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TEACHING, LEADERSHIP
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TRADITIONAL AND SCIENTIFIC CONCEPTIONS OF SNAKES IN KENYA:
ALTERNATIVE PERSPECTIVES FOR TEACHING (291 pp.)

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A 3-month qualitative study was conducted mid-September through mid-December 2005 to investigate rural southeast Kenyan teachers' conceptions of snakes. Teachers from five villages near Mt. Kasigau were interviewed to obtain an overall sense of what they thought about snakes ($n = 60$). Of those 60 teachers, 28 attended a 6-hour seminar on reptiles and amphibians. From these 28 teachers, 8 teachers from three villages were afforded additional educational opportunities about snakes, and 2 teachers from this group of 8 were teamed with 2 herpetologists as mentors during the last 2 months of the study. In turn, seven of these eight teachers presented lessons about snakes using live specimens to their fellow teachers and students.

Observations of teacher participants during workshops and field outings were documented as well as teacher classroom pedagogy involving snakes before, during, and after the institute. Semi-structured and open-ended interviews were conducted with the eight core teacher participants and field notes were used to

document participant observations during serendipitous live snake encounters, of which, there were many. In addition, village elders, including medicine men, one education administrator and one minister were interviewed to obtain a historical cultural backdrop, which teachers expressed as being an important influence while formulating their own conceptions about snakes.

Findings suggest that teachers' conceptions of snakes, within a culture where all snakes are feared and killed onsite, can change toward a more favorable orientation when given the opportunity to learn about snakes, witness positive modeling of snake handling through mentoring by herpetologists, and experience direct contact with live harmless nonaggressive snakes (e.g., the Brown House Snake [*Lamprohis fuliginosus*] and Kenyan Sand Boa [*Eryx colubrinus*]).