustrated that we have repeated an error. Lecturers need to recognise that we do know better but we also make mistakes. Sometimes their rebuke is quite disrespectful (Racquel and Cristine).

Alluding to the issue of role modeling and leading by example, one student commented: "We are trainee-teachers and some lecturers do not always model expected behaviours especially correcting us" (Mark).

We are not treated as adults...some lecturers dress inappropriately...sloppy..... some of how a lack of respect and expects to role model students. Some lecturers do not role models in how they dress; how they speak to us and in their general behavior and attitude towards us (Several students).

Lab attendants also need to treat students with respect. We are all adults; not High School children or their children at home (Several students).

The issue of role modeling was not confined to behaviour, dress or speech related issues, but extended to the very reason they are at Institution X- their practice. The likely impact on their evolving practice was also debated.

Lecturers want us to be innovative but they do not do this. They need to model the teaching behaviours they want to see us doing (Mark).

Because my lecturer does certain things I thought it was appropriate for me to do them; but when I was out on teaching practicum and I did it, I was told I couldn't.... yet I saw my lecturer doing it (Clair).

Linking theory with practice and providing opportunities for doing so was also a role modeling issue students had concerns with. Additionally, outcomes and expectations seemed ad-hoc and bereft of standardisation.

Individual lecturers use their own biases (preferences) to dictate what is to be done (taught). You are taught the theory but we do not practice; opportunities for practice are lacking; there is far too much theory. Lecturers need to have more stimulating classes especially because we are being prepared to teach; we are taught theory but do not get the chance to practice what we learn (Several students).

## **Discussion**

Teaching is one of the most important professions. It's an opportunity to shape minds and lives and to develop society through sharing and co-constructing of ideas. The preparation and readiness of trainee-teachers who exit training institutions and programmes designed to enable and equip them, are crucial to an education system achieving these goals. Trainee teachers represent the next generation of those who will transform classroom contexts to influence the lives of students. Therefore the experiences they acquire and the interpretations they make about these experiences are important influences on how they operate in the classrooms they enter.

Students undertake advanced studies for different reasons. One assumes that trainee-teachers enter the field of education in order to be equipped with the requisite skills and competences to enable them to help with the advancement and achievement of national goals. This sense of public responsibility is often underpinned by a sense of national duty, often supported by a strong sense of personal motivation, characteristic of a high internal locus of control (Rotter, 1966). Motives for undertaking teacher-training aside, where (adequate) systems and structures are not in place to prepare and support students; and where students feel their experience is less than favourable, two key outcomes are likely. First, students can experience a loss of motivation, characterised by a low internal locus of control. They may also experience confusion about what they are trying to achieve and disillusionment with their programmes (Mackie, 2001; Silverman and Casazza, 2000). Second- students may complete their training programmes, but their engagement with the system or with parts of the system (Mackie, 2001) yields sub-optimal rewards due to their under-preparation or due to the transference of poor practice from the learning phase to the doing phase. In other words, due to confusion about their competence which can negatively impact their motivation; and due to the absence of a secure sense of self underpinned by a developed form of cultural capital, the final outcome is likely to be the same: the system suffers, students suffer and the teacher suffers. It therefore means that issues of social justice that are linked to inequities in learning opportunities must be addressed to ensure quality outcomes.

Students want to feel in control of their learning (Rotter, 1966). Students want to enjoy their learning experiences (Mackie, 2001). Students want to feel they are getting value for money and that they are adequately and appropriately supported through a range of institutional and other factors (ibid). Importantly, students want to feel respected and supported, for it is this support and respect, received from institutional actors that will affirm them and solidify their commitment to the institution and what both they and the institution are trying to achieve (Bourdieu, 1987; Reay et al, 2009). Acknowledging and dealing with any tensions between institution actors and students will ensure respect for both social groups.

The students in this study turned the learned helplessness argument espoused by Seligman's (1975) and Dweck (2000) on its head. Indeed these students wanted to learn and to develop and grow but felt external factors such as the way the timetable was organised; how content was delivered; the attitude of lecturers towards students (local, international and advanced placement); denied them the opportunity to experience deep and meaningful learning that would enable them to be confident about what they know. Simultaneously, these issues point to argumentation around locus of control (Rotter), institutional habitus (Bandura, 1987; Ray et al, 2009) and students decision-making (Mackie, 2001) linked to practice that caters to a social justice agenda.

Regardless of how viewed, the fact students feel their institution has moved the goal post and not kept to the original programme diet they signed up to upon entry to their programme is distracting for students and impact their motivation. This issue is beyond this paper and needs further investigation. However, this is a matter of social justice linked to disenfranchisement, as well as motivation and quality of provision. That students feel the approach to grading their work advantages one group over another is majorly problematic and throw to light issues of fairness, consistency and quality assurance. That students feel they are forced to take Courses with little or no relevance to their chosen field of study, thereby (in their minds) making them more generalists, raise important questions about the quality of care students receive, the quality of outputs society receives and the impact these outputs will be expected to make once they've completed their studies and have entered the teaching profession.

That students feel other students are dis/advantaged on the basis of how they speak and dress is seriously problematic and mocks equality of opportunity and respect. A possible result is the likely isolation of some students with a low internal locus of control (Rotter, 1966), made

lower by their experience of habitus (Bourdieu, 1987) and justice (Griffiths, 1996) at Institution X. The halo-effect has no place in an institution of learning; let alone in a teacher-training programme. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR, 1948) affirms the worth and dignity of each individual regardless of speech, dress, origin and/or other distinctions. Any deviation, perceived or actual can only undermine the spirit and intent of the declaration itself and what an institution hopes to achieve with and through its people.

But these are not easy issues to resolve and they challenge the preparation and alignment of a trainee-teachers' personal motivation with national needs whilst simultaneously challenging the ability of teacher-educators and teacher training institutions to adequately address both national and individual needs. This implies that teacher educators need to adopt a social justice agenda that provides principles for preventing the oppression of one group/system over the other. What drives most teachers is an '*ethic of care*' (Smith 2011: p529), shown to each learner no matter what. This *ethic of care* must be shown by all teachers to all learners in all circumstances in order for society, community, institutions and individuals to derive optimal returns on their investments. In Jamaica, the verdict is wide open.

## Conclusions

Achieving quality in education is a journey and this journey starts with trainee-teachers. Not only as regards their selection, but importantly their preparation. Additionally, quality teachers can only emerge, raw talent aside, with an infrastructure of support that includes high quality well trained teacher-educators, adequate resources, respect and support for all, and a system of transparency that is built on the values of enabling rather than on the values of constraining. Achieving social justice in education is also a journey. It's a journey in which leaders of that journey (in this case teacher educators) understand and treat the individuals they lead with equality, fairness, dignity and worth. It's a journey that promotes tolerance and respect for diversity and difference whilst simultaneously responding to the needs of all. It's a journey that promotes and affirms individuals based upon meritocracy and through the recognition of hard work and not one that dis/advantages one group or any individual, unfairly, or due to some other perceived or otherwise *well founded* reason.

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## Endnotes

1 Teaching students based on your impression of them.

2 Advanced Placement students are students who have matriculated to university X with a teacher training diploma and are given placement in the second year of the four year B.Ed programme.

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Received: *June 15, 2013*

Accepted: *June 24, 2013*

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