TEACHERS IN THE TRENCHES: EXPLORING CANADIAN-CERTIFIED EARLY-CAREER TEACHERS’ EXPERIENCES OF TURNOVER AND RETENTION IN INTERNATIONAL SCHOOLS IN CHINA

by

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Abstract

Teacher turnover, often referred to as teacher attrition or migration, has been a growing worldwide concern for many years, particularly for teachers within their first five years of the teaching profession. Multiple studies have been conducted that identify the causes of teacher turnover and the possible teacher retention strategies within schools that can reduce the impact of this problem. Despite having knowledge of the factors that cause teacher turnover and the potential solutions for teacher retention, much of the research available on teacher turnover is both US-based and quantitative in nature, and as a result the unique and descriptive accounts of the human voices that experience the issue are often underrepresented from outside North America.

Inspired by my own experiences while working in an international school, this phenomenological study was conducted with the purpose of discovering and exploring the unique experiences of Canadian-certified early-career teachers surrounding the challenges, barriers and supports connected to teacher turnover and retention decisions in international secondary schools that use a Canadian curriculum in China. In order to carry out this study, a combination of a survey and individual interviews was used. Surveys were analyzed descriptively while interview data were audio recorded, transcribed verbatim and analyzed using a general inductive approach.

The findings of this study suggest that turnover and retention decisions in China are highly individualistic in nature and depend on a multitude of different contextual and individual factors. However, five main themes emerged from participants’ accounts which were influential in turnover and retention decisions. They included: participants motivations for working in China; barriers that influence turnover decisions; existing supports to overcome turnover challenges;
supports teachers feel would be beneficial to enhance retention decisions; and, advice from teachers to teachers. By exploring these themes, a more comprehensive understanding of beginning teachers’ perceptions and experiences surrounding the phenomenon of turnover and retention decisions in international schools in China emerged. Moreover, the importance of supporting early-career teachers both individually and professionally during the transition period into the teaching profession was highlighted throughout this study.
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Chapter 1

Introduction

Personal Statement

“After five years in the trenches, I am ready to lay down my arms and admit defeat. I give up. I lost” (Fawaz, 2009, p. 1). Reading this statement without any previous knowledge of its context one might imagine a soldier fighting a losing battle in World War One. However, this statement is not painting a picture of any historical battle, but rather was provided to readers by Nathan Fawaz in his personal essay “I shouldn’t be telling you this: A story of teacher burnout and attrition.” In his writing, Fawaz described his five-year emotional battle with the Canadian education system and how it ultimately led to his decision to leave the teaching profession. This issue has largely been described as teacher turnover.

As teacher turnover has been identified as an issue that has existed for decades in schools both within Canada and abroad (Macdonald, 1999), it might seem surprising that the negative factors that cause premature teacher turnover, such as in the case of Fawaz, have not already been resolved in schools around the globe. Unfortunately, as an early career teacher myself, the phenomenon of teacher turnover is not new to me. My experience in a classroom comes mainly from working at a Canadian international school in China. During that time, I was a new teacher navigating my induction into the teaching profession and learning how to manage a classroom while also working on adjusting to the Chinese culture. My time spent working in China was largely positive, however throughout my three-year experience teaching abroad I noticed a pattern of large amounts of teacher turnover happening at the end of each school year. Although my own choice for leaving the international school was related to pursuing a higher level of education, because of the large amount of leaving teachers, I began to wonder about other
teachers’ experiences and if there was a significant motivator that led to such large teacher turnover rates in international school settings.

In the beginning of my academic journey, I started to inquire further into this topic. I began with a concept map of questions that shaped my inquiry. I considered questions such as: Was it a predetermined plan that these teachers had only dedicated so many years to working in an international setting? Did the work environment contribute to different levels of satisfaction with the job? Was there some other hidden motivator that I was unaware of that caused teachers to quit? What factors were present in international schools that influenced teachers to make retention decisions, also described as the decision to stay in the workplace, and how could these retention factors be improved? With questions such as these, I began my academic research while reflecting on my personal understandings of what it was like to teach abroad. From my reflection, I came to the belief that teaching in an international school comes with its own unique challenges and supports that influence staying and leaving decisions. Therefore, my goal was to probe deeper into these characteristics and explore how they affected teachers who work abroad.

This phenomenological study was thus inspired by my own experiences while working in an international school and sought to explore Canadian-certified early-career teachers’ experiences of turnover and retention in international schools in China that use a Canadian curriculum. In this introductory chapter, I first describe the context of this study and offer a rationale of why a study of early-career Canadian teachers and their experiences of working in international schools in China is necessary. Following this, I outline the purpose of the study and the fundamental research questions. I then provide an outline of the potential significance for this research and other pertinent definitions for this study. Finally, I review the structure of this thesis and offer a brief description of the subsequent chapters.
Context of Study

In order to situate the reader in this research study, a brief introduction to the various types of Canadian international education systems and their presence in China is provided below. A more detailed account of international schools and their relation to turnover and retention will be explored further in the literature review of this paper.

“International education is a competitive global field involving all levels from primary to tertiary institutions” (Cosco, 2011, p. 3). It not only provides educational opportunities to students living in various countries but is also a conduit for new business opportunities and developing and sustaining positive international networks (Cosco, 2011). While there are various kinds of overseas education systems present all around the world, two of the most common types of schools that are referenced in the literature regarding the globalization of Canadian education are international schools and offshore schools. International schools were originally created to deliver an education “to students of expatriate communities who were not nationals of the host country” (Wang, 2017, p. 525). The structure of international schools can vary, and examples include schools which offer an education program prescribed by the nation state, independent institutions that offer a recognized program of international education and require tuition payments, and hybrid combinations of both (Hill, 2016). Offshore schools, on the other hand, have been specifically characterized as private educational institutions which grant home country recognized credits or high school diplomas to local students in foreign countries (Parkes & Han, 2015; Schuetze, 2008). Although both types of schools offer an international education, in China, Canadian offshore schools are unique in terms of their student populus (local society rather than foreign students), ownership (proprietary and for profit), program delivery (dual curriculum consisting of Canadian and Chinese courses and granting two diplomas), school certification
from Canadian home provinces and authorization by the Chinese government (Cosco, 2011; Wang, 2017).

Although by definition there is a distinct difference between international and offshore schools in terms of student composition and structure, over the years many international schools have accommodated the “increased interest from local parents who want to place their children into an international school setting” (Wang, 2017, p. 525), a demand which may correlate with the increased desire of foreign students wishing to pursue post-secondary education in Western countries (Cosco, 2011). “Hence, it is no longer easy to draw a line between the offshore and international schools as the boundary between the two is disappearing” (Wang, 2017, p. 525).

The definition of international schools has thus more recently expanded to include schools that bring together culturally diverse groups of students, both local and those from overseas families, under an international curriculum, as well as schools that teach international education that fosters global mindsets in students (Hill, 2016; Wang, 2017). For the purpose of this paper, Hill’s (2016) definition of an international school will be used, in which he stated that “an international school is an organization that offers its students an international education through the medium of its curriculum, its planned learning” (p. 10). Due to its generalizability, this definition can encompass both Canadian offshore school systems and other types of international schools in China that follow a different structure but offer a Canadian curriculum.

International schools have increased in number over the years both as a profession and as a business. “Figures on the International Schooling ‘market’ released by ISC Research indicated that, by September 2014, there was a total of 7324 schools catering to 3.75 million students and employing more than 347,000 full-time staff, and it was generating USD 36 billion in tuition fees” (Bunnell, 2016, p. 545). When viewing Canadian overseas educational systems alone,
Cosco’s (2011) research estimated that globally “there were 70 Canadian-accredited international and offshore schools as of January 2011…[and that] 63% of Canada’s international and offshore schools [were] located in China, Hong Kong SAR or Macao” (p. 6). The numbers of both global international schools and Canadian international schools have continued to grow over the years, and according to the Canadian Information Centre for International Credentials (CICIC, 2017) there are currently 83 listed accredited elementary and secondary international schools providing a Canadian curriculum across China alone. “These schools are administered by Canadians, regulated by Canadian legislation, provide Canadian content and provide thousands of full-time jobs for Canadian-certified teachers” (Cosco, 2011, p. 3). Most teachers working in Canadian accredited international institutions in China are certified by a Canadian province or territory, are paid in local currencies, make similar pay to teachers’ salaries in Canada and are often given living, personal or travel allowances (Cosco, 2011). However, current statistics of international schools, their employed workforce and the benefits they offer their employees need to be viewed with caution as it is impossible to get completely accurate numbers at any one time due to the rapid growth and globalization of international school systems and the increasing flow of people moving for work around the world in the education profession (Chandler, 2010; Hayden, 2006).

Rationale

Although many statistics exist regarding the number of international schools present around the world, the level of profit international schools bring in as an enterprise and the general numbers of students within international schools, far fewer studies exist that examine the turnover and retention rates of teachers employed within them (Chandler, 2010; Fong, 2018; Odland & Ruzicka, 2009). This fact is surprising as previous literature suggests that the phenomenon of teacher turnover has been a growing worldwide concern for many years, not just
in country of origin schools, and that international schools in particular have been cited as having high levels of teacher turnover (Hayden & Thompson, 2008). Specifically, there are “two kinds of teacher turnover: migration and attrition. Migration refers to teachers leaving one school to take a job at another…[while] attrition refers to leaving teaching altogether” (Cooper & Alvarado, 2006, p. 25). Many factors that cause both migration and attrition have been identified from previous research, including high workload, increasing demands, classroom management, professional relationships and perceived levels of support and training (Karsenti & Collin, 2013; Kutsyuruba, Godden & Tregunna, 2013; McGahey, 2011).

Despite having knowledge of the factors that cause teacher turnover, much of the research available on this issue has been collected from teachers working in American schools and has been supplemented with studies of teachers working in Canada, Australia and the UK as these countries have been identified as having relatively high teacher turnover rates (Karsenti & Collin, 2013). Although these studies prove useful in understanding teacher turnover and its context, having limited studies specifically on teachers working in international schools presents a research gap in creating solutions to causes of teacher turnover in global schools. In addition to this, just as Nurmsoo found in her 2013 research, “studies of teacher attrition tend to focus almost exclusively on identifying predictive factors associated with an increased risk of leaving” (p. 8). As a result, solutions are often created to address issues of significant statistical value and the unique and descriptive accounts of the human voices that experience the issue are often underrepresented.

Therefore, in order to learn more about how and why teachers’ come to the decisions to leave or stay in an international school setting, an empirical study that examines teachers’ experiences and beliefs must be considered given the subjective nature of each international
school and of the individuals working within them. As little is known about international teachers’ experiences and their goals beyond their current workplace choices, the term teacher turnover will be used throughout this study to encompass both those that make migration or attrition decisions.

**Purpose and Research Questions**

The purpose of this research study was to explore the issue of turnover and retention in international schools, both to enhance knowledge of teacher turnover in a global context and to gain a qualitative understanding of it from the people who are affected. Specifically, this study aimed to explore Canadian-certified early-career teachers’ experiences of turnover and retention in international secondary schools in China that use a Canadian curriculum. The research questions include:

1. What are early-career teachers’ perceptions of the challenges and barriers that cause turnover in international schools in China?
2. What supports are present to help early-career teachers overcome the challenges and barriers associated with turnover in international schools in China?
3. What supports do early-career teachers feel would be beneficial to increase teacher retention in international schools in China?

**Significance of Research**

Although some employee turnover is normal in all workplaces, problems arise when teacher turnover levels grow to be higher than what is considered natural (Fontaine et al., 2012). High levels of teacher turnover have wide reaching consequences that extend beyond the individual teacher. According to previous studies, it is an issue within schools for two main reasons: expenses and quality of teaching. Major monetary losses occur in training, hiring and
professional development, while a high staff turnover affects the cohesiveness of the school
team, the individual’s teaching practices and the quality of student education (Karsenti & Collin,
2013; Ryan, 2017). By completing a study on teachers’ perspectives of turnover and retention in
international schools in China, hidden or unacknowledged sources of conflict surrounding
turnover factors might be exposed and potentially allow for unique solutions to be developed to
aid teachers in their retention decisions in Chinese communities. Further to this, by identifying
and exploring teachers’ beliefs surrounding turnover and retention issues, school leaders of
international schools in China may gain a better understanding of teachers’ needs and gain new
insights on how to support teachers in the professional development of their teaching practices,
as well as aid teachers in becoming cohesive members in their international school communities
in China. Further to an educational significance, this research study also holds importance for the
academic realm. As little research has been conducted in international schools in China
surrounding turnover and retention, this study has academic significance to reduce the research
gap by enhancing the growing body of knowledge in this area. By specifically examining and
exploring teachers’ perceptions of challenges, barriers and supports in international schools in
China, this research also contributes to the growing body of qualitative data on this subject as
most previous studies are quantitative in nature.

Definition of Terms

In addition to the definitions of teacher turnover, teacher retention, international schools
and offshore schools that have been provided in the introduction, context and rationale sections
of this chapter, the following notions are instrumental to the purpose of this research study and
will be defined below.
**Early-career teacher.** An early-career teacher is often also referred to as a beginning or novice teacher. Although there is variance on the exact number of years of experience that qualify an individual as an early career teacher, most studies reference between three and seven years, with the most commonly cited average being teachers within five years of service (Clandinin et al., 2015; Karsenti & Collin, 2013; Lassila et al., 2017; Schaefer, Long & Clandinin, 2012).

**Challenges and barriers.** For this study challenges and barriers are considered to be any factors that negatively influence teachers experiences in international school settings. Challenges, however, imply a level of control over a situation, while a barrier is something outside of the individual’s influence. Examples of challenges for teachers may include items such as classroom management, developing lesson plans or time spent in extracurricular activities, while examples of barriers might include levels of funding from school leadership, school policy or low community support (Borman & Dowling, 2008; Fantilli & McDougall, 2009; Ryan et al., 2017).

**Supports.** In this study supports are defined as anything that aids or positively influences a teacher’s working experience. Examples of previous supports that have been referenced in the literature include access to mentoring, professional development opportunities, support from the principal and being part of a collaborative school community (Fantilli & McDougall, 2009; Kutsyuruba, 2013; Lassila et al., 2017).

**Teacher induction.** “Induction is a process-a comprehensive, coherent, and sustained professional development process-that is organized by a school district to train, support, and retain new teachers and seamlessly progresses them into a lifelong learning program” (Wong, 2004, p. 42). Effective induction programs are comprised of numerous features that help new
teachers transition into the teaching profession, such as training prior to the beginning of the school year, strong administrative support, a collaborative school community, training that continues two to three years into a teacher’s induction and an effective mentoring program (Wong, 2004).

**Mentoring.** “Mentoring is an action. It is what mentors do. A mentor is a single person, whose basic function is to help a new teacher” (Wong, 2004, p. 42). Often mentoring is part of an induction program and the support provided by the mentor is delivered in various ways depending on the workplace and its policies (Wong, 2004). Typically, mentors “help to provide answers to new teachers as they enter the classroom by providing advice, asking and answering questions, modeling techniques, offering feedback and a relationship” (Tregunna, 2013, p. 3).

**Professional development.** Coldwell’s (2017) definition of professional development will be used within this paper, in which he states that professional development is the “formal and informal support and activities that are designed to help teachers develop as professionals” (p. 189). Examples of professional development activities that have been cited to help teachers develop their professional practice include conferences, courses and in-school training, workshops, learning in school through mentoring or coaching, critical friends, collaboration, self-study and action research; and learning outside of school through partnerships with universities, and professional development centers (Coldwell, 2017; Day, 1997).

**Acculturation.** Acculturation is a process in which an individual or group enters and adjusts to a new cultural environment or the social traits of another cultural group (Acculturation, 2019). “When groups of different cultural backgrounds and their individual members engage each other, a process of acculturation begins, leading to cultural and psychological changes in both parties” (Berry, 2008, pp. 328). Acculturation often results in full assimilation (embracing
the host culture over the home culture), integration (balancing the host and home cultures), separation (rejecting the host culture) or marginalization (rejecting both the host and home culture) by the individual or group entering the new cultural environment; However, acculturation may also result in the selection and rejection of certain cultural elements by the adjusting participant (Berry, 2005; Stephens, 2016). Often, during the acculturation period, comparisons between the home and host country are made, and depending on the individuals’ level of comfort and feelings of personal fit within the host culture, the process of negotiating culture learning and shedding can result in various degrees of conflict, acculturative stress, anxiety or negative mental health, and can affect the individuals’ ability to adapt in the long-term (Berry, 2005; Stephens, 2016). Within this thesis, the term acculturation will be used to describe Canadian-certified early-careers’ teachers’ experiences related to the level of ability to adapt to the Chinese culture.

**Thesis Overview**

The thesis consists of five chapters that detail the research conducted. Chapter One has provided an introduction to the researcher, the rationale, the purpose and research questions, and the significance of this research. Chapter Two is a discussion of relevant literature that supports this research, including previous findings on factors associated with turnover and retention in country of origin schools, as well as previous research that has been conducted in international school settings on turnover and retention. Following this review of literature, Chapter Three is a review of methodology and methods used in this research. A presentation of the findings from both the surveys and one-on-one interviews is contained within Chapter Four. Drawing on these findings, in Chapter Five is a discussion of the key findings, implications for practice, policy and future research, limitations to this research, and a conclusion to the study.
Chapter 2

Literature Review

To accomplish the purpose of this study, within this literature review chapter I provide an overview of studies relating to teacher turnover and retention. Included are the definitions and the contexts of teacher turnover, the impact that turnover has on the education profession, descriptions of the factors that have been identified as causes for turnover and what solutions have been suggested to reduce these issues within country of origin schools, and what research has been conducted on this issue in international schools.

What is Teacher Turnover?

Teaching as a profession is a complex construct for those who work within it. The classroom “is an intricate web of relationships and goals and activities and experiences. Feelings of fulfillment and discouragement move in waves…and are highly contingent upon a highly complex network of factors” (Nurmsoo, 2013, p. 15). Since teachers’ experiences rely so much on the subjectivity of the classroom and the school environment, it is no surprise therefore that teacher turnover is also a complex phenomenon. Due to the large scope of the problem, Karsenti and Collin (2013) described teacher turnover as an “interdisciplinary problem that can be viewed from an economic, organizational, psychological, or educational perspective” (p. 141).

Specifically, there are two kinds of teacher turnover that are most often discussed in the literature: migration and attrition. “Migration refers to teachers leaving one school to take a job at another, which does not result in an overall permanent loss of teachers. Attrition refers to leaving teaching altogether” (Cooper & Alvarado, 2006, p. 25). The term “leaving” however can be ambiguous. “Sometimes teachers are defined as having left classroom teaching but remain in some form of educational work. Further, it is not always clear what happens when teachers leave
states, provinces, or countries” (Schaefer, Long & Clandinin, 2012, pp. 107-108). As migration of teachers within education is not always possible to track and is seemingly less harmful as it allows for continuity in the profession, most studies focus on attrition and the consequences of the loss of teachers completely from the profession.

Although often connotated as a negative thing, attrition happens in all professionals and can be viewed as a necessary evil. Fontaine, Kaine, Duquette & Savoie-Zajc (2012) found that there are four main reasons for teachers to naturally abandon the profession, including family reasons (having children, moving for a spouse, etc.), personal reasons (taking time off for one’s health, returning to school, etc.), professional reasons (getting a promotion, receiving a better job offer, etc.) and job dissatisfaction (low salary, poor resources, etc.). As a result, it is inevitable that the teaching profession does not retain every employee. In some cases, it would even be “beneficial for some teachers to quit their jobs and leave room for more dedicated or talented teachers” (Karsenti & Collin, 2013, p. 142). This would ensure that the quality of both the teacher and their teaching practices are at a high level within schools and that only those with a high level of commitment to the profession remain. However, the most pressing issue addressed in the literature is that teacher turnover rates are higher in some countries than what can be considered natural. Karsenti and Collin (2013) for example described how Macdonald’s 1999 definition of voluntary attrition has become problematic, as evidence from previous studies suggests that the challenges and demands associated with the teaching profession have increased over the years. Excessive workload outside of school hours, increasingly heavy workloads, and lack of time were some examples of these challenges cited by teachers in past research (Karsenti & Collin, 2013). Researchers believe that it is often increased trials such as these that force teachers out of the profession, and as such, the unnaturally high levels of attrition are often
associated with professional dysfunction, high levels of job dissatisfaction and feelings of disillusion with the educational system (Borman & Dowling, 2008; Karsenti & Collin, 2013; Nurmsoo, 2013).

Although not every country in the world has cited problems with teacher turnover, attrition rates remain a prominent issue in the US, Canada, the UK and Australia (Karsenti & Collin, 2013; Schaefer, Long & Clandinin, 2012). While teacher turnover includes teachers that leave the profession at any time between induction and retirement, most studies conducted in these countries have found that it is early career teachers who are at highest risk for leaving the profession. Typically, this leaving decision happens within the first five years of a teacher’s practice, although some studies also indicate that teachers’ leaving decisions are part of a process that begins long before the individual leaves the profession (Coulter & Abney, 2008; Karsenti & Collin, 2013; Schaefer, Long & Clandinin, 2012). Although statistics vary from study to study, early career teacher dropout rates have been estimated to be between 20% and 50% in the US, approximately 18% in Australia, between 40-44% in the UK and between 5% to 25% in Canada (DeAngelis & Presley, 2011; Karsenti & Collin, 2013; Nurmsoo, 2013; Ryan et al., 2017). Leaving rates are often calculated by polling teachers and schools or examining how many teachers renew their teaching licenses. For example, “in England, almost half of the state teachers polled said they planned to leave the profession in the next five years, and almost 8 out of 10 schools said they struggled to recruit teachers” (Ryan et al., 2017, p. 3). Meanwhile, the Ontario College of Teachers examined licenses in their 2017 Transition to Teaching publication which stated that 17 percent of graduates who got teaching licenses in 2012 were no longer certified five years later.
The Impact of Teacher Turnover

The impacts in countries that have higher than natural rates of teacher turnover are often wide-ranging and severe. Teacher longevity is an important issue for school atmosphere, school organization and resource allocation and for the students (Karsenti & Collin, 2013; Ryan et al., 2017). In one regard, the loss of teachers from the profession “can lead to an insufficient number of trained and experienced teachers being available to staff schools” (Coulter & Abney, 2008, p. 106). This can be extremely problematic in areas that have been identified as harder to staff, such as schools located in rural areas or those in areas that have high levels of poverty and can also have an impact on a school’s initial organization and setup, such as for example maintaining class sizes or for securing and delegating budgeting. Further to this, a heavy turnover of teaching staff “makes it difficult to establish a cohesive school team” (Karsenti & Collin, 2013, p. 142). A continuous turnover means that the professional relationships within schools and within school communities are constantly in flux which limits the consistency of networks built between educational stakeholders.

A high level of teacher turnover also affects the individual teacher and the teaching quality present within schools. This is both because “novice teachers who quit have not achieved optimal teaching skills…and because this turnover requires the hiring of more novice teachers, who are also building their expertise” (Karsenti & Collin, 2013, p. 142). Borman and Dowling (2008) stated that having novice teachers quit is especially problematic because the teacher has “accumulated less specific capital, or knowledge that is specific to the occupation” (p. 396) and that the little knowledge that they have gained is nontransferable. For example, those teachers who are leaving are never able to reach veteran status and thus they are unable to impart their knowledge and act as mentors for other novice teachers needing guidance. As a result of the
In essence, teachers typically grow more effective the longer they teach, and the loss of teachers early in the profession results is less efficient teaching practices while teachers are present in classrooms.

In addition to problems within schools, time and monetary losses occur in training, recruitment and hiring expenses, retention efforts and professional development (Karsenti & Collin, 2013; Ryan et al., 2017). “In the United States, the Alliance for Excellent Education estimated the cost of teacher attrition at almost three billion American dollars in 2004” (Karsenti & Collin, 2013, p. 142), and “The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future estimates the cost of a teacher leaving to be as high as $17,862 per teacher” (Ryan et al., 2017, p. 3). When such large amounts of money are spent on continuously recruiting and training teachers, losses become inevitable in other areas of education that require funding, such as resource allocation and support programs for students and early-career teachers. In addition, “when schools train teachers who do not remain in the field, this represents a discrepancy between economic resources invested and the professional output that the teacher contributes” (Ryan et al., 2017, p. 2), as seen with quality of student education. Because of the problems associated with the loss of teachers and the high levels of unnatural attrition in some countries, there is heavy emphasis on identifying the factors that cause turnover within the literature.

**Why are Teachers Leaving the Profession?**

Many studies have been conducted in the past which have determined a variety of factors related to attrition of teachers primarily in North America, Australia and the UK. Often factors
associated with the unnaturally high attrition rates in the literature are divided between individual factors and contextual factors (Clandinin et al., 2015; Nurmsoo, 2013); However, the “interdependence of attrition factors suggests that teacher attrition is more the result of a set of factors than a single factor” (Karsenti & Collin, 2013, p. 142) which increases risk of attrition. In the research focused on individual factors, some of the most prominent themes that emerged throughout various studies included stress and demographic features, while for contextual factors the literature often cited teacher education and training, working conditions, professional relationships and mentoring and induction (Clandinin et al., 2015; Karsenti & Collin, 2013; Walker, Kutsyuruba, Al Makhamreh & Stroud Stasel, 2017) as some of the most pressing challenges affecting teachers.

**High levels of stress.** There were various reasons for stress noted within the literature and many of the studies referred to the term teacher burnout. Burnout has been defined as a “syndrome of bodily and mental exhaustion, in which the worker becomes negative towards those they work with and develops a negative sense of self-worth” (Schaefer, Long & Clandinin, 2012, p. 109). Various studies have cited burnout as common in new teachers due to isolation, alienation, lack of support, role conflict, and unclear expectations (Schaefer, Long & Clandinin, 2012; Walker et al., 2017). In other studies, teachers expressed feelings of anxiety and stress surrounding finding and securing jobs, teaching contracts, working outside of their teaching background, finding a balance between work and home life, frustration with politics, test-based accountability, pressure from administration, student discipline, inadequate training, salary, working hours, meeting the multiple demands of the job and constantly seeking alternate sources of guidance and assistance due to the absence of a qualified mentor (Clandinin et al., 2015; Fantilli & McDougall, 2009; Nurmsoo, 2013; Ryan et al., 2017). Overall, the causes of stress in
teachers were varied in the literature and reflected the highly individualistic nature of the problem.

**Demographic features.** Previous studies consistently indicate “that the demographic characteristics of teachers have a strong relationship to decisions to stay at or leave schools, identifying these teacher characteristics as age, sex, marital status, degree obtained and years of experience” (Mancuso, Roberts & White, 2010, p. 308). In line with this statement, several studies have shown that younger teachers are more likely to leave in their first five years of the teaching profession compared to their older colleagues (Karsenti & Collin, 2013; Nurmsoo, 2013) and studies that attended to ethnicity and gender found that Caucasian teachers are more likely to leave the profession and that young females leave the profession more often than males (Borman & Dowling, 2008; Schaefer, Long & Clandinin, 2012). Previous studies have also found that teacher turnover rates are higher in areas that have high levels of poverty and students of low socioeconomic status, as well as large populations of minority groups (Borman & Dowling, 2008; Schaefer, Long & Clandinin, 2012). For example, Burleigh found in his 2016 study that attrition rates in Northern First Nations communities are estimated to be as high as 40% annually. In addition to this, studies have found that the geographic location of a school influences teacher attrition, with teacher turnover in urban, public schools with high poverty rates being slightly higher than average, while the turnover rate in small private schools was very high. Schools in rural areas also had a harder time attracting and retaining teachers than their urban counterparts (Borman & Dowling, 2008; Kono, 2012; Schaefer, Long & Clandinin, 2012).

Overall demographic features are often reliant on both the individual and the context of the school setting.
Inconsistent teacher education and training. Many studies have also discussed issues surrounding teacher education and training, with the divide between theory and practice often playing a large role in the problem of attrition. Initial education and training programs have been blamed for inadequately or partially prepared teacher-candidates for the realities of the teaching profession, relying too heavily on theory, being too isolated from schools and providing student teachers with a lack of training specific to the various needs of classroom teaching (Karsenti & Collin, 2013; Fantilli & McDougall, 2009). As such, many teachers are not able to handle the variety of challenges once they enter the teaching profession, such as for example the multitude of exceptionalities encountered in classrooms (Fantilli & McDougall, 2009). This causes many teachers to leave the profession before learning the required skills to become successful. Some studies also address the issue of teachers being “given assignments and grades to teach where they had no previous experience, relevant education courses, or experiences in pre-service teacher education” (Clandinin et al., 2015, p. 7-8) once they have entered schools. New teachers in particular are often given the most challenging assignments within schools without adequate preparation or support (Borman & Dowling, 2008). This attributes to higher levels of stress and anxiety in teachers which can be attributed to higher turnover rates.

Poor work conditions. Some of the most highly referenced work conditions in the literature related to teacher turnover included excessive workload both at work and outside of the workplace and lack of time (Clandinin et al., 2015; Fantilli & McDougall, 2009; Karsenti & Collin, 2013). Many teachers found that their teaching responsibilities impacted their home-life, health, sleep and fitness as their professional duties were expected to take privilege in their lives (Clandinin et al., 2015). In addition to dedicating an excessive amount of time to the profession, Fantilli and McDougall’s 2009 study found that other issues related to time management
included the “planning and organizing of daily and long-term schedules” (p. 823) and the “practicalities and subjectivities inherent to assessment” (p. 823) were major challenges for beginning teachers, especially if novice teachers were not assigned a mentor. Although salary is mentioned in many studies, it is hard to look at as an isolated factor. Studies in the US have shown a higher salary to be associated with higher retention, but other studies have shown that it is not an important factor in teachers’ leaving decisions (Karsenti & Collin, 2013; Schaefer, Long & Clandinin, 2012). As a result, salary is often viewed in conjunction with other factors when discussed with attrition.

**Conflicting professional relationships.** Many studies have found that beginning teachers often experience issues with students, parents, other teacher colleagues and administration. In relation to teachers’ experiences with students, past studies reported common challenges like classroom management, difficult student behavior, evaluation and assessment of students, differentiating instruction and meeting students’ special needs and individual education plans as challenges no matter which subject the teacher taught (Fantilli & McDougall, 2009; Karsenti & Collin, 2013; Schaefer, Long & Clandinin, 2012). Schools with high student numbers of minority groups, low socioeconomic status backgrounds and poverty, as well as student violence were associated with higher teacher attrition (Borman & Dowling, 2008; Schaefer, Long & Clandinin, 2012). Students’ parents were also seen as an important factor related to teacher attrition. “Having a difficult relationship with some of the students’ parents was repeatedly mentioned as a reason that drove future teachers to quit” (Karsenti & Collin, 2013, p. 147). Further to this, general communication with parents was considered a daunting challenge for novice teachers, as many teachers expressed “difficulties reporting about student progress and
dealing with parents” (Fantilli & McDougall, 2009, p. 823) who were found to be demanding or extremely vocal.

In terms of teachers’ professional relationships with fellow teachers and administration, a lack of a collaborative culture, problems with trust and communication, insufficient support, lack of resources and not feeling able to ask for help out of fear of looking incompetent were associated with beginning teacher turnover (Fantilli & McDougall, 2009; Karsenti & Collin, 2013; Schaefer, Long & Clandinin, 2012; Walker et al., 2017). Some teachers “felt that a lack of team spirit and time were obstacles to collegial support” (Karsenti & Collin, 2013, p. 145) which resulted in feelings of isolation and stress. When faced with difficulties, teachers frequently turned to other teachers, mentors and administration to help with the resolution process. This was often the case when teachers experienced issues with parents, and “although some respondents reported receiving unconditional support, others begrudged the lack of involvement and lack of admins level of preparedness” (Karsenti & Collin, 2013, p. 145). Other studies mention the lack of school support for teachers outside of the school setting, noting that the education system often discounts teachers’ lives as people, outside their roles as a professional (Clandinin et al., 2015). Overall, attrition rates tend to be higher in schools that show a lack of collaboration, teacher networking, and administrative support (Borman & Dowling, 2008).

**Lack of induction, mentoring and training.** Teachers often experience multiple challenges during the induction phase into the profession and these issues can often lead to teacher attrition (Walker et al., 2017). One issue is that programs centered on helping beginning teachers such as induction, mentoring and training programs are not available in all schools (Clandinin et al., 2015). In many cases when teachers were not provided with a mentor or a grade partner, they “cited increased difficulties in classroom planning and management” (Fantilli &
McDougall, 2009, p. 823). In schools where some form of initial aid was present for new teachers, the teaching profession has typically “been slow to develop a systematic way to induct beginners gradually into a highly complex job” (Borman & Dowling, 2008, p. 397). This has especially been true in areas where there is no federal regulating agency over the education profession which results in varied amounts of support and funding being available for schools to create necessary support programs (Kutsyuruba, 2013). In cases where teachers were provided with a mentor, “issues surrounding mentor qualifications and their motivations to serve in the role of mentor emerged” (Fantilli & McDougall, 2009, p. 824) and were related to teachers’ dissatisfaction with their mentors. Challenges have been referenced in terms of professional development (PD) training after a teacher’s initial induction as well. Some studies have found that “despite the particular needs of teachers early in their careers, access to more varied types of PD is more likely to be offered to more experienced teachers” (Coldwell, 2017, p. 190), a fact which may be related to career progression of novice teachers.

Overall teachers are faced with multiple challenges throughout their first five years in the teaching profession, many of which when combined cause teachers to leave the profession permanently. These issues range from the organization of schools, to professional relationships with educational stakeholders and students, to teachers’ individual experiences and their resilience to stressors. As a result of various studies that determined the factors associated with teachers’ leaving decisions, solutions to these problems were also researched widely in the literature.

**Solutions to Turnover**

Multiple countries have conducted studies to determine possible solutions to teacher turnover and enhance teacher retention. These solutions include internal changes that can be
made within schools, and external solutions from other stakeholders involved in the education profession.

**External solutions.** As many of the issues found in past literature have centered on teacher training prior to beginning work at a school, one of the exterior solutions that has been suggested is to enhance university training and strategies (Karsenti & Collin, 2013). New teachers reported the need for pre-service programs to be enhanced to include: increased exposure to practical tasks that prove difficult for beginning teachers, increased practicality of pre-service courses, the teaching of pertinent emotional skills and self-awareness, improving pre-service supports, creating pre-service programs with more collaboration with schools, having pre-service programs provide support during the induction phase, varying training practices based on teacher needs and allowing student teachers opportunities to create collaborative spaces in schools (Fantilli & McDougall, 2009; Schaefer, Long & Clandinin, 2012). Better policy developed aimed at inoculating new teachers into the profession and supporting them at the beginning of their practice was also suggested from past studies (Borman & Dowling, 2008; Kutsyuruba, 2013). In addition to better policies, “respondents expressed the need for district hiring practices to be refined such that new teachers are hired and assigned to grades with ample time to gain familiarity with the school and curriculum” (Fantilli & McDougall, 2009, p. 823). Finally, to move beyond simply retaining teachers and focus on sustaining them, getting to know teachers as people and supporting them both within schools and in their lives outside of it has also been a suggested solution in past studies. This shift not only requires support from the school, but also creating a network of supports outside of schools such as community organizations and parent groups (Clandinin et al., 2015). External solutions such as these help to reduce teacher stress and anxiety and have been associated with greater retention rates.
**Internal solutions.** As teacher turnover comes from within schools, many internal solutions have also been examined. Research found mentoring, induction programs, better professional development, support from experienced teacher colleagues, teacher collaboration, having a supportive principal, higher administration support, release time for observing, common planning times, and creating networks helped support beginning teachers and can increase teacher retention both overall and within a school (Karsenti & Collin, 2013; Kutsyuruba, 2013; Lassila, Timonen, Uitto & Estola, 2017; Schaefer, Long & Clandinin, 2012). In terms of support programs, mandated induction programs that were organized at the government level were found to provide many benefits such as a degree of procedural standardization and facilitation of effective induction programs (Kutsyuruba, 2013). Kutsyuruba (2013) stated that “mentoring is at the core of successful induction programs” (p. 235) and Walker et. al (2017) found that “many teachers benefited from formal supports from administrators, mentors and guides, as well as informal support from colleagues and other stakeholders” (p. 129). Quality of mentors was also found to be an important component of retaining teachers, and research suggests that mentors are the most effective when they value the knowledge and past experiences of mentees, are chosen in collaboration with the beginning teacher, have dedicated time to work with mentees, are skilled in helping mentees learn and are trained to deal with the complex needs of their mentee (Fantilli & McDougall, 2009; Schaefer et al., 2012). High quality professional development, as well as access to a range of professional development programs, that provide support and care to teachers throughout their careers have also been found to have positive influences for maintaining commitment to the teaching profession and improving overall retention rates in conjunction with individual and organizational factors (Coldwell, 2017).
Along with mentoring and induction programs, positive professional relationships were stressed as a key factor in retaining teachers in many of the studies. Part of the requirement to attain this is to create collaborative teaching communities and networks of veteran and novice teachers within schools (Schaefer et al., 2012). Another key member in positive professional relationships is the school principal. Having a school principal or school leader who was supportive, promoted a collaborative and positive school culture, practiced open communication, was respectful to its staff, was readily available for new teachers and helped to solve problems (Fantilli & McDougall, 2009; Lassila et al., 2017; Walker et al., 2017) was found to be beneficial for new teachers’ success. “In addition, the leadership qualities linked to lower turnover are also consistent with distributed leadership in which decision making and influence in a school are shared by administrators, teachers and others” (Mancuso et al., 2010, p. 319). Overall in the literature, attrition rates appeared to be lessened when teachers were part of a supportive school culture and were given chances to collaborate with and receive aid from other professionals within the school in ways that positively influenced their learning and supported them in the face of challenges.

There are many other solutions that have been mentioned in previous studies as well. Teachers from within past studies have recommended solutions for other teachers, including a good work-life balance, a positive mindset, engaging in reflective practice and collaborating with other teachers as solutions to avoid teacher attrition (Walker, et al., 2017). In addition, support “for professional learning through incentives and access to resources was particularly important in retaining teachers in schools with high rates of poverty” (Schaefer et al., 2012, p. 113). Supports were found to be effective when they were provided through districts and included professional development opportunities geared specifically to the needs of new teachers such as
subject-specific workshops, release time for planning, classroom observations and mentor-mentee collaboration time, time to develop necessary planning, programming, assessment reporting and specialized teaching skills, in-school resource personnel, and access to subject-specific resources (Fantilli & McDougall, 2009). There are many varied solutions to teacher turnover, and studies found that “teachers who perceived the school as a good place to work were more likely to stay in the profession” (Schaefer et al., 2012, p. 113). Overall it will require a combined effort of all of those involved in education to see solutions implemented in schools.

**Teacher Turnover in International Schools**

Despite having multitudes of studies regarding teacher turnover in the teachers’ countries of origin, far fewer studies have been conducted on teachers’ relationships with turnover and retention factors in international school and offshore school settings (Chandler, 2010; Fong, 2018; Odland & Ruzicka, 2009). This fact is surprising as the few studies that have been conducted in previous years have shown that international schools have high levels of teacher turnover (Hayden & Thompson, 2008). These studies found that international teachers believed “5–6 years was the optimum period for a school to retain their services…[and] that 3 years was thought the minimum contract period needed to successfully implement change” (Chandler, 2010, p. 215) in the workplace. However, from the teachers that were surveyed in the literature, few remained in the same international school beyond two or three years (Chandler, 2010; Farber & Sutherland, 2006; Hardman, 2001). In addition to this, “because of the independent nature of international schools, the capacity to track teacher movement from school to school is severely limited” (Odland & Ruzicka, 2010). Therefore, it is largely unknown whether the experience that teachers gain from working in the international school have been of continuous benefit in education at another location or lost completely from the profession. This is problematic as, like
schools in countries of origin, teacher turnover is problematic for international schools in terms of monetary losses. “Large investments are made to recruit, transport, house, and orient strong faculty for global schools…Human resource specialists in high performance industries report that a bad hire costs a company nearly 2.5 times the employee's initial salary in recruitment and personnel expenditures and lost productivity” (Farber & Sutherland, 2006, p. 14). Thus, the monetary and professional losses incurred by the exodus of teachers may be felt even more widely for international organizations due to the extra costs associated with globalization.

Although relatively little research exists around international schools, some studies have been conducted to determine what reasons could be behind the movement of international teachers and whether they experience the same challenges as teachers working in their home countries. Quantitatively when looking at the demographic information of teachers, significant predictors related to turnover found in previous studies were years of teaching experience, teacher’s spouses, and age. Middle-aged teachers and teaching couples were more likely to move than younger teachers and those with non-teaching spouses (Mancuso et al., 2010). To explore teachers’ well-being in international school settings, Coulter and Abney (2008) conducted a causal comparison of Canadian teachers’ burnout levels in different countries to discern whether stress was a major factor in turnover decisions. From the data, Coulter and Abney (2008) deduced that “burnout affects teachers relatively equally” (p. 117) regardless of their demographics, but that “median measures of total burnout, general exhaustion, emotional exhaustion, and overwhelmed feelings and loss of interest were statistically higher” (p. 117) for teachers working in Canada. Based on these results, Coulter and Abney’s (2008) conclusion was that “international teachers had a statistically lower level of burnout than teachers working in their country of origin” (p. 105). Although these studies were able to identify the demographics
of exiting teachers and determine that overall burnout levels were lower, neither study examined the qualitative reasoning behind these statistics. However, Coulter and Abney (2008) suggested that the teaching environment could be attributed as the main reason why teachers were affected by turnover factors differently than teachers working in their country of origin.

As part of the research on international school environments, Chandler conducted a study in 2010 to discern whether location of international schools was pertinent to turnover and retention. His findings, however, found no determinable link between location satisfaction and retention levels, and overall “location satisfaction seemed more closely tied to other variables than to location itself” (Chandler, 2010, p. 219) such as years of experience, marital status and position/job satisfaction. Chandler’s (2010) conclusion was that “international schools cannot be certain of keeping teachers who like living in their location longer than those who do not” (p. 224). Another aspect of a school’s characteristics that was examined by Mancuso et al. (2010) was for-profit versus nonprofit status, however the researchers concluded that neither was a significant predictor of teacher retention, although Odland and Ruzicka (2009) found that proprietary schools seemed to suffer “from the perception of operational decisions being driven by a profit incentive” (p. 5).

Other issues that have been mentioned in previous studies that may be considered unique to international teaching include economic issues related to living and working in the host country, such as cost of living, tax issues, fringe benefits, and exchange rates of compensation (Farber & Sutherland, 2006), as well as contract and recruitment tensions. “It is not known, for example, if international educators have individual contracts…or to what extent they are derived of entitlement to benefits…Indeed, little data exist for comparing pay and conditions between teachers in different regions, or even within the same network of schools” (Bunnell, 2016, p.
However, from the research it has been shown that when teachers felt that the school or the situation had been misrepresented during the recruitment phase, or if they felt teaching contracts and renewal packages were ambiguous or unfair, this sometimes was connected to their leaving decision (Odland & Ruzicka, 2009). Also related to the school were found to be issues related to professional relationships, including issues with administration, students or other working colleagues, which were sometimes related to teacher turnover (Odland & Ruzicka, 2009). The previous studies on turnover and retention in international schools suggest that the individual nature of the teachers themselves, professional relationships and the varied organizational conditions of the school appear to be key factors in teachers’ leaving decisions.

Suggestions on how to enhance teacher retention in international schools have also been explored in previous studies. As graduating students in international schools have been found to be high-performing, possibly because they come from some of the highest socioeconomic status brackets, Fong (2018) stated that ultimately, “schools benefit from stability and economy of resources by retaining qualified teachers in ways other than student achievement” (p. 65). Instead, findings from the literature have discussed the importance of having supportive administrators, allowing teacher autonomy in school decisions and having open communication policies (Mancuso et al., 2010; Odland and Ruzicka, 2009). Mancuso et al. (2010) stated that transformational leadership and distributed leadership styles, in which decision making and influence surrounding school policies and procedures are shared by school stakeholders, appear to be the most effective type of leadership that help to increase job satisfaction for teachers working abroad. “Teachers considered school heads effective if they were supportive, gave them respect, worked with them to develop the school’s vision, encouraged collaboration among teachers, and worked with staff to meet curriculum standards and to solve school or department
problems” (Mancuso et al., 2010, p. 319). Mancuso and colleagues (2010) also reasoned that “the school head and not the principal was significant in teachers’ stay or move decisions… Principals, although they have closer contact with teachers on a daily basis, do not appear from the data to be perceived as the ultimate source of school leadership – in either a positive or negative way” (p. 319). Fong (2018) furthered these findings in his study of Gen Y and Gen X teachers, in which he discovered that non-Gen Y teachers in particular exhibited higher job satisfaction when they felt they had likeable, competent, objective and empowering administrators, as well as supervisors that showed interest in the feelings of staff members.

Odland and Ruzicka (2009) also stated that communication between administration and educators was important in teachers’ staying decisions, and Fong (2018) stated that school administrators should “be aware that Gen Y teachers need communication in both directions. Communication needs to be frequent and useful from leaders to Gen Y teachers…[and] administrators need to allow Gen Y educators to have meaningful input into school operations” (Fong, 2018, p. 63-64). This includes “sharing clear goals, updating staff members about what is going on in school, and clearly explaining work assignments” (Fong, 2018, p. 63-64). The desire for open communication regarding school operations could be reflective of the independent nature of international schools as many schools dictate their own policies and teachers often do not have the support of a union in the global community. Overall studies found that “teachers who rated the effectiveness of their school head higher were less likely to be moving” (Mancuso et al., 2010, p. 319), which ultimately suggests that more effective leadership and open communication practices lead to higher teacher retention in international schools.

Another area that has been researched in relation to increased teacher retention in international schools is working conditions and the nature of the job. Unlike in schools located in
their country of origin, international schools “need to utilize additional resources, such as relocation and language training, to transition teachers into the host countries” (Fong, 2018, p. 65). As such, school administrators in international schools may benefit from creating effective induction programs and compensation packages that help teachers deal with challenges that come from transitioning to a new country and culture (Hardman, 2001; Odland & Ruzicka, 2009). Areas where teachers in international schools have identified the need for support and compensation have included: “homesickness, family obligations, good health care, good living facilities, opportunities to travel, professional and personal support, safety, and mechanisms for acclimatising to the culture and mores of the host country” (Farber & Sutherland, 2006, p. 19). Similar to country of origin teachers, new teachers working in international schools also “expressed a need for new teacher induction, mentorship, orientation programs to the school and host country community, uniform and consistent practices, procedures, and policy implementation (Farber & Sutherland, 2006, p. 19). Although much of this is reliant on leadership in international schools, it may also involve other educational stakeholders such as department heads, other administration, boards of trustees, and other teaching colleagues for successful implementation.

Other areas for suggested improvement of retention of teachers in international schools include having opportunities for professional advancement, maintaining a happy and respectful working atmosphere in the school, having a clear school vision that aligns with teachers’ goals, ensuring job security, having a good pay scale, and having a strong sense of job challenge and fulfilling work (Fong, 2018; Hardman, 2001; Odland & Ruzicka, 2009). Ultimately by “identifying and targeting factors that encourage contract renewal will directly translate to cost savings and lower the disruption of replacing teachers” (Fong, 2018, p. 59) and increase
retention in international schools. Although a variety of solutions have been researched to reduce the impact of teacher turnover in schools, there are still many barriers present to successfully implementing solutions in schools, both in country of origin schools and in the international schooling community. Unfortunately, these supports are not always offered and creating collaborative cultures can prove problematic due to complexities of teaching (Schaefer, Long & Clandinin, 2012). What may work for one person may not work for another, just as one solution may work for one school but prove ineffective at another center within the same district. This is especially true for international schools due to their individualistic nature as well as the multitude of variations in school location, organization and staff. As a result, it may be hard to determine the exact needs of each independent school and how to implement solutions effectively (Burnell, 2016; Chandler, 2010). Problems also arise surrounding the implementation and include funding disparities, appropriate timeframes and the question of how to create effective programs, especially in areas where there is no national body governing the teaching profession (Kutsyuruba, 2013). To fully address issues of teacher turnover in schools, more research needs to be done to find ways to address issues of implementation in schools around the world, and for international schools it may be beneficial to conduct more individualistic research in order to meet these challenges.

Summary

Overall the vast amounts of previous research on teacher turnover provide insightful information and empirical evidence on the factors and solutions regarding teacher turnover that have been previously studied within various countries that have been found to have relatively high attrition rates. Major challenges to beginning teachers working in their country of origin include feelings of burnout, working conditions, demographics of schools and their student
bodies, ineffective teacher education programs, poor professional relationships with students, parents, teacher colleagues and administration, and issues with or lack of mentoring, induction and on the job training. Solutions such as effective induction and mentoring, enhanced professional relationships and teaching networks, better preparation for teachers and enhanced practicality of pre-service programs, and better policies and supports designed to aid beginning teachers will help to reduce the stresses and challenges associated with beginning teaching.
Chapter 3

Research Methodologies

In this chapter, the research methodology and data collection and analysis methods used for this study are described. In the sections below, I first describe the qualitative research design and provide a rationale for the use of phenomenology. Following this, I describe the research methods, including the location of the study, the selection and recruitment of participants and the qualitative methods used within the research. Finally, I describe the data collection procedures for each method, the data analysis procedures and the efforts made to establish the trustworthiness of the research.

Qualitative Research Design

The aim of this research study was to explore the issue of turnover and retention in international schools, both to enhance knowledge of teacher turnover in a global context and to gain a qualitative understanding of it from the people who are affected by it. Specifically, this study aimed to explore Canadian-certified early-career teachers’ experiences of turnover and retention in international schools in China that use a Canadian curriculum. This was done by examining the challenges, barriers and supports that influence turnover and retention decisions. According to Creswell (2013), qualitative researchers “try to develop a complex picture of the problem or issue under study. This involves reporting multiple perspectives, identifying the many factors involved in a situation, and generally sketching the larger picture that emerges” (p. 47). Specifically, qualitative research is used when a problem or issue “needs to be explored; when a complex, detailed understanding is needed; when the researcher wants to write in a literary, flexible style; and when the researcher seeks to understand the context or setting of participants” (Creswell, 2013, p. 65). Based on these definitions, a qualitative research design was chosen as it
would best support this study’s specific goal to explore teachers’ perceptions surrounding challenges, barriers and supports that affect turnover within schools.

Within a qualitative research approach, a phenomenological lens was chosen for this study. “Phenomenology is a project of sober reflection on the lived experience of human existence” (van Manen, 2007, p. 12). It aims to investigate and describe lived phenomenon and the meaning that is attached to peoples’ experiences and thus requires the researcher to be thoughtful while avoiding theoretical, prejudicial and suppositional biases (van Manen, 1990; van Manen, 2007). As the goal of this study was to explore Canadian-certified early-career teachers’ experiences of turnover and retention in international schools in China that use a Canadian curriculum, phenomenology was deemed most appropriate for use in addressing the research purpose of this study as it “describes the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon” (Creswell, 2013, p. 76) and allows participants to “perceive it, describe it, feel about it, judge it, remember it, make sense of it, and talk about it with others” (Patton, 2002, p. 104). As participants were required to individually discuss their perceptions and experiences related to turnover and retention, a phenomenological approach supported the exploration of these elements and the meaning they held for individual teachers while tying them to the larger context of working experiences in international schools. For example, if individual teachers experienced funding inequities within their workplaces and associated them with leaving decisions, this could be an important element in understanding turnover on a larger scale and help to create solutions to increase retention decisions in international schools. Therefore, the phenomenological approach allowed for first-person accounts of individual beliefs and lived experiences to be gained while also viewing them as parts of a whole to aid in the understanding and creation of possible solutions for the collective
problem of turnover and retention. Phenomenology also supported the validation of the study as it aided in the identification of researcher biases. As I myself have worked in an international school setting, phenomenology allowed me to identify my personal experiences of the phenomenon of teacher turnover and to bracket myself out of the research (Creswell, 2013) through reflective analysis of the data provided by participants.

Research Methods

As little research has been conducted specifically in the context of turnover and retention in international schools in China, a qualitative research approach with multiple data collection methods was chosen to carry out this study. A combination of a survey consisting of open and closed questions and qualitative interviews was deemed the most fitting for the purpose of this study. “Questionnaires and interviews are used extensively in educational research to collect information that is not directly observable. These data-collection methods typically inquire about feelings, motivations, attitudes, accomplishments and experiences of individuals” (Gall, Borg & Gall, 1996, p. 288). In addition, by including both surveys and interviews, the study design allowed the focus to move from what the participants have experienced, to a more descriptive account of how they have experienced it (Creswell, 2013). For these reasons, the combined data collection methods used the phenomenological approach which, within this research study, aimed to describe the lived experiences of early-career Canadian certified teachers through first-person accounts, as well as to describe general themes and interpretations drawn from their lived experiences. Although surveys are commonly used in quantitative research studies, its purpose in this study was to help gather a larger number of responses on initial themes relevant to the topic of this study prior to conducting interviews as limited research in the area of turnover and retention in international schools specifically in mainland China exists. Furthermore, the analysis
of the survey responses was primarily qualitative in nature with only descriptive statistics and tables with basic percentages used to report on the findings. Therefore, the survey responses served primarily as a source of triangulation with interview findings and an in-depth quantitative analysis of survey findings was not conducted. Research ethics clearance to conduct surveys and interviews with participants was granted on October 31, 2018 (see Appendix A).

**Location and Participant Selection**

In a phenomenological study, all participants must be individuals who have experience with the phenomenon being explored (Creswell, 2013). Therefore, to explore participants’ experiences of the challenges, barriers and supports that influence teacher retention in international schools, I chose to contact teachers that worked within a grouping of international schools at which I taught prior to beginning my research journey. I chose these research sites because of my prior knowledge of the school systems which allowed for a deeper understanding of the topic under study, and because the connections that I created there eased the access of gaining participants. Furthermore, reaching teachers who have already left the profession is typically difficult as there is no formal way to determine their whereabouts (Karsenti & Collin, 2013). Thus, it was convenient for this study to contact teachers who were currently working within international secondary schools in mainland China, and it allowed for employed teachers’ perspectives of the most current issues and supports present within international schools as they were happening to be explored.

As there are no governing school boards that oversee international schools, after receiving ethics clearance from the General Research Ethics Board at Queen’s University, schools’ highest levels of leadership were contacted by email for additional ethical clearance to contact teachers. A protocol was developed to discuss the nature of the study with leadership and
what would be required to gather data within their schools (See Appendix H). All secondary schools were international schools located across mainland China that teach a Canadian curriculum. The exact number of schools that were contacted was left out of the study to protect workplace anonymity. In addition, although teachers from multiple international schools were provided access to the study, it is unknown if teachers from all contacted schools participated in the study due to the anonymous nature of the survey. Therefore, the exact number of participating schools cannot be determined.

The goal of this study was to gather approximately 50 participants for the survey to gather a wide range of perspectives on the overall challenges, barriers and supports present in international schools, and then to conduct further interviews with at least 5 early-career teachers to gain a more detailed view of the context behind these issues. With increasing interest in the study, 7 early-career teachers who expressed willingness were chosen to participate in individual interviews in order to allow for a greater variety of qualitative responses based not only on number of teaching years, but also based on teaching subject areas (see Appendix G). Given the time constraints for a master’s thesis, no more than 7 candidates could be interviewed.

To participate in both the survey and the interview, participants were required to hold a current teaching certification from a Canadian province or territory and be currently employed at an accredited international secondary school in mainland China that taught a Canadian curriculum during the time of the study. Previous literature has identified that novice teachers are at the highest risk for turnover (Karsenti & Collin, 2013), and so participants for this study were also required to have completed five or less years of full-time teaching. All participants were given a pseudonym in the discussion of findings and no school was identified to protect the identity of participants and their places of work.
Data Collection

Surveys. The first stage of the research process entailed gathering completed surveys from approximately 50 Canadian-certified early-career teachers. As limited quantitative or qualitative data was available on the perspectives of Canadian-certified early-career teachers in international secondary schools that use a Canadian curriculum in China, the purpose of the surveys was to gather initial data to determine what teachers have experienced in terms of the phenomenon of turnover and retention and their beliefs on what factors they felt were most influential to turnover and retention decisions (Creswell, 2013). Survey questions were developed through the adaptation of selected instrument items from the pan-Canadian Early Career Teachers survey (Kutsyuruba & Walker, 2017) and asked the same questions of all individuals who participated in the study (Gall et al., 1996).

The survey consisted of three sections: participant information, participants’ experiences with factors related to teacher turnover, and participants’ experiences with factors related to teacher retention (See Appendix D). The first section on participant information consisted of closed-ended questions aimed at gathering demographic details, teaching experience and current workplace information of participants. Sections two and three consisted of open and closed-ended questions with a seven-point Likert scale used for attitudinal-based questions. The combination of using both closed and open-ended questions “enables the exploration of various aspects of a phenomenon” (Springer, 2010, p. 437) and “can enhance the completeness and accuracy of the research” (Springer, 2010, p. 436). The closed-ended questions were used to discern what previously studied aspects of turnover and retention were currently relevant in international schools and to collect information about participants’ attitudes surrounding the issues of turnover and retention. The open-ended questions were included to give participants the
ability to provide their own perspectives on turnover and retention factors, and to allow the researcher to “understand the world as seen by the respondents” (Patton, 2002, p. 21). The survey was peer reviewed by my graduate supervisor and then piloted by twenty teachers who have had experience working in an international school to gather feedback, criticisms and recommendations on its improvement prior to its use in the study (Gall et al., 1996). Following the gathering of recommendations and the editing process, the final version of the survey was created using the online platform Qualtrics.

As “it is impossible to give any precise estimate as to the size of the international school teaching population” (Chandler, 2010, p. 217), participants were recruited for the survey through convenience sampling by means of a pamphlet which included details of the study and an anonymous web-link which allowed access to the Qualtrics survey (See Appendix B). The pamphlet was distributed using each school’s system-wide email and school social forums after permission was granted from school leadership to access these mediums. An online survey was deemed valuable to this study as it had “the advantages of cost and time efficiency”, provided “participants with time and space flexibility”, and helped “create a nonthreatening and comfortable environment” (Creswell, 2013, p. 159) for participants from various locations to provide information. In addition, as I had previously worked for one of the international schools that had been contacted, there was a chance that a small number of participants may have been familiar with myself as the researcher. Thus, the online survey also helped to safeguard participants’ anonymity and limit researcher bias in the study.

To ensure participants’ consent, the survey included a cover letter (See Appendix C) which consisted of an overview of the study and its requirements for participation, a statement of voluntary withdrawal, a statement of the participant’s anonymity, and the known risks and
expected benefits of participating in the study (Creswell, 2013). A consent form with a click-box for approval of the terms was provided for participants’ agreement to be part of the study. The survey responses remained anonymous to the best of the researcher’s ability unless participants wished to provide contact information for a chance to participate in the interview process. The interview purpose was outlined in the survey cover letter and the option to provide contact information to participate in an interview was given at the end of the survey. Also included was a confidentiality statement ensuring that the participant’s name and contact information would only be shared with the researcher and their graduate supervisor if they wished to participate in an interview.

**Individual interviews.** Although surveys are advantageous for collecting a variety of responses over a wide geographic region, they “cannot probe deeply into respondents’ opinions and feelings” (Gall et al., 1996, p. 289) of the studied phenomenon. Therefore, individual interviews were conducted to help illuminate and further explore the initial responses and themes gathered from the survey (Springer, 2010, p. 445). This method of data collection aligned nicely with the phenomenological approach as it allowed participants to express their views and give greater understanding to the “processes, norms, decision making, belief systems, mental models, interpretations, motivations, expectations, hopes, and fears” (Guest, Namey & Mitchell, 2013, p. 116) associated with teacher turnover and retention in international schools.

In preparation for the interviews, an interview protocol and semi-standardized interview guide were created through the adaptation of interview questions from the pan-Canadian Early Career Teachers telephone interview protocol (Kutsyuruba & Walker, 2017) and Tregunna’s (2013) interview protocol (See Appendix F). “The semi-structured interview involves asking a series of structured questions and then probing more deeply using open-form questions to obtain
additional information” (Gall et al., 1996, p. 310). This method of interviewing was considered appropriate for this phenomenological study as it allowed the researcher to create a consistent set of questions that were broad enough to use with all participants, gave participants direction as well as freedom in discussing their experiences, and permitted the researcher to inquire further about participants’ individual responses beyond the structured questions from the interview guide (Creswell, 2013; Gall et al., 1996). As Creswell (2013) recognized that “all phases of the process may change or shift after the researchers enter the field and begin to collect data” (p. 47), the semi-structured interview guide was further deemed appropriate as it allowed for emergent themes from the surveys to be used as further probing questions in case participants needed further guidance for answering questions. In some cases, probing questions were not listed on the guide and were created during the interview process based on participants’ responses.

Seven teachers who had identified themselves as being interested in participating in an interview via the survey were interviewed. They were contacted by email and provided with an invitation letter (See Appendix I), and once they confirmed interest they were provided with a letter of information and a consent form (See Appendix E) that outlined the purpose of the study, the confidentiality of the participant, the interview procedures and the plans for the use of the data (Creswell, 2013). Once consent forms were returned, participants were contacted again to discuss and mutually decide on a location, date and time for an interview. Interviewees were also provided with copies of the semi-standardized interview guide prior to their scheduled interview. Giving participants the interview questions prior to interview dates was considered appropriate to allow participants ample time to consider their possible answers and to raise any concerns regarding the questions (Creswell, 2013). In-person interviews were conducted at a time and in a confidential location that was decided upon by both the researcher and the interviewee. As some
of the participating teachers worked in various sites across China, travelling to the participants’ locations was not always possible during the allocated data collection time period. In these cases, participants were given the alternative option to conduct the interview via the online communication platforms Zoom or Skype. In these cases, the conversations were audio-recorded via the Zoom or Skype Recorder technology, with a secondary recording being done using the Otter recording technology. In all interview methods the participants were notified that the interview was being audio-recorded and field notes were taken as another measure to record information.

Interviews lasted approximately one hour to respect the time of participants. Interviews consisted of the following elements: welcome to the participants, a review of the letter of information and consent forms and the conduction of the interviews. At the end of the interviews, participants were asked if they had any final comments regarding previous interview questions or if they wished to discuss anything that was not asked of them during from the interview guide. Following these responses, the audio-recordings were stopped. Participants were then thanked, given a twenty-dollar gift card as appreciation for their participation and were notified that follow-up information could be requested of them by email if necessary. Participants were also reminded that they could submit any further responses, amendments or concerns to the researcher by phone or email, as well as withdraw information prior to publication. Using the interview recordings and field notes, the interviews were then manually transcribed verbatim. Confidentiality was protected by employing the use of pseudonyms for all participants throughout the transcriptions and the dissertation (Creswell, 2013). Names of schools and other people mentioned by participants during the interviews were also removed from the study to ensure confidentiality, and findings are discussed in the following chapters.
Data Analysis

Surveys. After cleaning data by removing incomplete and ineligible responses, the final sample to be analyzed included 43 Canadian-certified early-career teachers’ responses. Data analysis took place in multiple stages. Surveys were analyzed first to gather an understanding of the background information of Canadian-certified early-career teachers and their initial attitudes towards turnover and retention factors present in international schools, as well as to determine if any new themes emerged that were not previously found in the literature. Data analysis consisted of different processes for closed and open-ended questions. Closed-ended responses from sections one, two and three of the survey including the attitudinal responses from the Likert-scales, were tallied using the quantitative feature of Qualtrics platform. All participants answered all closed-ended questions unless questions were conditional based on the answers to the previous questions (e.g., SQ12). Likert scale questions received a 100 percent response rate. In the presentation of the findings, descriptive statistics in brief paragraphs were used to show the frequency of responses, while tables using percentages were used to visually provide simple summaries of the “numerical characterizations of the phenomenon” (Springer, 2010, p. 19). Percentages are rounded to their nearest whole number.

Further to tables and descriptive statistics that present the frequency of the closed-ended responses, summaries were used to describe findings in more detail, including major themes cited by participants. Analysis of open-ended questions from sections two and three consisted of using an inductive approach to manually highlight significant statements that were provided by participants for each question and then cluster the statements into common codes, phrases and themes. Findings were presented in written summaries to give “useful insights into peoples’ attitudes, beliefs, intentions, and actual behaviors” (Springer, 2010, p. 19) surrounding turnover
and retention factors in international schools. In cases where codes and phrases recurred across multiple participants’ open-ended responses, the number of times each theme was described by a participant was tallied and provided as a percentage along with summaries of the findings, when available.

**Interviews.** Analysis of the interviews included several steps. The first stage of analysis included using the Otter technology to transcribe each individual interview. To ensure accuracy of transcriptions, auditory recordings were listened to again by the researcher following the Otter transcription and necessary details were added to ensure transcriptions were recorded verbatim. Each interview candidate was provided with a copy of their transcription and given the chance to add, alter or remove statements prior to publication. Interview transcriptions were read through multiple times by the researcher and significant statements were highlighted manually. Memos were written into the margins of the transcripts to identify key concepts that stood out in each interview. Memos were created using a combination of etic and emic approaches. For this research, the emic approach is described “as beginning with a “blank page” and allowing research participants to define and explain the concepts of interest in their own words. In contrast, the “etic” approach uses definitions and explanations drawn from all the countries included in the research” (Punnett, Ford, Galperin & Lituchy, 2017, p. 4). In this way, both ideas drawn from the literature review of this study, as well as unique phrases that were mentioned by participants, were used to identify significant statements and in the creation of memos.

From the memos and highlighting of statements in each interview open codes were created, and larger themes were identified from the common collected codes from all seven interviews (Creswell, 2013). Finally, once interview analyses were concluded, findings from the surveys were triangulated with the responses from the interviews, and an interpretation of the
information from both methods were combined into an in-depth presentation of the findings and a discussion of the essence of the phenomenon of turnover and retention in international school (Creswell, 2013), which are provided in the following chapters.

**Trustworthiness**

To ensure the trustworthiness of the study, clarifying research bias, peer review, and member checking were used at various stages throughout the study. Recognizing that I was unable to fully remove myself from the research as I had worked in an international school setting in the past, in Chapter 1 my own perspectives from my past experiences working in an international school were outlined in an attempt to bracket my personal experiences and remain objective considering participants’ perspectives. During the research process, I also kept a bracketing journal as a validation strategy to minimize the potential of personal biases during data collection and analysis and to ensure inductive analysis of the information provided by participants. Member checking was also performed throughout the study to ensure the accuracy of collected information and the interpretations that were drawn. This was done throughout the interviews by reiterating to the participants my understanding of their statements to ensure an accurate understanding of interviewees’ responses to questions and was done again with interview candidates by providing each individual participant with a copy of their transcription after they were completed. As surveys were completed anonymously, member checking was not possible. However, peer reviewing was done with my graduate supervisor during the creation of the survey and the interview guide, as well as after each chapter of the dissertation was generated to gather feedback and need for areas of improvement. Triangulation was achieved by using multiple forms of data collection, including surveys and interviews, as well as by using field
notes, a bracketing journal and member checking. All participant concerns, clarifications, and requests for changes were accommodated throughout the study leading up to publication.

**Summary**

This chapter outlined the methodology and methods used in conducting this research study. The combination of online surveys and individual interviews was deemed the most appropriate approach to collect data on Canadian early-career teachers’ perceptions of turnover and retention in international schools as little previous quantitative or qualitative information was available from previous research. The results of these data collection methods are presented in the following chapters.
Chapter 4

Research Findings

This research study explored the issue of turnover and retention in international schools in order to enhance knowledge of teacher turnover in a global context and to gain a qualitative understanding of it from the people who are affected. Specifically, this study explored Canadian-certified early-career teachers’ experiences of turnover and retention in international schools in China that use a Canadian curriculum. Two methods of data collection were used in this research: a survey with open and closed ended questions and individual interviews. In order to provide the reader with the contextual background for this study’s participants, using data from both collection methods, I begin with a description of the general demographics and an introduction to the interview participants. Following this, the findings from both data collection methods are presented together thematically.

Themes that emerged from participant responses included participants’ motivations for working abroad, as well as answers to my guiding research questions. These included: (a) what are early-career teachers’ perceptions of the challenges and barriers that cause turnover in international schools, (b) what supports are present to help early-career teachers overcome the challenges and barriers associated with turnover in international schools, and (c) what supports do early-career teachers feel would be beneficial to increase teacher retention in international schools? A further emergent section including advice from current early-career teachers to new teachers which addresses how to build personal well-being and resilience within the education profession while working abroad has also been provided. In each section, findings are supported using descriptive statistics, tables, summaries and participant quotations, when available. Participant quotations are referenced in relation to their time segment (See Appendix J).
The Participants

Demographic Details from the Survey

In this research study, 43 completed survey responses were collected. Participants for this study were teachers who held a Canadian teaching certificate, had completed five or less years of full-time teaching experience and were currently working in an international school in mainland China that uses a Canadian curriculum. To learn more about the participants involved in the study, in the first section of the survey, participants were asked questions regarding their demographics including citizenship, age, gender, teaching credentials and past teaching experience. Of the 43 teachers who responded to the survey, 79% of respondents were Canadian citizens while the remaining 21% were citizens of various other countries including the United States, South Africa, Jamaica, and the Philippines who had obtained a Canadian teaching certificate (Survey questions (SQ) 1-2). Gender, age and teaching credentials varied between participants and findings are shown in the table below (SQ3-5).

Table 1

Survey demographics- gender, age and teaching credentials

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age groups</th>
<th>Teaching credentials</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>20-29 58% Bachelor of Education 86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>30-39 30% Bachelor’s degree (Outside Education) 91%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>40-49 9%</td>
<td>Master of Education 9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>50 and above 2%</td>
<td>Master’s degree (Outside Education) 14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Teaching English as a Foreign Language certificate 2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Doctorate Degree 0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although some teachers held teaching degrees for the elementary levels, a median average of 85% of participants were certified to teach at the secondary level from grades nine to twelve.
Participants held teaching certificates in a multitude of teachable subjects, with 47% qualified to teach in the field of English, 49% in Social Studies, History and Geography and 30% in Sciences. Less than 20% of participants cited holding teaching certificates for each of the areas of Math, Fine Arts/Music, Health and Physical Education, Special Education, Business, French and Technologies (SQ6). Regarding previous teaching experience, small groups of participants noted having experience either as an occasional teacher in Canada, a teacher outside of Canada, or as a teacher at another international school prior to their experience at their current workplace. However, most participants in all cases did not have any teaching experience prior to that which they gained at their current workplace. Details of teaching experiences are shown in the table below (SQ8-11). For survey questions 10 and 11 participants were able to select more than one answer if answering yes – See table 2.

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Do you have experience as an employed occasional teacher in Canada?</th>
<th>Did you work as a full-time teacher for a school in Canada prior to teaching abroad?</th>
<th>Do you have any prior experience as an occasional or full-time teacher in a school outside of Canada?</th>
<th>Do you have any prior experience as an occasional or full-time teacher at any other international schools?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>Occasional 9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Full-Time 33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition, of the nine participants that identified as having either occasional or full-time teaching experience in other international schools prior to their current employment, the majority
had experience working in only one (56%) or two (33%) other international schools located in countries such as the United Kingdom, China, South Korea, Thailand, Mexico and Costa Rica (SQ12-13). These participants also reported that 44% had used a Canadian curriculum in their previous international school placements within the various countries (SQ14).

Interview Candidates

In order to explore the phenomenon of teacher turnover and retention in greater detail, seven candidates from multiple international schools were chosen to participate in an individual interview. All survey participants had the opportunity to submit a request to participate in an individual interview at the conclusion of their survey responses. Thus, the interview candidates for this study were all part of the survey participants reported above. Interviews occurred with Jennifer, Josh, Marvin, Alex, Georgia, Mackenzie and Sophia.

Interview participants were chosen based on differences in years of teaching experience and teachable subject areas in the hopes of representing varied experiences and perspectives. Each interview participant represented a different number of years of completed full-time teaching experience between one and five years, and each participant had varied teaching experience across multiple subject areas including English, Fine Arts and Music, Physical Education, History, Sciences, Mathematics and Technologies. All teachers’ names are pseudonyms and any reference to personal or workplace identity has been removed from the study. In the presentation of data below, I use direct quotations and summarized themes discussed from participants’ interviews along with the findings from the survey participants.

Research Findings

Below I share the research findings according to the responses provided by survey and interview participants. Included are sections on participants’ motivations for working abroad,
responses based on the three research questions I set out to answer, and a section on advice from current international early-career teachers to those just joining the profession. Subthemes were created for each emergent theme and are listed in the table below in the order that they appear within this chapter.

Table 3

*Emergent themes and subthemes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Emergent themes</strong></th>
<th><strong>Subthemes</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1. Participants’ motivations for working in China                                | 1. Employment opportunities and ability to save money  
  2. Sense of adventure, challenge and desire to travel  
  3. Workplace choices and level of preparedness |
| 2. Challenges and barriers that cause turnover in China                           | 1. Challenges with acculturation  
  2. Seeing the job as a temporary position  
  3. Differences in expectations versus reality  
  4. Lack of desired professional growth  
  5. Poor school conditions  
  6. Lack of/ineffective formalized support programs |
| 3. Existing supports to overcome challenges and barriers associated with turnover in China | 1. Positive informal support systems and relationships  
  2. Effective professional development and collaborative communities  
  3. Effective formalized support programs |
| 4. Potential supports to increase teacher retention in China                       | 1. Increased collaboration and teacher autonomy  
  2. Creating more formalized and effective support programs  
  3. Increased opportunities for teacher growth, leadership and professional development.  
  4. Increased honesty, transparency and pre-arrival information |
| 5. Advice from teachers to teachers                                               | 1. Be adaptable to the experience  
  2. Maintain a balanced lifestyle  
  3. Use existing networks |

Sections include various types of data to help show the findings reported by participants and may include descriptive statistics drawn from the surveys, tables, excerpts from the survey’s open-ended responses and summaries of themes or verbatim quotes collected from the interviews.
Participants’ Motivations for Working in China

One of the themes that emerged from survey and interview findings was the reasonings why participants chose to work in China. Following the gathering of demographic details, participants were asked about their motivations for working abroad. Participants were given a multiple-choice question with the option of choosing from 18 set answers or providing their own answer as to why they chose to work in an international school in China (SQ28). Their answers are represented in the table below:

Table 4

*Top and least cited factors for working in China*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Top factors</th>
<th>Least cited factors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ability to save money</td>
<td>More freedoms-political, religious, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desire to travel abroad (ex.</td>
<td>Offered dream job</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Countries other than China)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take a job opportunity</td>
<td>Better economic stability in host country</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense of adventure/challenge</td>
<td>Desired length of opportunity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desire to visit China/experience</td>
<td>Desired location of opportunity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese culture</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited jobs in home country</td>
<td>Desire to expand your network (ex. Personal, professional, etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competitive salary</td>
<td>Opportunities for career growth (ex. Promotions, training, certifications, etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Personal/professional development (ex. Skills, traits, abilities, etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Good job benefits (ex. Time off, medical/dental/health care, bonuses, etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gain experience to apply to jobs in home country</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Desire to learn a new language</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

No participants provided any other reasons for choosing to work abroad apart from those that were listed in the multiple-choice section. Many of the interview candidates helped to elaborate
on the most popular reasons for working in China in their individual interviews, including employment opportunities, ability to save money, sense of adventure and challenge, and desire to travel. Although not asked of participants, many interviewees also described why they were motivated to choose their current workplace. These factors are described in the sections below.

**Employment opportunities and ability to save money.** Alex, Josh, Mackenzie and Marvin referenced the employment opportunities in their interviews. Mackenzie began telling his story by discussing his choice to go abroad after obtaining his Teacher’s College degree. Thinking back Mackenzie recalled, “I didn’t want to let myself sit too long after finishing my placement so I wanted to try and see right away if it was a profession that I was interested in and passionate about pursuing” (2:53) and “there were not many teaching positions available in Canada at the time, so I followed the opportunity to get my own classroom” (0:34). Alex, who had been working as an occasional teacher in Canada prior to working abroad, also desired her own full-time classroom. About achieving her goal, she said, “China did seem like a unique and interesting experience for sure, but it was mostly just about getting teaching experience, moving away from home and having that opportunity to try something that would open up some different experiences” (Alex, 3:48). Josh and Marvin echoed similar themes in their individual interviews when they discussed the limited number of teaching positions in Canada and the need to make living wages. Marvin noted, “the reality is people go where there’s a need to fill the need. There was a demand for teachers in China” (1:03:59) and “at the time you didn’t need any teaching experience to get a job in China. So that was a big factor” (0:36). Further to the demand and the opportunity for teachers to gain employment in their profession, according to Josh, one of the biggest draws to working in China is the financial benefits. “The cost of living is cheap, and you can pay off debt, student loans, things like that, so people are keen to make money” (Josh,
He believed that the ability to earn full-time wages immediately after graduating was a large draw for many early-career teachers thinking of teaching in China.

**Sense of adventure, challenge and desire to travel.** Apart from employment opportunities, Jennifer, Sophia, Marvin and Josh discussed being drawn to China by the sense of adventure, travel and challenge that presented itself by going abroad. Jennifer was a newly certified teacher at the beginning of her international teaching experience. During her interview, she recalled her feelings as she finished university, worked a summer job and thought about her future pathway. Unlike what she saw many of her friends and coworkers doing, she stated, “I didn’t have that desire to really start putting down roots in a community, so I was like I’m ready to go abroad and have an adventure” (Jennifer, 0:49). Similarly, Marvin, who had been working in a field outside of education after graduation, had known for years that he wanted to live in a country other than Canada but had never taken the chance previously. For him, his teaching degree gave him a chance to chase his dream and move abroad. Opposite to Jennifer and Marvin, Josh and Sophia had each already graduated more than a year prior and had entered the education profession and gained some teaching experience in other countries. Josh had a full year of teaching experience working at an English as a Second Language school (ESL) in Korea. He knew he wanted to continue teaching in Asia while travelling and seeing the world. He described the experience as a fun challenge and talked about how he looked forward to learning about a new cultural system and figuring out how he fit into it. Similarly, for Sophia, who had been working at a school in the United States, the opportunity to travel to China helped her to achieve her goal of experiencing something new beyond her lived experiences of Western cultures. Of the opportunity she stated:
I actually had an offer to teach in London at an IB school but I turned that down because, upon thinking about the differences between England and China, I felt that China was going to give me more of that cultural diversity that I wanted that I was looking for. So I really wanted to be pushed out of my comfort zone and I figured England is very similar to Canada so culturally speaking I wasn’t going to be challenged from that angle and I knew China was going to give me all that and more. (Sophia, 1:36)

Despite varied motivations, each candidate felt that the opportunity to teach abroad in China presented them with the chance to achieve their individual goals.

**Workplace choices and levels of preparedness.** Although not asked in the survey, in almost all interviews the participants went beyond discussing why they chose to work abroad and described how or why they were drawn to the school that they chose to work for and how they became prepared to work in China. For many, a large part of their choice was made based on their own personal relationships. For Georgia, the connection was a coworker she had met while working at another international school in England. Describing how she had not enjoyed her experience in England, Georgia stated, “one of the coworkers that I was working with who was also Canadian at my school said she was going to go work in China…and I said sure I’ll tag along, and I’m here (0:24). Her previous educational experience and her personal connection made her feel more comfortable to pursue work in Asia. For Josh, Mackenzie and Marvin, they gathered information from personal friends, family members and networking connections prior to making their workplace decisions. Mackenzie and Josh both knew multiple people from their time in teacher’s colleges who had already left Canada to work abroad and helped provide them with information. About his fellow graduate peers, Josh said, “they seemed to have pretty good experiences or good things to say about working abroad at this school” (0:54) while Mackenzie
said that their advice “really made me rest assured that I was coming to a nice work environment and they also told me it was a great opportunity” (2:22). Similarly speaking to this in his interview, Marvin stated, “people from Canada were telling me that they heard it was a good place to work for, and I had a good friend from high school who also worked there, so I had many first hand perspectives on the school” (1:36). These personal relationships and the first-hand depictions of what each workplace was like were large influencers in each candidate’s workplace location choices.

Other than personal connections, five of the seven interviewees also stated that part of the reason they chose their current workplace was because of the overall reputation of the school, as well the opportunities that some schools provided. In his interview when discussing his chosen workplace, Josh said “it seemed to have a solid system, it seemed to be established, it used a Canadian curriculum, it seemed liked a known quantity” (1:57). Alex too stated that she chose to work for her organization because on top of a decent compensation package it seemed to be “the most reputable looking organization with connections to Canada” (3:48). Sophia, who had tried to find information on the school online but was unable to find the exact information she was looking for, took a leap of faith on her chosen workplace. She stated, “even if I didn’t find the answers that I was looking for on the website, it’s like, okay my university is promoting this school, it must have some degree of a good reputation” (Sophia, 4:20). While Josh, Alex and Sophia were drawn in by the overall depiction of the school, Georgia had a more focused vision of what she was looking for in a workplace in terms of its reputation. When asked why she and her friend chose their institution, she stated, “we decided on the school because they had the best art program” (1:05). As Fine Arts was one of Georgia’s teachable subject areas, she hoped to get opportunities to work within her field at the school. Aside from the school’s reputation, Marvin
also discussed feeling excited about the unique opportunity to be promoted quickly to an administrative level and cited it as one of the big reasons why he chose his workplace. “I was told that this is a school where you could grow into being a vice principal, [or] a principal” (Marvin, 1:03:59). Thinking back on his comparison of different international schools that were recruiting him, Marvin said that not all schools he considered provided growth opportunities, which also contributed to his overall decision.

In addition to why they chose their current workplaces, some interview participants described how they learned information about their schools and where that information came from. Most said information came to them not only from their own personal connections, but also from school recruitment agents, job fairs, employees of the workplace or from independent research. Marvin reached out to education professionals that had experience working abroad and gathered a list of questions that they felt would be helpful for him to ask recruiters. He described his current workplace’s recruitment process as the best out of all the school he looked at, saying “I was looking at ten schools and ten schools were actively recruiting me and so they were the one that I thought were the most professional and gave me the most answers” (Marvin, 1:36). In addition to his personal motivations, Marvin’s extensive personal research along with the school’s recruiters helped him choose his current workplace. Like Marvin, Sophia also discussed the recruitment process and said their information was influential in her workplace decision:

So for me the people recruiting, or I guess their insights, had a very big impact on my decision because they’re the ones I was in constant communication with…So with the fact that my university was supporting it and the feedback I was getting from the recruiters and whatever information I found online, all together I took that holistically
and said okay I’m willing to take this chance of going abroad to this particular school.

(3:22-4:20)

Regardless of who they spoke to or how they made the decision to work abroad and work at their chosen schools, all seven interview candidates said their initial feelings about accepting their contracts, as well as on arrival to China and their workplaces, were those of excitement.

**Challenges and Barriers that Cause Turnover in China**

This section relates to the first guiding question of this research: what are early-career teachers’ perceptions of the challenges and barriers that cause turnover in international schools in China? Although one decisive factor that immediately caused teachers to make a turnover decision was not discerned from the research, many common factors that appeared to influence the turnover decisions of early-career Canadian-certified teachers in international schools in China that use a Canadian curriculum continuously recurred in both data collection methods. These subthemes included: (a) challenges with acculturation; (b) differences in expectations versus reality; (c) seeing the job as a temporary position; (d) lack of opportunities for professional growth; (e) poor school conditions; and, (f) lack of/ineffective formalized support programs.

**Challenges with acculturation.** The challenges with acculturation referred to the difficulties that were encountered or seen by participants based on the ability to adapt to cultural differences between their home countries and what they experienced living in a foreign country and/or working in an international school setting. On the survey, participants were asked if there were any factors outside of the working conditions noted in survey question 31 that they felt were influential in beginning teachers' turnover decisions in international schools in China (SQ34), as well as if they felt there were any factor unrelated to challenges or barriers that
influenced teachers’ turnover decisions (SQ35). 28% of participants (SQ34) and 42% of participants (SQ35) provided an open-ended response that discussed the challenges of adapting to elements of a new culture. Codes were created to highlight significant statements or words which related to this subtheme, and the most highly referenced codes were homesickness, feelings of disconnect from home comforts and traditions, language barriers, feelings of isolation, lack of sense of belonging, separation from family and friends and difficulty adapting to differences in cultural practices, policies or beliefs as potential contributing factors for teacher turnover decisions. Interviewees and open-ended survey responses helped to elaborate on some of the context related to many of these codes, and it was discovered that they were often discussed in relation to particular experiences that participants had. Therefore, these codes have been grouped into five categories which represented the main challenges that participants noted when discussing challenges with acculturation, including: (a) challenges transitioning to life and language of a new country; (b) challenges creating and maintaining relationships; (c) challenges related to location barriers; (e) challenges accessing support systems; and, (f) challenges adapting to differences in cultural practices, policies and beliefs.

Challenges transitioning to life and language of a new country. Homesickness, lack of sense of belonging and feelings of disconnect were often discussed by participants along with difficulties transitioning to life and language of a new country. Thinking on his last few years in China, Josh said the country is a “very interesting place and the more you learn, the more you realize you don't understand it…you want to figure out how it works but at the same time it can be extremely frustrating and challenging to do so” (1:03:58). Specific challenges cited by participants in both data collection methods included learning to do and feeling comfortable completing daily life processes such as: buying groceries, going to dinner, negotiating
apartments, finding Western comforts, using the currency, doing banking, paying bills, driving, taking public transportation and doing activities. Josh gave an example of how these tasks might appear more difficult due to different ways of doing things between Chinese and Western cultures, language barriers and having to rely on dual-language speakers for assistance. Of visiting the post office, Josh said, a local Chinese person or employee at the school “might give you the address of the post office you're supposed to pay your water bill at…but how do you do it? It's completely different. And what do you say and things like that?” (Josh, 40:53). Josh concluded that these situations can be discomforting for some, especially in cases where the individual felt alone during the cultural transition or did not know where to seek help.

One survey participant wrote that part of the problem in some workplaces is that there is “no support in building Mandarin language skills” (SQ35), which left people to figure out how to overcome obstacles on their own in cases where there was no language support. Some participants felt that continuous frustrations or discomforts such as these could sometimes lead to feelings of negativity or even intolerance of the new culture based on their comparisons between the two very different home and host cultures. Discussing this Marvin stated, “China is a 1.4-billion-person country and it’s a country and culture that’s been around for thousands of years. Canada is 150 years old and most people come from Canada and some are really quick to judge China” (23:17) because of the differences. One survey participant cited that this could be problematic if there is a “lack of preparation or explanation of how life and our school are different from back home” (SQ34). Regarding cases where teachers felt overwhelmed by the acculturation process or had lowered flexibility towards change, Mackenzie said he has “seen many teachers leave just because they miss the amenities of back home” (53:26). Although neither Sophia nor Georgia felt much culture shock which they attributed to their prior
international experience, both felt new teachers especially who had never lived in another country could become overwhelmed by the cultural transition without support.

**Challenges creating and maintaining relationships.** Other than participating in daily life processes, some participants also discussed how acculturation within China posed challenges when creating relationships which could result in an individual’s feelings of a lowered sense of belonging and isolation and lead to turnover decisions. Many participants discussed how opportunities to make relationships often related to the size of the staff at their workplace, location of home and workplace within China and the number of foreign expats living within their local community. In some cases, these challenges were discussed surrounding personal relationships and how opportunities to create them were limited due to the language barriers. “Being in China can be isolating if you do not speak the native language [as] your only community are your coworkers” (Survey participant, SQ35). Josh experienced this and discussing the relationships with his coworkers, he said, “you kind of have to like them and if you don't, then that's when you get isolated” (37:27). Some felt that these feelings of isolation could also become exaggerated due to the separation from family and friends in their home country. Beyond the limitations of creating social relationships outside of work due to the language barriers, Georgia also discussed how the social relationships that are formed within the workplace can be either positive or negative. The “people you work with are the people you hang out with, are the people you are friends with and who are pretty much your family while you’re here whether or not you would have them as friends in another situation” (Georgia, 8:59). Reflecting on her first year in China, Georgia, who described herself as introverted, remembered feeling as if she fell into the wrong social group for her personality. She described feeling
pressured to take part in social events outside of her comfort zone but took part in them in order to feel like she was part of a community rather than risk feeling alone in a new country.

In addition to feelings of isolation in cases where individuals did not connect with members of their workplace and or felt they experienced a lack of appropriate social relationships, Georgia and Jennifer also discussed how the unique social relationships formed between workplace colleagues could affect teachers’ perceptions of each other professionally. Of the interactions with her colleagues, Jennifer for example said:

If you decide to go have fun or a lot of fun on Friday night, feel free to do so, but when I see that and you’re maybe like my principal or another teacher, it can be hard for me to then see them on Monday morning in a professional manner when I still remember what happened last Friday. And we have to do that because there's only 100 of us that speak English in our city so we're going to work together and play together. (14:14)

Although Jennifer argued these perceptions are not always negative, she felt that it brought an interesting aspect to the relationships formed between members in her teaching community and could affect how teachers viewed their fellow teachers and leaders in the workplace. In addition to perceptions of work colleagues formed outside of schools, some participants also described the challenges of creating professional relationships in the workplace. Some believed that there may be a “lack of cultural connection or understanding with students or Chinese staff” (Survey participant, SQ34) in places where both Canadian and Chinese citizens were employed. As an example, Alex discussed how most of the maintenance, tech, finance and support staff within her workplace were Chinese and did not speak English. Due to this, she often had to use translators or liaisons when she needed support from these departments, making it difficult to establish working relationships and making school processes more time consuming. Mackenzie also
discussed how he felt that Canadian and Chinese employees sometimes held different ideals or standards regarding education, which could cause misunderstandings in the workplace. Beyond relationships with staff, Alex also discussed how being a foreigner from a country that is on a different level on the development scale and not being accustomed to Chinese cultural norms and processes can affect one’s relationship with staff and students. “Sometimes teachers can expect students to be able to know or to be able to do things, or sometimes puts the expectation that they won’t be able to do things which they can know or do” (Alex, 33:46). Alex and Mackenzie felt that constant humility, growth and flexibility on behalf of teachers were needed to navigate these barriers.

**Challenges related to location barriers.** Apart from workplace relationships and language barriers, some participants discussed how the location barriers and turnover of international teachers could cause feelings of isolation or of lack of belonging. Although Marvin worked in a more urban location, he felt negative feelings could arise “if you live very far away from stuff and it’s hard to get to things and say you have a lesser quality of social life because there are not many places to go” (1:03:59). Josh, who had worked at two international schools in different parts of China, was able to provide a further example on how location and school size might affect relationships and cause feelings of isolation. On this matter he said:

In the previous city I worked in for example, there was more staff members, so there was a lot of people you could you could talk to, you can hang out with and people that have been there for a while, so you have a much larger support to draw from and then you can also go out and you can meet other people, new friends and things like that, so it's not just work friends all the time. Now at the school I'm currently at, it has a smaller staff and we are located outside of the main city...You do feel isolated, not just from Canada, but
from even the heart of city so you're kind of in the back waters country town where there isn't any Western food, there's no English translations, there's nothing at all. (Josh, 37:27)

Josh felt that working in an isolated community could lead people to feel like they were on their own, while opposite to this, both he and Mackenzie described how they felt working in a larger school with a large and supportive staff could contribute to lowered feelings of cultural adaptation. Based on survey findings, 33% of participants cited they worked in a large city, 33% in a small city, 30% in a town or village and 5% in a rural area (SQ20). Another potential reason for poor social relationships was cited by Jennifer who said that, in addition to problems of location and language barriers, international communities are often not static and consistent.

Discussing how people come and go more frequently than in country of origin schools or communities, she said although this can be exciting for some, it often made it hard to develop many lasting relationships. “We’ll be friends for a year, we’ll date for a little bit, but then you're going to leave and your friends are going to leave” (Jennifer, 49:52). Jennifer also described how this ever-changing cycle of people in the workplace could take a toll on teachers’ emotional health while living abroad when they connected with someone only to have that lasting relationship vanish when the individual left. Jennifer herself described not expecting this aspect to be so hard, saying:

   You really get deep really quickly with people here and have a true relationship because you don't have a lot of other options and you understand the stresses and the struggles of the school and the troubles of the students and that is a very deep connecting point for relationship. (50:24)

Georgia also thought that the dynamic nature of people in international schools and the continuously changing social relationships were not only influenced by turnover decisions but
might also play a role in people’s turnover or retention decisions. “What I’ve noticed being here in my fourth year now is that people generally stay with their friends or if their friends are leaving, they’re more likely to leave than stay on their own” (Georgia, 9:37) the following year. Georgia felt that social relationships were integral to individuals’ levels of comfort and sense of belonging in a foreign community.

**Challenges accessing support systems.** Other factors cited by participants regarding challenges with the acculturation process were difficulty accessing similar support systems that were present in Canada or their home countries. One recurring discussion was the lack of mental and physical health supports at the school and country level. Some felt the lack of access to these support systems was problematic for international schools, discussing poor mental health along with homesickness, lack of sense of belonging and lowered personal resilience when faced with difficulties. Alex believed that mental health was important for teachers because it was influenced by everything around them while living in a foreign community. When “you aren’t at home and dealing with culture shock and you don’t feel comfortable, or if you have this huge workload that you don’t know how to deal with…it all connects back to that mental health piece” (Alex, 45:36). Jennifer also described how mental health can be affected by not only the shift in country of residence, but also by loss of connections:

I think coming to China and being alone, yes there's a community but you're also like alone in this country because you don't have that support, that background, that familial familiar like nest of home life, and then being alone you kind of are confronted with like a lot of, okay, what do I really believe, what do I really want to do and how do I really want to act when I don’t have my friends and my family influencing me? And that can be a really great thing, it can also be kind of scary thing. (3:57)
At the country level, Marvin believed that part of the problem was attributed to the stigma surrounding mental health and special needs still present in China, stating that “mental health isn’t a big topic here” (1:15:24). When asked about mental health and who teachers could turn to, Marvin continued, in China “there really isn’t someone who swears confidentiality, who is a mental health professional and who is supporting the staff…I am not familiar with anyone talking about counselling or counsellors” (1:19:29). At the school level, both Georgia and Alex admitted that there have been no mental health initiatives at their schools for teachers, although there have been some sessions on student mental health. “There's nothing, which especially for people moving to a new country and this is the first country they’ve moved to, just general homesickness you would expect as a normal mandated program that they would have” (Georgia, 47:19). In the absence of formal mental health initiatives, some more experienced teachers felt that they had to take on the role of a mental health professional for beginning teachers. Georgia experienced this when she took on the role of a mentor for two first-year teachers. Remembering her feelings of frustration she said, “I don't have any qualifications to be doing any of that, to be giving any advice, but I've had to take that role with both of my mentees because they need that and there is no one here” (49:25) to fill that role. Physical health amenities, such as sexual health services, were also described by some participants as hard to access.

**Challenges adapting to differences in cultural practices, policies and beliefs.** In relation to differences in cultural practices, policies or beliefs, throughout the findings, responses commonly surrounded feelings of restriction when trying to incorporate Western practices and traditions within schools. Some teachers for example discussed how, despite working at an international school which used a Canadian curriculum, teachers were not given time off to celebrate Western holidays such as Christmas or Thanksgiving as they were not commonly
celebrated traditions in Chinese culture, or time off was not provided by their workplace for these purposes. In other cases, some described how holidays or traditions were unable to be celebrated within schools. Marvin for example described how a Halloween dance was cancelled as a result of government education policies. Although teachers did not describe these restrictions as affecting their teaching, many discussed feeling homesickness, lack of belonging and separation from friends and family more strongly during these times. Beyond celebrating cultural traditions, some participants felt cultural differences in policies or practices were sometimes felt within their schools and classrooms. Marvin for instance described a case where another teacher tried to create a gay-straight alliance in his international school, a group which has been formed in some Canadian schools. Of the experience he said the teacher was “told full stop no it’s not going to happen, and that teacher ended up leaving” (Marvin, 1:22:32). Although the other teacher left, Marvin did not take the circumstance personally. Reflecting on the situation he continued by saying:

You got to understand that we’re in China and things happen different here. You know, it’s not like Canada where we have the blending of the cultures, we’re still in China. And again, we don’t have the same history, we don’t have the same political system, we don’t have a lot of these other factors. So yeah, some things have happened here that people are disappointed about and they feel like they can’t do anything about it. But I do think that it’s somewhat where culture comes in where certain things just don’t happen here because it’s just not the way it is. (Marvin, 1:22:32)

Although teachers may understand the differences in political systems and what that might mean for their teaching, Josh, who experienced circumstances where he was unable use certain resources within his classroom due to differences in political systems, felt that over time
limitations such as these might strain teachers and cause frustrations surrounding their teaching practices. He said, when teachers start finding they continuously cannot do things, they “start questioning perhaps the efficacy of how effective what you're doing and are you doing a true international education, are you active in Canadian curriculum? And there's issues with that” (24:47). Josh believed that over time the growing levels of frustration surrounding political or cultural differences may sometimes cause teachers to return to Canada or look for teaching opportunities in countries more politically similar to Canada.

Seeing the job as a temporary position. Throughout the survey and interview processes, some teachers described turnover decisions in relation to seeing international teaching jobs in China as temporary positions. This was first seen in Survey question 26 when participants were asked if they had a predetermined plan of how many years they originally wanted to teach at an international school in China, to which 37% answered yes and 63% answered no. Of the 16 candidates that answered yes, they were then asked how many years they had planned to work in an international school in China (SQ27). The findings are shown in the table below, to which approximately half of the participants who answered yes cited that one to two years was their predetermined plan.

Table 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of years</th>
<th>Percentage of responses</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Discussing this topic in their open-ended response on what other challenges or barriers might be influential to teacher turnover decisions, one survey participant described international teaching in China and wrote, “for many it’s a short-term goal” (SQ34). Similarly, Marvin also discussed this theme in his individual interview when discussing potential turnover factors and said, “I’ve talked to some other teachers and they’ve just said, you know what, I thought I was going to be here for two years and I was here for five or six so I’m done. My time here is done” (47:24).

Although Survey questions 26 and 27 allowed for insights into what teachers’ original plans were prior to beginning their current international work experience, they did not show the intentions of those who had answered no or whether the intentions of those who said yes remained the same after they began working. Therefore, participants were then asked if they thought they would continue working at their current international school the next year (SQ29), as well as what their future goals were once they completed working for their current workplace whether that be the following year or in the future (SQ30). Results are shown in the table below.

Table 6

*Findings on teacher intentions*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Plan to continue working at current international school next year</th>
<th>Future goals</th>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Definitely yes</td>
<td>Return to Canada/home country to teach</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Probably yes</td>
<td>Work at another international school outside Canada</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Might or might not</td>
<td>Leave teaching and seek other employment in education</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Probably not</td>
<td>Leave teaching altogether and seek employment outside education</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definitely not</td>
<td>Return to school</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Work at current international school long-term</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unsure at current time</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Analysis of individual interview responses and open-ended survey responses revealed potential motivations behind the above results.

**Financial factors.** One common factor that was continuously cited as a reason for returning to Canada or their home country to teach was financial factors. In his individual interview Marvin described the financial aspect in relation to recent university or college graduates:

The cost of living in China is much lower for the most part which means they can save more money [and] put it down on their student debt which a lot of us have, which is part of the reason why we come out here, a big reason why we come out here. So once they financially come to a certain threshold then that might be a reason to go back. (50:57)

Another financial factor discussed by teachers was building a retirement fund. In relation to this Marvin said, “when we’re talking about international teaching, we have to compare it to local teaching and in every [Canadian] province if you get hired as a full-time teacher you are attached to a pension” (47:24). Georgia also discussed pension and described it as one factor which contributed towards her own leaving decision from her workplace, stating, “we don't get a pension and, me now getting older, that’s another reason that I don't wish to stay here because I'm not paying into my pension and I know that my employer won’t pay into my pension” (1:11:38).

Beyond financial factors, some teachers described seeing international employment opportunities in China as stepping-stones to other desired prospects. Mackenzie for example said he’s seen many teachers leave when job opportunities present themselves in their home countries which may not have been available at the time they left. “A lot of teachers thinking it's just a temporary thing and it's for travel and to get experience. And then when something’s available to them they jump on it and go back home” (Mackenzie, 46:05). Two survey participants also wrote
about job related reasons for some viewing international teaching jobs in China as temporary positions, saying that some may simply have a “long-term goal of working as a teacher in Canada” and “come here for a short time but then realize they need to get their life started at home” (SQ35). Thinking more specifically of job opportunities between schools, Mackenzie also described how some people might enjoy working internationally but simply move between different schools in China or to schools in other countries for a variety of reasons:

There’s Canadian programs at other international schools and I’ve seen lots of teachers join those programs, so could be for a few things to do related with teaching but also I think they find a salary that's better or a benefit where maybe they’re paying for their living and they just with a little more experience and a little more knowledge of the country, find other opportunities here and then jump on those opportunities. (46:05)

Some survey respondents as well as Mackenzie cited level of comfort within the culture, job benefits, school sizes and work conditions within individual workplaces as possible factors responsible for teachers’ seeking work at different international institutions.

**Relationships.** Relationships also appeared to be another factor based on some participants’ perspectives for why international work opportunities might be viewed with a timeline. Discussing these ideas one survey participant wrote that “living away from home or family for a long time is not for many” (SQ34), and Marvin stated that he felt many people eventually returned home to be closer to their families. In addition to families, some participants also talked about dating and marriage. Marvin for example believed these factors would affect peoples’ turnover decisions, especially in schools with younger staffs. Of dating Marvin said, “if you’re single working internationally it’s great, if you’re in a relationship with someone you work with that’s great, but what happens when both of you want to do something different? Then
you leave and you leave together” (47:24). Marvin also described how he believed some teachers returned to their countries of origin to pursue marriage, saying “it’s a very standard practice in our culture to try to get married between the 25-35 range so I do think that the pull factor is maybe because you get pressure from your family to get married” (47:24). Some participants also discussed the potential for starting and supporting families in relation to the temporary nature of experiences. One survey participant respondent wrote that at their workplace there were “no benefits for pregnant women. Men receive three days paid leave; women get zero. This is why every pregnant staff leaves; no hope for young families to stay and grow their families” (SQ35). Another survey participant cited frustrations that tuition for their children was not covered by their workplace, although they had seen it provided as a benefit by other international schools (SQ35). They felt that seeking a workplace which has specific benefits which an individual is looking for at that time in their life could be a factor that causes teachers to return to their country or origin or seek employment in another international school.

**Differences in expectations versus reality.** This category referred to the expectations that participants had before they left their home country to the realities they experienced after they arrived in China. Some participants discussed feeling disillusioned between what they were told prior to leaving and what they experienced upon arrival by their workplaces or workplace representatives and cited frustrations with these experiences as potential factors in teacher turnover decisions. Commonly discussed factors from both survey and interview respondents included: a) differences in contractual commitments; b) differences in description of the job or life in China; and, c) differences in expected English abilities of students.

**Differences in contractual commitments.** In relation to differences in contractual commitments, some teachers cited feelings of frustration due to changes in teaching assignments,
as well as being asked to teach outside of their certified teachable subjects after their arrival in China. During her interview, Georgia, who had expected to teach all science courses based on what she had been told by her workplace before her arrival, described feeling surprised, nervous and ill-prepared when she was told she would be required to teach some math courses after landing in China, despite not being certified to teach math. Sophia had a similar experience and remembered feeling shocked when she found out she would be teaching English. Remembering the surprise when she first arrived at her school, Sophia said, “I was welcomed by the English department and I thought that wasn't very professional. I didn't really appreciate that because my expectations were, I was hired as a social studies/humanities teacher” (6:01). Based on survey findings, 54% of teachers who responded cited teaching fully within their certified subject area, while 37% taught some courses and 9% taught no courses in their certified subject area (SQ24).

Although Mackenzie ended up teaching what he was contractually promised, he discussed seeing these changes happen to other teachers and described it as a negative occurrence that can create rifts between leaders and teachers within schools, especially if teachers “come in with an expectation that this is how it's going to be and this is how [they have] spent the last two weeks preparing to come here” (32:35). Many felt that changing assignments limited their ability to be fully prepared for their professional duties. Discussing her ability to learn about and prepare for her math courses, Georgia stated, if given advanced notice “I would have been able to prepare myself to come and teach except I had to do that within three days” (12:58) of school starting. Many described this as stressful, especially as new teachers who are beginning to learn how to prepare and manage their time in the education profession while also managing a cultural transition.
Some interview candidates went on to elaborate on why expectations and realities sometimes differ between pre and post arrival for international teaching jobs. Regarding contractual differences to teaching assignments, both Mackenzie and Jennifer described the problem as complex and cited teacher turnover itself as part of the problem. Surrounding teacher turnover in international schools in China, Mackenzie said, there is significant “unpredictability of teachers arriving or leaving and the average turnover [is] a little higher than maybe a public-school back home [in Canada]” (35:54). Jennifer also described how turnover affected the remaining teachers, saying, “people come in and people are flowing, it's a dynamic process and because one person leaves, I may have to teach another class” (10:13) until another Canadian-certified teacher can be hired in their place. Some teachers also described obtaining a Chinese work visa as a difficult process and a potential factor for different arrival times of teachers throughout the school year, including lengthy waits for the arrival of new teachers in the cases of position re-hires due to teacher resignations.

**Differences in description of the job or life in China.** Another theme that emerged surrounding differences in expectations and reality was the recruitment process for international schools in China. Some participants described feeling that there might be a disconnect between the process that happens in Canada and what is experienced in China due to differences in what is told to them surrounding the job or life in China. When asked if Josh felt prepared upon arrival to China for example, chuckling he stated, “I definitely experienced some differences in what they told me and then what I received when I got on the other end” (3:42). Both he and Jennifer described the recruiter as a sort of salesperson, saying that to attract candidates to the possibility of working abroad, “they're going to go with the good stuff and then the other stuff maybe not so much” (Josh, 4:54). Josh for example experienced drastic differences surrounding what he was
told about rent costs in China before and after arrival and described feeling frustrated as it was not what he was prepared for. Another survey participant also experienced differences and said “the description of the school and location was not honest. Promise of a city-center and access to a lot, when in reality we are an hour away from the city-center” (SQ35). Describing why she thought differences like this sometimes happened, Jennifer described her belief that some recruiters might have former international education experience but may not have worked specifically for the school that they were then hiring for. She said because of this “the recruiter’s perspective is just a lot different from what it was actually going to be” (7:52) like, causing frustrations by teachers when they arrive and experience things that are different from what was told to them. Other examples cited by participants where they felt they experienced differences between what they were told either by recruiters or schools pre and post arrival in China included subject availability at schools, availability of course resources or pre-planned lessons, availability of on-campus housing and English levels of students.

**Differences in expected English abilities of students.** Some participants shared about being surprised by the low levels of English of their students (compared to the level that was described during the recruitment process) and feeling inadequately prepared or trained to fully teach in an English as a second language (ESL) setting. When Georgia was asked about her first impressions of her workplace, she commented on how different the levels of English were from her previous students in England who also attended an ESL school. Describing the difference in English ability and her expectations prior to arrival, Georgia stated:

> The level of English was not communicated at all. It was communicated that they were ESL students, that English is not their first language, but that they have to pass an exam to get in. My school in England was also a 60 percent ESL school so I came from a
background of ok, I will have some kids who know nothing but maybe that’s two or three and then the kids can generally understand the gist of what you’re saying. I came in teaching a grade ten class and I said hello and they didn’t understand me…That to me was a complete and utter shock and I had no idea how to deal with it because I’m not an ESL teacher. (14:13)

One possible reason for this shock was mentioned by Josh when he too discussed his first impressions of the school and the students. Describing his students, he said, “they were mostly all Chinese and that was I guess maybe one thing I wasn't really ready for because they do promote this international school kind of idea and so I was expecting a little bit more diversity” (Josh, 10:31). Beyond not feeling adequately trained to teach ESL, Georgia noted frustration with the expectation for teachers to deliver a fully Canadian curriculum to a primarily ESL audience and have them graduate at the same pace as Canadian students. “We are consistently told that everybody's an English teacher, you're all ESL teachers, but the expectation that's put on us is that you are teaching Canadian kids, which is not what we're doing” (Georgia, 25:36).

Georgia felt that being asked to teach ESL students the Canadian subject matter at its natural level and expecting them to pass at the same level as a Canadian student were unrealistic expectations for international workplaces in China.

**Lack of desired professional growth.** Another theme that emerged within survey and interview findings was dissatisfaction with personal professional growth in an international setting. This theme included discussion of a) the younger workforce and turnover culture in international schools and, b) limited professional development opportunities.

**Younger workforce and turnover culture in international schools.** Discussing potential factors for turnover decisions in China, many of the interview candidates discussed how personal
professional growth was impacted by the more professionally and demographically inexperienced nature of school staffs, as well as teacher turnover, in international schools. Before Jennifer arrived in China, she recalled how nervous she was to begin her career as a full-time teacher for the first time in an established school. She remembered thinking, the teachers will be “well experienced and know how they want to conduct their classroom in its professional pedagogically correct manner. And so, I was nervous to be like this new young teacher…Just how people would perceive me and my teaching styles” (Jennifer, 10:04). However, after she arrived and began working, Jennifer remembered her feelings changing from nervousness to surprise when she realized that most of the staff at her workplace were only in their first two years of teaching. She continued “at first I really was like, oh my gosh, all of these people are going to be senior teachers and I’ll learn so much and this is awesome. And I quickly found that that's not the case” (10:04). Josh too discussed the professional and demographic youthfulness of the staff within his workplace in China: “I definitely would say that the people that are willing to travel, to uproot and the ability to go somewhere are definitely younger recent graduates, so they tend to be inexperienced so to speak” (22:37). Survey findings showed that 88% of respondents identified as being in the 20-39-year age groups (SQ4), while at least 60% cited having no previous teaching experience, either as occasional or full-time teachers, prior to that gained at their current workplaces (SQ8-11).

Although Josh described enjoying the enthusiasm and ideas that new teachers bring and fresh graduates bring to the profession, he also discussed seeing a problematic side when working in schools with large numbers of beginning teachers for new teachers who wants to learn and grow professionally. Of this aspect Josh said:
When it comes to asking or seeking for seniority when it comes to a question or curriculum or anything like that you are talking to somebody that may only have a year extra experience than you… and so you do find a there's a lack of support sometimes, or you might even question who do I ask? I mean, there isn't anybody there…when it does come to finding that that experienced voice that can comment on something and can say no actually this is how education has changed or this is what I've done in my class three years ago, four years ago, ten years ago and this is what I'm doing now, then you don't have anybody to go to really. So sometimes it's like being in the wild west. You're on your own and you kind of figure it out from there. (21:13)

Marvin too described feeling that there was a limited number of people he could turn to to support his professional growth, saying, “I like to be around people who motivate me, who drive me to be better as a professional…and to be honest with you there are very few people who I’m inspired by in my workplace” (21:40). Josh felt this could be a factor unique to international schools and could be relevant to location due to China's development as a country. Of this he said, within China “they’re probably fairly newer schools and I guess in Europe they probably have more established international schools and maybe more experienced teachers there” (22:37). Others alluded to the fact that as younger persons tend to have less commitments tying them to one location, they are more likely to travel and seek opportunities outside of their country of origin during their youth, which in turn could result in younger workforces in international schools in China due to the sense of adventure.

Many of the interview participants also discussed how turnover itself related to the younger workforce and turnover cultures in international schools in China, especially in the area of school leadership, which they felt could hinder teachers’ personal and professional growth.
Since “turnover’s so high you end up with people who are fairly new in their teaching careers taking on leadership roles… all the department heads, all the student support liaisons, everyone is basically within the first four years of their career” (Alex, 30:21). Of the 43 survey respondents, 51% said they held positions of extra responsibility outside of teaching, such as in administration or department head roles, outside of teaching (SQ25), even though all participants were within having five years of completed full-time teaching experience.

Although many felt positively about the unique opportunities to move into administrative and leadership roles so early in their careers, some also questioned and cited feelings of concern about the growth for various reasons. From a beginning teacher’s perspective, Jennifer for example discussed how it is difficult to look at some of her leaders with the respect of being professional mentors and pedagogical leaders due to their lack of experience. “My department head has the same number of years teaching as me. Yes, he's older and he has really great ideas…but there is no one that is senior that I'm like oh I look to you as a mentor” (Jennifer, 10:04). Josh also noted that inexperienced higher-level administration pose problems within schools when they have the same number of years of experience as teachers: when “you realize that you perhaps are more grounded in what's going on it makes you lose faith in going to that support or those senior members when you realize that you are on your own because they don't know” (Josh, 44:41). In her workplace, Sophia also felt that some leaders were not properly experienced for their jobs but were placed in their positions because of the turnover in international schools in China. Giving the example of her department head she said, “he's not English trained, so he’s social studies trained heading an English department. So oftentimes I was asking academic related questions that I wasn't really getting really solid answers to” (Sophia, 45:55).
Beyond level of experience, Sophia also wondered about the motivations of those placed in leadership roles, describing how she did not feel like her department head adequately supported her during her first-year teaching in China. She inquired:

Does he really care about me? Is he going to have my back? Is he just here because he had no other choice because there was nobody else to take on this role? So, then it got me starting to think about administration, who's putting people into these roles and why...Are they in these roles to genuinely see the staff grow or just because there's no other person? (Sophia, 40:41)

Those that held positions of extra responsibility elaborated on some of these issues from a leadership point of view. Discussing their experiences and what they have seen because of the higher turnover rates, one survey participant wrote that “administrative turnover is huge” (SQ33) and Josh said because of this people tend to get “promoted fairly quickly. This can be good, but it can also be people are getting promoted when maybe they shouldn't be” (47:08). Josh for example said he became a department head after one year but ended up stepping down from the position because he felt that he was not able to do the job to the best of his ability with his level of experience. Georgia, who also held multiple leadership responsibilities with her school after four years as a teacher, felt professionally and mentally prepared for the added duties because she had worked in multiple education related fields, but felt the pace at which she was promoted would be too quick for an early-career teacher without any prior related educational workplace experience:

I am at the top of my teaching game that it would take me 15 years to get back home…However, if we go back five years and I would have progressed this quickly, no I would not have been ready and I think it would have been too soon. I would not have
been able to handle the pressure. I would not have been able to handle the stress of this job...I don't know if everybody who's in their position so quickly is going to be able to hold themselves accountable. (Georgia, 1:01:47-1:04:50)

Since Georgia felt that she had nothing left to aspire to professionally within her workplace, she admitted that she would be pursuing a new career outside of the teaching profession once the year concluded. In regard to how he became a department head, in his interview Mackenzie said, “the department head left each year so there was somebody new and now in my fourth year I am the head of a department” (22:53). When asked how he felt about taking on that leadership role as an early-career teacher, Mackenzie stated he believed he was ready but admitted that there were challenges. “I think there's a pretty big gray area about what a department head is supposed to be and what the roles and responsibilities of them are” (Mackenzie, 23:27). Similar to this, Georgia and Josh both discussed receiving no formal training or guidelines for their leadership roles. When the previous department head left, Josh admitted he received a small orientation to the role he would be taking on, but that everything beyond that was left up to him to learn or create on his own. “That sounds good maybe to begin with and then you realize that in order to make it what you want it requires tons of work and time while you're also teaching” (Josh, 48:03). Josh felt that although he set goals of what he wanted to achieve as a leader, he often had a lack of time to accomplish them because of his workload.

**Limited professional development opportunities.** Several participants discussed experiencing lack of or poor professional development in relation to teacher turnover. Survey participants were asked to describe how often they felt they experienced lack of or unsatisfactory professional development within their workplace (SQ31). They were also asked to describe their
overall satisfaction with the professional development that was offered (SQ36). Findings from the Likert scales are presented below.

Table 7

Findings on professional development

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How often teachers experience challenge at workplace</th>
<th>0 (Not at all)</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7 (Always)</th>
<th>Not available</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lack of/unsatisfactory professional development</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of satisfaction with support factor at workplace</th>
<th>0 (Not at all satisfied)</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7 (Extremely satisfied)</th>
<th>Not available/offered</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professional development</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training sessions (outside scheduled professional development)</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Analysis of these questions revealed that most participants felt they sometimes or often experienced lack of or unsatisfactory professional development and were somewhat satisfied with sessions that were offered, while most were not satisfied with training programs outside of scheduled professional development. Although only 14% of participants cited the lack of or unsatisfactory professional development itself as the most influential factor for teacher turnover decisions (SQ32), interview participants felt that the unsatisfactory or the lack of effective professional development became more influential to turnover decisions over time because of its relation to inadequately supporting personal professional growth. After four years in China for instance Josh described feeling like his teaching practices had become stagnant. “So, whatever I
learned in Teachers College was the best I got and now everything I’ve learned since then either hasn't actually met the same standards as Teacher’s College or just wasn't even there” (Josh, 1:01:00). One of the areas that teachers including Josh cited as a frustration was not having professional development that was relevant for an international classroom. Many of the professional development sessions have been “hard to apply in our school or maybe is sometimes lacking understanding of the day to day realities, being that you know, sometimes we’d have professional developments that were designed for people in Canada or for very different situations” (Alex, 55:31). Even in cases where schools brought in external experts from Canada, some teachers often thought that they were out of touch with the exact situation of international education, especially in China. “Some of the ideas that are being suggested, yes they're wonderful, but how do you apply them to a Chinese international classroom…how do we actually use them” (Josh, 54:22)? Because in some cases teachers noted that the resources they were being given were not relevant to an international setting or for their particular classes in China, some participants described seeing teachers get frustrated over time spent in professional development sessions. Mackenzie, who had experienced this within his workplace when new educational topics or curriculum were introduced in the past without experts on the subjects there to explain them, described these professional development sessions and said because some teachers may not feel they are relevant to them, they might perceive the sessions as “not worth their time, that they didn't learn from it or they thought maybe they could have learned more by using the time themselves, like online or doing some research” (Mackenzie, 57:49).

Another recurring theme that teachers cited in regard to professional development was the lack of networking opportunities. Marvin, for example, claimed that much of the professional development he had experienced at his workplace was isolated to within the school. “There’s
internal professional development but there really isn’t innovative professional development that happens outside these walls that I’m familiar with” (Marvin, 40:01). Later in his interview he returned to this point when talking about how there are multiple international schools in China and said, “I feel that we’re very isolated from each other and we don’t really share ideas” (1:08:02). Jennifer, too, described the lack of collaboration with other international schools in her interview. “There's another international school in the same town as ours and we’ll play soccer with them but I think it'd be unheard of to go to another school and maybe do a chemistry lab together or something” (Jennifer, 3:57). Mackenzie said that there have been online efforts for collaboration with other institutions or experts at his workplace, but believed they were not fully effective. “I think it's still a pretty new thing and people don't feel comfortable enough to have those conversations and really get into what they're doing online” (Mackenzie, 1:00:50). Josh also cited frustrations with getting experts from outside Canada to speak with teachers and described how there are often obstacles to its efficiency. It is “done through video feeds and things like that where questions can’t be answered as effectively, communication is limited. It's kind of like this is your two hours to talk to them through a video and then that's it” (Josh, 54:22). In addition to technological and time-based challenges, Mackenzie also felt that the feeling of talking online may be different than talking in person and lack the sense of connection that teachers are looking for in professional development sessions.

Turnover also was cited as a problem for professional development sessions. Alex stated that because teachers are continuously coming and going each year, “the problem is you have a lot of different teachers who are at very different stages of their teaching career who probably need different supports” (55:31). Alex felt this made it difficult for schools to create standardized professional developments that suited all teachers’ needs and caused frustrations for teachers
when they felt sessions did not support individual needs. Also discussing this aspect, Georgia described how often the professional development offered within her school was repetitive from year to year to ensure incoming first year teachers were provided with the basics:

It’s great for first year teachers, but for teachers in their second, third, fourth year having to sit through the exact same presentations when you know what work you need to be doing because you literally only have those five days from landing to having kids in your classroom…it is so incredibly frustrating to sit through the exact same workshop again when you have lesson planning and classroom prep to do. (36:44)

Other than turnover resulting in the need for similar professional development sessions each year, some participants also described how turnover resulted in less experienced teachers or educational leaders running professional development for the rest of the staff. About this, Josh felt that staff run professional development sessions had their pros and cons:

Some staff members are very, very keen in researching new fields and sharing that information and are very good at sharing it. But then also there's the other side where some staff members are maybe pressured into doing a professional development in a field or subject that they don't feel comfortable with that they don't know too much and we're just doing this because we have to kind of have professional development. (53:05)

Josh felt that although he experienced some very good professional development sessions, the majority were ineffectual because they were provided by staff members that did not have the experience or knowledge yet to provide an effective session. Jennifer also felt that high teacher turnover affected staff collaboration in her workplace which limited professional development. Of this she said, “we’re not really trying to build each other up to be better. And there have been efforts put in place to collaborate, for sure, but I don't see that collaboration in that effort to get
better” (Jennifer, 41:43). Jennifer described feeling that the lack of collaborative culture creates a survival mindset, and said, “as a younger teacher I want to become a better teacher and so I think I’m going to leave because of the opportunities not happening here” (41:43). In cases where the professional development session they needed was not offered through the school or supports were not offered through their department, some such as Sophia, discussed having to do their own personal professional development to gather needed skills for their professional practice.

**Poor school conditions.** Negative work conditions experienced within individual workplaces emerged as the theme based on responses regarding the most influential causes of turnover in international schools in China (SQ32). The top four responses included: a) heavy workloads (44%); b) lack of autonomy in school decisions (42%); c) lack of resources (37%); and, d) low levels of professional support (28%). These were further complemented with findings from interview data.

**Heavy workloads.** The first factor, heavy workloads, refers to the amount of work teachers felt they experienced on a regular basis in their workplaces. 44% of survey respondents felt that heavy workloads were one of the most influential factors in individual’s turnover decisions (SQ32). In addition to citing high amounts of work, similar factors that were cited by teachers in congruence with high workload levels included large amounts of take-home work, lack of time to complete daily tasks and too many demands unrelated to teaching. As these factors were previously discovered by reviewing the relevant literature prior to this study, in Survey question 31, all survey participants were asked to describe on a scale of zero to seven how often they felt they experienced each of these four factors at their workplace. Results are represented in the table below.
Figure 1.

*Teachers’ experiences with workload factors*

Based on the findings, approximately one third of teachers who responded in the survey felt that they always experienced heavy workloads, large amounts of take-home work and lack of time to complete daily tasks within their international workplaces. Interviewees elaborated on these factors in their personal interviews when they were asked individually what they thought were influential factors to turnover decisions. Mackenzie noted that his workload was very high in his first year of teaching and described it as almost unmanageable. He stated, “if I didn't have the support and I didn't have people helping me and voluntarily mentoring me and giving up some of their time to make me feel more comfortable I would say something would have had to give” (19:01). He used the expertise of those within his department to learn how to approach the large amounts of work and manage his time appropriately. While Mackenzie described himself as lucky to work in school that had a large and supportive staff for him to turn to for aid, Josh
believed that being a beginning teacher in an international school setting with a smaller number of experienced teachers could play a role in new teachers’ feelings of a heavy workload and long work hours and influence their turnover decisions:

As a new teacher you have limited contact with experienced teachers and the ones that have come through the system or the ones I have contacted, it seems like Canada or the public-school system is completely different. So, as a new teacher you kind of don't know if it's expected that you work until seven, nine o'clock every night. (Josh, 16:03)

Josh was of the opinion that without experienced mentor teachers to guide new teachers, new teachers might come to believe that a high workload and long hours are the standard expectation which could quickly lead to inability to keep up with teaching duties, a waning in passion for the teaching profession and eventually cause burnout. Even with department support Jennifer sometimes considered herself to be in survival mode at her workplace because she did not have enough time to complete daily tasks during work hours. Even “throughout my prep it’s like, I'm prepping, I'm sending out emails with questions about how the student’s doing. If a student needs to come and do a reassessment, I'm making those reassessment materials…and then marking that again” (Jennifer, 48:24). Some teachers, such as Alex, described having to take work home with her in order to meet deadlines and get prepared for their teaching duties. There “were a lot of very late nights, a lot of very early mornings and a lot of very long weekend days of marking essays and marking tests and planning for new units” (Alex, 20:40). One survey participant also wrote about this theme, declaring that there was “not enough time to decompress from the school day and work week” (Survey question 34) at their workplace.

Beyond adjusting as a beginning teacher and trying to balance time between professional and personal lives, some participants also were under the opinion that certain classroom
conditions were relevant factors in heavy workloads in an international setting. Josh for example commented that offering appropriate class sizes in international schools with large populations of non-native English speakers was vital for teachers to effectively deliver a Canadian curriculum. Describing his experience in the classroom at his workplace, he said:

I think that by Canadian standards they’re reasonably okay. They're around 25 students per class, which is fine, but again because of the atmosphere, because they’re English language learners that might be fine for like, I also teach geography, I have like 30 students, that's fine. I can get through that. That's no problem. But when you're teaching English 12 and you want students to be really grasping these things to get into university, I can't mark 60 English 12 essays quickly and to the level that I would say is effective…I can get through them, I can mark them, but am I actually doing the best I possibly can for the students and even for myself? So that can be the frustration…especially when they perhaps don't have the foundations to succeed. (Josh, 16:03-19:11)

When asked what kinds of foundations his students had coming into the school, Josh detailed how students came from varied learning centers such as Chinese public schools, as well as other international schools in China with different curriculums or programs and, from his experience, the students did not all have the same foundations for reading, writing and speaking in English that Canadian students living in Canada would have. Josh felt this further created challenges for teachers trying to teach communication-based courses while ensuring each student’s individual needs are met, which often resulted in higher workloads for teachers trying to bring students up to the appropriate level needed to succeed. Alex and Sophia also believed that standardized courses and tests were influential in the amount of workload that was experienced by teachers and put extra pressure on teachers. Sophia stated, “that is kind of out of your control because
that's done by government standards, so you don't really have a say in that, you have to just implement it and ensure that students are not falling short” (52:25). Alex noted that everything including assessments and how to mark were mandated through the entire department for standardized courses, making them feel more top heavy. She conveyed that this did not give her the “opportunity to become more creative or innovative with ways to mark effectively and efficiently” (23:59), whereas non-standardized courses allowed for more flexibility and allowing her to explore assessment styles suited for her personal and professional skillset.

Although not cited as a factor experienced by all teachers, some perceived that the demands outside of teaching also contributed to feelings of a high workload, with approximately 14% stating they always felt they experienced demands outside teaching, and 23% stating they sometimes experienced it (SQ31). Based on the findings, examples of demands outside of teaching in international schools might include leading extracurricular activities such as sports, clubs, or school productions, running tutorials for students outside of class times, running homerooms, or taking on extra teaching assignments beyond contract requirements. For Josh, limited free time was the result of days seeming to be fully school focused. “I would say a lot of people feel like they can't get on top of it, or it's just always there…So you think you've had time to finish your marking but now you're doing a speaking contest or something” (Josh, 31:40-33:07). Georgia too described the extra demands, and said although she enjoys running activities, she sometimes felt that the school leadership required too much. The problem is “when extra things are added to that extracurricular time and are mandatory that I'm doing on my own time on a weekend that I'm not then getting compensation back for” (Georgia, 21:00). Georgia stated she often felt like there was a lack of appreciation or no return for extra work put in by teachers within her workplace. Reflecting on his first year as a teacher, Mackenzie also discussed the
extra responsibilities placed on educators outside of teaching and described feeling overwhelmed by learning how to be a teacher at the same time as taking on extra duties. “I had students coming up to me and asking me can you help our club or can you coach hockey and you know as a new teacher that seems pretty overwhelming to add on to your plate” (Mackenzie, 11:42). He had to learn how to manage his time to accommodate the extra demands which required a shift in mentality after coming out of university and relying on more experienced teachers to help guide him on time management techniques.

Some teachers elaborated on why they thought extra demands such as these were placed on teachers. In some cases, teacher turnover was discussed in relation to extra demands outside of regular contract obligations. Some survey participants provided open-ended responses on this topic, with one participant citing being “asked to teach outside of area due to high teacher turnover” and “teaching an extra class for an extended time”, while another participant stated that in the five years they have worked for their school, “not once have we had enough teachers” and “the existing staff need to take on more classes, more responsibilities, bigger class sizes and we burn out” (SQ35). Also discussing extra demands on teachers, Josh described how he often felt like there was pressure within his workplace to take on extra demands outside of teaching:

I mean there's obviously pressure in Canada as well…but I feel like there'd be more of an understanding where oh your first year or two you can get into your teaching, that's your priority and then you pick up an extracurricular or you can co-teach an extracurricular with somebody, but the contracts usually state that you are kind of expected to partake in some sort of extracurricular. (33:58)

Although Josh described the pressure to take on extra duties as unspoken and was not sure if the pressure came from the contract obligations, the principal or the staff at his workplace, he argued
that more time and support should be given to new teachers in particular to adjust to the teaching profession before taking on extra duties.

**Lack of autonomy in school decisions.** The second most prominent factor related to workplace conditions cited by participants within this study was lack of autonomy, of which 42% of participants felt it was one of the most influential factors that contributed to turnover decisions in international schools in China (SQ32). Although most teachers who alluded to this topic noted that they had a good level of autonomy within their individual classrooms, some thought that they had “little control or say about what happens in the school” (Survey participant, SQ34), with 37% of respondents responding that they always experienced this within their workplace (SQ31).

Table 8

*Findings on lack of autonomy in workplace*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How often teachers experience challenge at workplace</th>
<th>0 (Not at all)</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7 (Always)</th>
<th>Not available</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lack of autonomy/control over what happens in the school</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>37%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

On the one hand, some teachers described feeling a lack of autonomy based on the type of administration or leadership within their schools and felt frustrated in cases where they experienced a negative hierarchy in the workplace, as well as when leadership took a top-down approach when making decisions that affected teachers. Josh gave the example of his idea of creating a writing center for students which he proposed to his administration with a detailed outline of how he perceived it would be most effective. When his writing center was created
within the school, Josh remembered feeling frustrated, saying “all of the meat of my proposal was completely ignored and it was just, we’ll take the title and now it's like oh, you are coming up with new ideas, you do have a say. But it's just kind of like an empty feeling” (1:16:11). Teachers also cited frustrations when they experienced administration or school leadership that did not listen, value, act on or support their opinions and ideas. Josh for example thought teachers got frustrated when they faced limitations from administration. Describing being a recent graduate from a teacher training program, he commented, “you've got all these great ideas and you want to sink your teeth into it…then you start finding you're getting told no we can't do this…and you don't feel like you have a voice and your opinions don't matter” (Josh, 1:11:13). Alex also said it can be frustrating for teachers when administration “effort is put into regulating policies that are not efficient for learning rather than concentrating on other policies that I think, in terms of what research shows or in terms of where education is heading, maybe would be more effective” (Alex, 26:23). Discussing bringing complaints to administration when she believed something needed to be addressed, Jennifer felt that there was limited follow through within her workplace. “I don’t know how much of what I say really, like it would just be heard, but I don’t know if action would be taken…I just don’t have faith anything would change” (Jennifer, 38:18).

Mackenzie felt that sometimes problems such as this were attributed to the principal or top leaderships’ limited powers within the private school system in cases where they were accountable to a higher power or decision-making team. “The principals and administration of the Canadian program, I think would say we hear you, we know, but it's out of our control as well” (Mackenzie, 51:25). Mackenzie also noted that issues with teachers feeling that they might not have autonomy could be unique to international schools and the country they are located in.
Comparing teacher autonomy in schools in Canada to that in international schools in China, he said, “it's different back in Canada where we have a union and we can voice our concerns and it feels like it's being heard by union representatives and it's being taken forward to the government” (Mackenzie, 48:59). Mackenzie pointed out that because teachers’ opinions and complaints were not always addressed and they had nowhere left to turn to after approaching school administration, it could result in some teachers feeling hopeless in what they could achieve in their workplace and thus contribute to turnover decisions.

Other than direct school leadership, some teachers felt the lack of autonomy related to the for-profit nature of international schools and the top-down decision-making process. Describing this element, Marvin said, “there is limited power that the foreigners have here in a Chinese business” (34:39). When asked if he could provide an example of what he had seen in terms of limited power, Marvin detailed how the decision-making process might differ between a private for-profit international school and a public school in Canada and discussed the example of why effective professional development opportunities may not always be funded for teachers:

Public schools in Ontario are businesses too. They’re run on taxpayers’ dollars. So the difference between a public school in Ontario and those in a private school here is that your taxpayer is your funder and the people have to pay taxes so you will get money for every student you get, whereas here it’s privately owned so the person who owns the company can be more frugal if they want to. There’s less decision makers. (Marvin, 44:14)

Some teachers, such as Mackenzie, Josh and Jennifer, questioned whether decisions being made from business stakeholders were always for the benefit of the students or teachers within schools. Discussing the teachers, Mackenzie for example said, “I've seen the businesspeople in the school
make decisions about teachers’ salaries and benefits and then say one thing but then end up doing another thing” (48:59). Discussing the students, Josh said sometimes international schools can come across as an educational “robotic assembly line” (1:12:16) when taking a business-like approach. In terms of “individual student plans or really focusing on what each student needs, it kind of gets brushed to the side and just said, well, whatever gets the most people out the door and graduated that's what we're aiming for” (Josh, 27:06). A survey participant also cited feeling “pressure to accept students who are unable to meet the basic requirements necessary to be successful” (SQ34), which Georgia described as happening because teachers did not have control over who gets admitted to schools. Georgia declared that sometimes students were admitted before they had fully developed the English language skills required for a Canadian program which she attributed to the business side of schools attempting to increase school profits.

In cases such as these, Mackenzie felt that eventually teachers may lose a bit of trust in the decision making process when they felt that practices and policies created by business leaders were not focused on education, saying “that could be why teachers are leaving, maybe too many complaints have caught up with them and they just can't take it anymore and they decide, you know what I don't have to work here, I can work somewhere else” (48:59). Mackenzie also discussed how decision-makers in international schools may not feel accountable to teachers, saying “I understand it from the business representatives too that maybe the ones that are complaining won't be here anyways in a year or two, so why do we bend over backwards to address their complaints” (51:25)? Ultimately Josh compared business and education and concluded that they were not always ideal companions. “You can't really balance the two well unless you have clear structural ideas as to how it's going to operate. But if you're just going to focus on the business side, education is definitely going to suffer” (Josh, 1:12:16).
**Lack of resources.** Over one third (37%) of participants believed that a lack of available resources was one of the largest factors related to turnover decisions in international schools in China (SQ32). Survey findings on resources are presented in the table below, and open-ended survey responses and individual interview responses helped to elaborate on why participants felt resources were an issue related to turnover decisions.

Table 9

**Findings on resources**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How often teachers experience challenge at workplace</th>
<th>0 (Not at all)</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7 (Always)</th>
<th>Not available</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lack of sufficient resources</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of satisfaction with support factor at workplace</th>
<th>0 (Not at all satisfied)</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7 (Extremely Satisfied)</th>
<th>Not available/ offered</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Resource sharing/access to resources</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The findings showed that problems surrounding resources were based on individual schools. Although most participants were somewhat satisfied with the resources that were available at their workplace, almost half of the participants that responded felt they always, almost always or often experienced a lack of sufficient resources (SQ31), and that resource sharing or access to resources was not satisfactory or minimally satisfactory for approximately one-third of participants (SQ36). About resource acquisition at her workplace for example, Sophia said physical resources provided by the school were limited and that she and other teachers were responsible for attaining what she needed. “I tend to buy most of my things on my own. I don't even know if we have a budget…[and] I know some colleagues who actually have to pay a lot
out of pocket for materials” (Sophia, 1:04:28). Resource acquisition and securing a budget for resources was also cited as difficult in cases where teachers had extra responsibilities, which was experienced by both Georgia and Mackenzie who held department head titles for primarily elective courses. Further to limited access to resources, at the school level a lack of resources was also often cited as a frustration in cases where teachers were asked to teach a course outside of their teachable or agreed upon contract obligation. This happened to Georgia, who was teaching math with no math qualifications. About the experience she remembered, we were “eight weeks into the course and it wasn’t until week seven that I got any resources for it and that was from a fellow teacher, not my department head” (5:56). Sophia, who also was teaching courses outside of what her original contract stated, was provided with lesson plans for the first few weeks of her teaching but was left disappointed with the quality of the resources she was provided with. The “lessons that were given to me were from Teachers Pay Teachers, so it wasn't a very much designed with curriculum in mind...I was expecting the lessons to be ESL tailored because that's what was told to me” (Sophia, 36:35). Sophia also described feeling stressed about the lack of time given to fully go through the resources that were provided to her because she did not feel pedagogically able to fully understand them and adapt them to her teaching style.

In other cases, problems with resource acquisition was cited in relation to the nature of international schools in China. When discussing why sometimes resources were hard to access, Mackenzie viewed teacher turnover as a factor in the loss of resources and noted that it can be difficult to find resources outside of those provided by teachers within the school itself. He provided an example that he experienced in his workplace discussing how his school used to have a program where students could order English books. Of this program Mackenzie stated, “one year we were able to do it and it seemed great I saw a lot of good books around the school
and then next year it's like what happened to that resource…maybe it's turnover within the library or new staff” (43:59). Mackenzie felt that when teachers who ran programs such as these left without passing on the duties or resources to another teacher, often they were lost to the school. As another potential reason for why it can be hard to access resources, Alex discussed facing limitations at the country level. “This is a unique to China issue, [but] being an English school most of the quality resources are from outside of the Chinese servers” (Alex, 36:33). Josh too said, “I mean you're in China, obviously the access to a Canadian curriculum, professionals or even materials is going to be limited” (54:22). Many teachers described how a virtual private network (VPN) service was required to access certain global resources or websites. Alex described cultural limitations to resource acquisition as frustrating. It is “important for me as a teacher to know how to utilize technologies effectively in the classroom, and also our students going forward into global schools and universities across the world to be able to effectively use email and research resources” (Alex, 36:33). Alex felt that not being able to use certain tools and technologies limited her own professional development as well as the students’ level of preparedness for global classrooms.

**Low levels of professional support.** In terms of teachers’ professional support, 28% percent of survey participants cited the lack of professional support from fellow teaching colleagues, department heads and higher-level administration as one of the most influential factors for turnover decisions in China (SQ32). When asked how often they experienced low levels of professional support, results varied, with most teachers citing they experienced this sometimes within workplaces (SQ31). Results are presented in the table below.
Table 10

Findings on levels of professional support

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How often teachers experience challenge at workplace</th>
<th>0 (Not at all)</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7 (Always)</th>
<th>Not available</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low levels of professional support</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Discussing cases where they had seen low levels of professional support, in individual interviews one concern that was discussed by participants was cases where teachers saw their leadership as divided from them. Josh and Georgia for example felt that their administration was often only present for evaluative purposes at their workplaces. They check in when “marks are not where they're expected or students have complained, so it's more of a negative support. It's like you've done something bad, now I'm talking to you about the issue rather than being proactive and checking in” (Josh, 44:41) beforehand. When asked why he perceived that there was sometimes a division, Josh commented that it could be for different reasons such as a “personal administrator’s choice if that's how they see a hierarchy as a business”, a personal idea of “I’m above you” or “a school or system structure” (50:58). Describing what he meant about a system structure, Josh said, “I feel like the Chinese system, regardless of whether it's a school or anything, is very top down even politically and so there is a very there's a strict boundary between the master and the apprentice” (50:58). Josh also theorized that in some cases school leaders do not have the necessary supports themselves within their job roles and therefore may not be able to always adequately support teachers.

Another issue that was discussed by participants was when teachers believed that their administration did not care about them on an individual level. Comparing her experience with
leaders in her workplace in China to that of being a practicum student in a school in Canada, Georgia recalled being checked on daily by her mentor teacher in Canada not only in a professional manner, but also to see how she was coping as a person. Georgia felt disappointed by the level of administrative support she was receiving at her current workplace, saying “I think what administration is lacking here is, is they're forgetting that teachers are people, like real live living, breathing people. They're not just a robot at the front of the classroom teaching students” (Georgia, 50:28). Josh too felt that sometimes his school leaders were not as focused on individualism which made him feel like they were not on his side. “It's like once you're here, you're here to teach what the contract says, and that's all the school has to provide essentially” (Josh, 15:21). He described experiencing school leaders be standoffish when teachers approached them for help, saying “that's something I've experienced as time has progressed and I've encountered maybe burnout and overwork and things like that, I feel like they haven't been as receptive as they could be” (Josh, 15:21). Josh noted that this depended on a variety of independent factors such as the school, the principal and the staff.

Describing how one teacher in her department left midway throughout the school year, Sophia, who described herself as close to the individual, claimed she left because of the lack of support from those above her. Of the circumstance, Sophia said if leadership judges teachers or answers them in condescending ways, “that will make them feel shut down. And if that's how they feel then why would they come back a second year, even if there's somebody else in that role, you know, you start associating these negative feelings to where you are” (47:06). Although Sophia commented that this was not an aspect unique only to international schools but rather a reality in all educational workplaces, she believed that schools that hire teachers directly out of teacher’s college, such as international workplaces in particular, will need higher levels of
support systems and strong relationships to help those transitioning into new roles for the very first time succeed. Ultimately on this topic Sophia concluded that, “if the relationships don't feel genuine, then it's not a place I want to be in” (1:03:01). Other concerns cited by participants regarding lack of support were “lack of appreciation for staff and their hard work,” “unclear expectations from administration” (Survey participants, SQ34) and low levels of professional support from department heads.

**Lack of/ineffective formalized support programs.** Lack of formalized support programs referred to the official programs that schools and school leadership had set up to help support their new teachers transitions into the teaching profession, as well as to support the arrival to a new country. Many teachers discussed lack of or ineffective support programs such as orientation, induction programs and mentoring as potential causes for teacher turnover decisions.

**Orientation.** One of the formalized support programs that was experienced by some participants upon their arrival to China was an orientation session. Levels of satisfaction with orientation programs varied based on individual experiences, and findings are presented in the table below.

Table 11

*Findings on orientation programs*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>0 (Not at all satisfied)</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7 (Extremely Satisfied)</th>
<th>Not available/offered</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New teacher orientation</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Most participants were somewhat satisfied with the orientation programs provided by their schools, however a large percentage reported feeling largely or not at all satisfied (SQ36).

Discussing orientations they experienced at their workplaces, Alex and Georgia both said they had an orientation that introduced them to the school and its policies but described them as short and overwhelming. Even though Georgia already had previous teaching experience, she said, “it’s a lot. It is five solid days of sitting in an auditorium listening to somebody talk, morning and afternoon...It's way too much information to be shoved in your brain landing in a new country three days before, jet lagged” (35:16). Georgia also stated she did not receive much information from her workplace prior to her arrival in China which added to the overwhelming amount of information during her first week in China. Sophia and Jennifer were both late arrivals to their workplaces and reported that their orientations were inadequate and did not fully cover what earlier arriving teachers had experienced. Sophia, for instance, arrived in China on the first day of school and described being overwhelmed and rushed into teaching:

I think, having traveled for 36 hours that had a big role into how I felt because when I got here, I was introduced to the principal right away, I didn't have time to go to my apartment, settle down, take a shower, sleep, like it was you arrive and in your airport clothes you go and introduce yourself to the team...I had asked prior would it be possible to have an orientation in some kind of similar capacity as those that came in earlier and I was told that I would but then when I got here, that expectation wasn't met. It was just like, sink or swim type thing. (Sophia, 10:08-14:30)

Sophia was given what she described as a mini orientation which covered the minimal basics and then was expected to take charge of classroom duties within two days of arriving. Jennifer arrived a month into school and her orientation comprised of watching the teacher who had been
covering her class for one day. She described feeling overwhelmed with the quick turnaround. I observed and “got to know the students and stuff and then she was like, so do you want to teach tomorrow? I'm like, oh, okay. Like I don't really know how to get fresh water but sure let me teach this class” (Jennifer, 6:58). Jennifer wished she had been given more time to adjust to the Chinese culture and her new role at the school before taking on her full-time teaching duties. Other than a school orientation, at his workplace Josh described receiving an orientation to the country which was provided by some of the staff at his school. Reflecting on what that experience had entailed for him, Josh said, the “secretary will set you up with an apartment, take you to IKEA, show you maybe a few restaurants and things like that and that's pretty much the extent of most of the formal getting to know China” (42:26). Although Josh construed the orientation to be helpful, he described it as somewhat basic and remembered hoping for a more extended program, which was not offered.

**Induction programs.** Another support program that was described by participants was an induction program or a structured training program that aids new teachers throughout their first years in the teaching profession.

Table 12

*Findings on induction programs*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How often teachers experience challenge at workplace</th>
<th>0 (Not at all)</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7 (Always)</th>
<th>Not available</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lack of/unsatisfactory initial training or induction program</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of satisfaction with support factor at workplace</th>
<th>0 (Not at all satisfied)</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7 (Extremely Satisfied)</th>
<th>Not available/offered</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level of satisfaction with support factor at workplace</td>
<td>0 (Not at all satisfied)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7 (Extremely Satisfied)</td>
<td>Not available/offered</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Findings from the survey results varied, with some teachers experiencing no challenges with a lack of or unsatisfactory induction program, and approximately one quarter citing that they always felt they experienced a lack of or unsatisfactory induction program (SQ31). However, most participants were not at all or largely unsatisfied with induction programs offered at their workplace (SQ36). Interviewees discussed induction programs in their individual interviews and helped to elaborate on why survey participants might feel this way. Almost all participants that mentioned an induction program stated that there was no formalized effective program at their workplace. At his workplace Marvin stated that the induction process was all professional development sessions. It “was mostly like, you know, these are the rules of the school, this is how things work. I don’t think that was anything innovative or exceptional. I think it was standard, but it was adequate” (1:00:58). Discussing the current induction program at her school, Georgia outlined it as more of an evaluative process rather than a support system for new teachers. The “induction program that happens, it's, they come in, see that you can stand at the front of the room for 70 minutes without anybody killing themselves and you get a check mark” (57:35). Georgia felt that because teachers were not being held accountable to a continuous program of support or check ins from administrators, there was limited feedback for teachers to continuously improve on their teaching within her workplace. Josh too described in his interview having a similar experience, commenting that he expected more of a consistent check in program to make sure teachers are comfortable throughout the year, “not just like the first three days get you sorted, then you're on your own” (4:54). When asked if Alex experienced any formal
induction program, she stated that all she had at her school was the orientation days at the beginning of the school year and nothing beyond that was offered.

**Mentoring.** Formal mentorship was also discussed by participants and generally tended to vary based on their workplace and each individual’s experience. Findings based on participants’ level of satisfaction with formal mentorship programs offered at their workplace are shown in the table below (SQ36).

Table 13

*Findings on formal mentorship programs*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of satisfaction with support factor at workplace</th>
<th>0 (Not at all satisfied)</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7 (Extremely Satisfied)</th>
<th>Not available/offered</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Formal mentorship</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

About mentoring at his school, Josh said “there's never really been a mentoring program or any kind of extended orientation” (44:41). Some participants, such as Alex, stated that her school did in fact provide an administrative mentor, but that for the most part she considered it as more of an evaluative system and less of a support system. About getting help from other mentors or veteran teachers, Alex continued, “there’s people who are there if you reach out, but a lot of it requires us as new teachers reaching out to ask for that support” (50:44). Mackenzie also was provided with a mentor at this workplace, but said, “they were teaching in another building and wasn't really in my department and they were able to help me with like questions outside of school better” (20:25) about his mentor teacher. When asked about mentoring, Jennifer said her school had some great programs, but that she felt she wasn’t always able to access programs due to time and responsibility constraints due to her workload.
Georgia’s school on the other hand provided peer mentors to help teachers adjust to living in China as well as academic mentors to help new teachers adjust to the teaching profession at the school level. However, she observed that both systems were inadequate. Describing her China life support mentor, Georgia said, “not all of their mentors should have been mentors. So I ended up with someone who knew absolutely nothing” (10:52) and “I ended up having to leech off of other people and their mentors just to be able to figure out what was going on because I was kind of left in the dust” (10:52). Georgia also described feeling inappropriately paired with her academic mentor who turned out to be her department head. Describing how their different personalities caused a conflicting relationship between them, she said “I almost left after my first year because of my department head, not having anyone else besides that one academic person made it extremely tough my first year because I didn't know who I could go and talk to” (Georgia, 41:59). At Sophia’s workplace she also depicted having both a social committee to welcome her to China and help her transition to living in a new country, and an academic mentor at the school. Like Georgia, Sophia’s academic mentor ended up being her department head. However, Sophia also looked at the circumstance as a negative pairing and described her mentor as often too stressed themselves to adequately help her grow professionally from an academic standpoint:

When I say that he was very stressed and I found out he was my mentor, I almost wanted to ask him are you sure you want to be my mentor because I ask a lot of questions and I'm not shy, because that's how you grow, especially when you start a job…So, I almost feel bad that he was my mentor because I'm like, my goodness, he's so busy. Is this too much? I don't want to be a burden but I also would like my questions to be answered, you know, so that definitely had a very negative impact on how I felt because I always felt
that I was being judged when I was asking questions…I felt I was answered in many condescending ways, again, not something that felt good. (23:23-24:44)

Sophia felt that her relationship with her mentor discouraged her from asking questions and seeking help when needed. When asked about her long-term goals, Sophia said her goal is to work internationally for a few more years before returning home to complete her PhD, but recalling instances where she expressed feeling confronted or judged by her mentor within her workplace, said, “I don't think it's here, you know, because of just the climate…people never forget how you make them feel” (1:00:22).

In some interviews, participants described why they perceived their mentoring programs to be not fully effective or why they were not adequately paired with an appropriate mentor. Georgia turned to the process of how the program was organized in her workplace. She said mentors and mentees are paired by means of a brief survey but that it does not delve beyond the surface of who a person is and what needs they have. Marvin’s school also provided mentoring, but he noted that the formal system provided was very basic. Referring to the way the program was set up, he said, “they do facilitate mentoring, but they basically just say hey do you want to be mentored, yes or no? Okay great. How about this person? Okay great. And I think they just let it go” (Marvin, 1:11:18). Sophia, who had arrived a week late after the formal orientation sessions were already completed, was unaware that there was a mentoring program at her school. She said, “I could have definitely been more ready had I had, I think my expectations managed a little earlier, but I only found that I had a mentor, like in week three and I found out because other teachers were talking about their mentors…So I remember requesting a mentor and yeah, that just fell short” (13:44). Sophia had no awareness of how the academic mentoring program was set up within her workplace, or if there were any other support systems available outside of
the social committee that helped to greet teachers. Josh believed that teacher turnover was partially to blame for lack of or ineffective mentoring programs in international schools. Due to “the retention rate there's maybe not enough experienced staff or enough staff to offer a mentor program, and that might actually help retention rates is to be mentored” (44:41). Sophia too thought that proper mentoring and support were not only influenced by teacher turnover in schools but have a great impact on individual growth and turnover decisions. Describing how she often felt misjudged by her academic mentor and was left on her own to overcome obstacles within the school, she stated, another “person left because of this kind of situation that I'm in, so it just goes to show if the support is not there, people will leave very quickly or stay and plan to leave eventually” (Sophia, 29:54).

Existing Supports to Overcome Challenges and Barriers Associated with Turnover in China

This section relates to the second guiding question of this research: what supports are present to help early-career teachers overcome the challenges and barriers associated with turnover in international schools in China? Themes that emerged from survey and interview responses include: (a) having positive informal support systems and relationships; (b) having effective professional development and collaborative workplace communities; and (c) having effective formalized support systems.

Positive informal support systems and relationships. One of the supports that was often cited by participants which helped beginning teachers in international schools was having positive informal support systems and relationships. These systems were not provided formally by schools or local communities but developed casually in and out of workplaces. 40% of survey participants believed that informal mentorship was one of the most influential factors in
beginning teachers’ decisions to continue their employment in international schools in China (SQ37), and in many cases interview participants described other teaching colleagues within their schools, which ranged from beginning educators to veteran teachers, as one of the largest informal supports. Describing his fellow coworkers, Mackenzie said he felt fortunate to have such a supportive staff. The “support comes from within and the people who generously give time to new teachers and make them feel comfortable” (Mackenzie, 54:47). Josh too considered the staff number one as his reasons for feeling supported and remaining abroad:

The people that I've worked with have been fantastic…the staff is your only support, especially in a smaller campus, and that's been the reason why I've spent so much time there, I guess more than the two years is I just like the people I work with, and you feel like you're in the same situation and you can work with each other (39:35).

Some teachers also specifically cited other teachers within their departments as helpful sources of support when adjusting to the teaching profession. Of the more experienced staff members in his department, Mackenzie said he considered himself lucky to be able to learn from them, saying “they were all able to fully support me and provide me with ideas because everything was new” (10:21). Sophia, who did not experience full support by her department head, noted being overwhelmed at the beginning of her transition to teaching in China, but said that once she knew that there were other teachers within her department that were “just waiting to share their experience and tips and tricks, I felt great and I realized I'm very lucky to be surrounded by some awesome teachers and I kind of just informally considered them mentors” (57:01). Beyond who supported them, teachers also detailed in what ways they received support from their fellow teaching colleagues. Alex for instance stated, “having people to ask what they thought or what they would do in the classroom or how they would run a lesson was extremely valuable just as
you’re getting on your feet” (28:03) and Sophia too said just having conversations with other colleagues to “see how do they go about teaching? What do they do? What are you know, best practices from their end? (32:32) were helpful for her teaching practice. Sophia also identified that informal relationships with other teaching colleagues helped to support her and helped her to adjust to different cultural dynamics in the classroom:

I was seeking advice from veteran teachers who were super helpful and just teaching me small things, like when you hand something to a student to show that you respect them you hand it to them with two hands. These small little gestures I learned by speaking to colleagues made me feel better in connecting with my students (Sophia, 17:47).

Sophia felt that these supports provided by other teachers helped her to show her students that she respected them and their culture, and ultimately allowed her to create stronger bonds with her students and create a positive classroom environment.

Many teachers also outlined that informal support from departments heads and administration, as well as students were influential in supporting their success as a beginning teacher. Talking about higher school leadership, Marvin explained how the principal himself helped him to feel welcomed and part of a community immediately upon his arrival to China. “The principal picked me up from the airport, the principal took me to my apartment, took me out to dinner my first night, was very welcoming and was very kind. It made me feel a lot more at ease” (Marvin, 17:07). Josh also saw the principal at his workplace as a valuable support, saying, the principal “strongly encourages the expat staff, the former staff to take out new arrivals and things like that. So, it’s definitely there and encouraged to try and get people as comfortable as possible” (42:26). Describing how she observed her administrators supporting teachers informally at her workplace, Jennifer said, “I think that most of them are very
approachable, if that's email or drop in, most of the principles have an open-door policy and so that's very encouraging” (32:59) and “I think that the principals and the administration staff always send emails saying to come talk to them if there’s any problems…So that’s really valuable and supports new teachers” (52:15). Mackenzie and Jennifer also expressed that knowing their administrators on a personal level because of the opportunities to network with them outside of school hours were positive informal supports as they allowed teachers to feel more comfortable approaching them. Beyond department heads and upper-level administration, Sophia also considered her students to be a great source of informal support who have helped her to overcome challenges teaching within a new culture, saying “I've asked them what they need to learn and just what I can do to help them so and getting their feedback is so important because then I can address it directly, so I feel like that's helped me” (57:52).

Outside of the workplace, teachers cited friends, roommates, family members and services or members of local communities as supports for their transition and continued success working in an international environment in China. Discussing how she had made some good friends within her community Sophia described it as “a huge relief. Definitely very helpful whenever you have to just like talk about your day and events. I think that's super helpful to have, even in terms of addressing mental wellness in general” (59:50). Sophia and Josh also cited taking opportunities to connect with family members back home. Discussing this Josh said he considered his family a distant support, saying “I did the Skype thing and I had the VPN and so that was working, so I mean on the weekends calling home and I still do that now with WeChat so I've never really felt too homesick” (5:57), while Sophia said, “I always find time to talk to them because they keep me sane” (59:30). Some teachers found that their department heads or school leaders became close social friends beyond the professional workplace. Other than
personal friendships and family supports, some participants also discussed finding helpful support systems in their local communities. Discussing how she comes from a strong Christian background, Jennifer for example said, “one of the teachers here at our school…leads a Sunday church service and so that was something I kind of leaned on last year to go to kind of remind me of home” (0:56). Although Jennifer felt lucky to have this support, findings indicated that community programs were dependent on location, with 30% of survey participants cited that community support systems were not available to them in their area (SQ36).

**Effective professional development and collaborative communities.** Often in cases where teachers discussed effective professional development, collaborative workplace communities were cited together as a factor for teachers’ feelings of positivity towards sessions as well as towards the overall school atmosphere. Regarding effective professional development that she has seen in her workplace Alex said, “I’ve found some to be extremely effective or have given a lot of really good tips, especially the ones that were run by other teachers, especially when we had choice” (55:31). Alex described how sometimes teachers were given up to three choices per professional development session and thought that having these different choices was a great opportunity for teachers to gain skills in areas where they felt they personally needed to grow and enhance their skills while avoiding repetitive training. Sophia also looked positively on professional development sessions run by senior teaching colleagues in international schools: “I like to think highly of educators, and I think when we’re together all in one house like you’re each other’s best resources so why not utilize that?” (1:04:51). Discussing her workplace, Sophia observed that by drawing on an interdisciplinary approach, professional development sessions were enhanced and were helpful for teacher’s growth and creating a collaborative school community where teachers learn from others who have similar experiences as them and could
build each other up. “It's just nice to share teaching styles and just your ways and how you do things…that just made the professional development experience a whole lot better because you're not just seeing things through one lens, but through various lenses” (Sophia, 35:04).

Sophia felt that having the opportunity to experience training for teachers by other teachers in an international setting was an amazing initiative. Teachers such as Jennifer also expressed that having time provided by the school to collaborate with other teachers was an extremely useful opportunity to enhance personal growth outside of preplanned professional development sessions.

Other effective professional development and opportunities for growth discussed by teachers were networking opportunities with other international schools located in China or surrounding countries, as well as collaboration opportunities with school leadership. One example of a networking opportunity that Mackenzie experienced and described as helpful was having guest speakers come in from outside of the school during a conference that his workplace hosted. This year we have had “educational leaders from Canada visit and talk about the revised new curriculum and this year was drastic improvement I'd say from other years” (Mackenzie, 55:57). However beyond just getting the opportunity to learn from the guest speakers, Mackenzie also felt that the conference itself was beneficial outside of the presentation times. Of the experience he said:

It ended up being a very good use of everybody's time because it allowed all the teachers from different schools to collaborate about what they're doing at their schools and we were all gathered together to participate in the same guest speakers’ presentation, but what happened with outside of the presentation was also a great experience because it
was finally a chance to talk in person about things going on in their schools so there was like a feeling of connectedness. (Mackenzie, 59:06)

Mackenzie believed that this opportunity to connect and learn from other schools was a great source of teacher growth. About collaboration with administration, many felt positively in cases where they were able to work together with their department heads and school leaders. Mackenzie depicted the department head he had in his first year as a great support that he could go to whenever he needed help or advice. “He had encountered a lot of the problems I was asking about, so he was able to provide resources…and if I was ever in a pinch for not knowing what to do next he could give me some great ideas” (Mackenzie, 21:21). About collaborating with her department head Jennifer said, “my department head was really awesome with like, here this is everything that I have, this is everything that the former teachers who've been here before you have, here it is” (17:49). She felt this helped her adapt to the profession quickly. Describing how he had seen administration work with teachers and how he personally had the chance to get to know them, he said he has gone from “being a first year teacher feeling like the administration teams not on my side” to getting “to know them and it's like we're all working in the same environment and we're on the same team” (1:01:31). Mackenzie thought that when administration took time to get to know their teachers on a more personal level both in and outside of school, it helped create a team atmosphere in schools and a positive collaborative environment.

**Effective formalized support programs.** Although in many cases participants described their formalized support programs as lacking, some participants noted having great mentor pairings or committees which helped support them as new teachers at different stages during their transition to China and to the teaching profession. Sophia for example described how her
school’s social committee helped prepare her before her arrival in China. “I got very useful information on a really nice comprehensive guide on what to bring, what to prepare, so a lot of my research actually was based on that kind of information. So that was super helpful” (Sophia, 7:23). Jennifer too experienced what she described as a great mentoring committee who helped facilitate social events to help relieve stress and support teachers throughout the school year. They organized “events where we could all come together, like experienced teachers with new teachers that go around the city, like finding all these really good restaurants or shopping areas or just fun, like basketball or sports or things to do” (Jennifer, 52:12). While Sophia experienced difficulties with her academic mentor, she said it meant a lot to her to have a social mentor who was there to support her. “My social mentor was absolutely phenomenal and from that side everything was really great, and she was very caring, and she really took it to heart to ensure that my transition year from that social aspect was a smooth one” (Sophia, 23:23). Jennifer on the other hand experienced a positive role model in the form of her academic mentor, saying, “she was also the department head and she was awesome. She gave me all of our resources, she would always answer my questions, I think she really did want to help people and she really cares for that” (0:01). Overall teachers outlined supports such as welcoming committees and positive mentor pairings which led to higher feelings of support and smoother transitions to a new country and profession.

Some teachers also noted that benefits provided by some international schools in China helped them to get oriented within the new country and culture were helpful support factors for teachers. When discussing his arrival in China and what sorts of benefits he was provided with, Marvin said “we were set up with a bank account, we got set up with a cell phone and we were given cash when we got here. So those things are huge supports and those are from the school”
Marvin felt that these helped reduce stress for teachers during their transition to China. Georgia described these supports as standard for most international schools looking to hire teachers but thought that her workplace went above standard in regard to her flight allowances and medical benefits. Describing the flights, Georgia said, the school will “pay for my flight back and forth to my point of hire, which to me is a small regional airport, which I extremely appreciate. It's not just from a huge international airport, so I do appreciate being able to fly right home” (1:10:13). Regarding the medical benefits, Georgia described them as pretty good. “I can get a medical checkup and not have to worry about paying for anything upfront and that is covered all around the world. I’ll actually be really sad when that coverage goes away because it's really great” (1:10:13). Another benefit that teachers found helpful which was often included in contracts from international schools in China were work and residential visa processes. “I don't have to worry about getting my visa...I know that's a huge process and so I do appreciate not having to deal with any of that or having to deal with the police reports when you get to China” (Georgia, 1:10:13).

In some cases, teachers described appreciating benefits that were provided directly from their workplace although they were not included in contract promises. Marvin for example expressed gratitude at being given time to get “settled into your apartment, unpack, making sure you know where the food is, getting to know places around you” (9:51) and noted these items as extremely valuable benefits that could be provided by schools before teachers start working in order for them to get their “feet on the ground” (9:51). He felt that this would help teachers feel both comfortable and ready for the school year and give them the appropriate time needed to focus on adjusting to the profession. Another benefit that teachers appreciated was when schools provided resources. Although resources were not cited as provided to all participants, in cases
where schools provided course resources to teachers, participants described this as a great support. Marvin, whose school provided him with some standardized resources, believed that they helped alleviate pressure for new teachers as they transitioned to becoming a full-time teacher all the while adapting to a new culture. He stated, the fact that “I didn’t have to create programs from scratch is massive because I got here August 22 and if I was told, okay you have your classroom now start building your lessons plans…it would really increase my stress” (1:00:58). Jennifer was also provided with some resources from her workplace. Describing how she was required to teach a math class although she was not qualified to teach math, she said “I was given everything, like all the notes, but I made a lot of my quizzes. The tests were given to me and I liked that I was given good resources” (Jennifer, 17:49). Jennifer commented that being given resources for a subject matter outside of her teachable qualifications helped her succeed as a new teacher in that circumstance.

**Potential Supports to Increase Teacher Retention in China**

This section relates to the third guiding question of this research: what supports do early-career teachers feel would be beneficial to increase teacher retention in international schools in China? Themes that emerged from survey and interview responses include: (a) increased collaboration and teacher autonomy; (b) creating more formalized and effective support programs; (c) having increased opportunities for teacher growth; (d) leadership and professional development; and, (e) having increased honesty, transparency and pre-arrival information for beginning teachers.

**Increased collaboration and teacher autonomy.** Increased teacher collaboration and time for teacher collaboration was cited by some participants as a possible factor that would
increase teacher retention in international school settings in China. Discussing this within his interview, Marvin stated:

I think what maybe keeps people here longer is more related to the environment of the school, so like the morale. Like is there a collaborative community, is there a supportive environment…if I didn’t feel I had a good connection with the staff I’d probably say get me out of here, so again having a supportive staff team that can help you professionally and if necessary personally as you’re adapting to a new culture. (1:03:59)

Marvin felt a collaborative community was essential to retaining teachers for a longer period.

Sophia too described how she thought relationships and collaboration were some of the most important aspects to a workplace, and discussing what more collaboration could look like, Sophia said, “a lot of opportunities for staff to get together and work together. I think that could create a better climate and better culture in the school, just more collaboration” (1:04:28), as well as ensuring that “new teachers feel good, feel confident, [and] when they asked questions, creating an environment where questions are embraced, and not discouraged” (47:06). Sophia believed that because other professional development or networking opportunities could be more limited in international schools in China, that teachers themselves were schools’ best resources.

Also discussing this topic in his interview, Josh said creating communities where people feel like they are not alone will help retention issues. “Humans are social animals. I mean, if you have a problem, someone else has the problem then you get two minds working on it's helpful, and when you do get like a high from working together” (Josh, 40:53). Josh thought that having opportunities to work together, whether it be working on lesson plans together or learning how to pay water bills in a foreign culture, helped build strong relationships which led to reasons for teachers to remain at their workplaces longer. Some participants described the desire to have
time to collaborate both before school began and throughout the school year. One survey respondent for example wrote, “living around the world during the summer, there is very little time to collaborate with your department in September. There should be allocated time to plan the semester as a department before the school year begins” (SQ40). Another area where both Mackenzie and Josh felt there could be more collaboration in international schools in China was resource sharing. Discussing the desire for more Canadian materials, Josh said, “obviously we have the internet so teachers are more than welcome to explore on their own, but it would be good that you know the schools themselves are sharing and dispersing material that's coming out of the province” (56:19).

In combination with a more collaborative workplace community, some participants also discussed the need for greater administrative support and increased teacher autonomy. When asked what she thought an ideal leader would be like, Georgia said it would be a person who has a visible presence and is there for teachers to support their needs and show them that they care about them as an individual:

They have time to be able to move around their schedule to come to events, to come to sports games, to come to performances, to show up…Someone who when you walk in the hallway, asks you how you are and doesn't just do it for the sake of asking you how you are. When…somebody turns to you and goes how's your day today? How are your classes going? How was the performance last week? Did you hear the volleyball team got gold? Those types of things make you feel like your administrator’s connected to the school, because the administrator should be like, the spiderweb between everybody. They’re not a thing, they’re everybody” (54:07).
Georgia conveyed that administrators’ relations with their teachers should be like those of teachers’ relations with their students and should focus on the human relationship first and the teacher professional relationship second. Also describing how school leaders often are the connections between people within a school, Josh said, “the best support or the best orientation and things like that I would say actually does come from the administrator encouraging staff to support each other” (52:30). Josh commented that ideal leadership would help teachers grow and encourage collaboration and help teachers to become leaders themselves. Discussing the youth culture in international schools in China, Alex described how her ideal types of leadership would be those that focus on working with their followers rather than taking a hierarchal approach. Since “I feel like everyone is on such an equal playing field then it makes more sense for meetings to be more collaborative rather than this, I’m the expert, this is what we’re going to do” (30:21). She felt that leaders at all levels within school systems who take a more team-based approach will encourage a more collaborative culture and achieve a higher staff morale. Some teachers also described needing to feel that leadership supports them in their decisions. One survey respondent for example said, “it is important that there is strong support from administration regarding student behavior. If teachers are not supported in decisions they make regarding discipline from actions…it will cause teachers to not go to administration for support for their students” (SQ40).

Another common theme that was discussed by teachers was having their voices and opinions heard and valued by their leaders. “I would say giving teacher voice is very important. So, having more feedback and then not only hearing that feedback but then taking it and trying taking some risks and trying some things to be innovative” (Alex, 57:30). Also discussing this aspect in his interview, Josh thought that school leadership should be more receptive to negative
critiques or comments provided by teachers. “I would say that they're not just negative comments, it's how the school is going to do better” (1:08:29). Georgia suggested that for administration to show that they value teachers’ thoughts, they should create an atmosphere “where teachers feel safe to express their opinion” (55:43). Beyond just listening to teachers’ requests, Josh explained that leaders need to make sure their staff knows that they are working towards facilitating changes when they are needed. He felt that although sometimes administration might be trying to accommodate teachers’ requests, their attempts were not always communicated to the staff. Describing this aspect further he said, “I think that's actually hurting the retention rate, again that divide between the board and this kind of stuff, and then it slowly trickles to the staff member, so we don't really feel like part of the system, we're simply filling in a position” (Josh, 1:08:29). Some teachers, such as Mackenzie, also discussed wishing to have more autonomy within the classroom and school at large to make it feel like a place where teachers feel included, such as having the ability to decorate classrooms and make them their own space.

**Creating more formalized and effective support programs.** Another area where teachers discussed the potential for international schools in China to increase their retention of teachers was by formalizing effective support systems, such as orientation sessions, induction programs and mentoring partnerships within individual schools. 28% of survey participants reported that an effective orientation program was one of the top three most influential factors for teachers’ retention decisions in international schools’ settings in China (SQ37). Discussing his thoughts on what an effective orientation session would look like, Josh said, “so when you come in, maybe more of an extended orientation, not just here's the three days get you set up and you're good to go, but more of a check in kind of thing” (1:03:33). Some survey participants
outlined the need for “training for late arriving teachers” and “clearer training on who to contact when a teacher needs support” (SQ40). Other participants expressed that orientation needed to be provided or improved not only for school purposes, but also for the transition to China itself. Describing this a survey participant wrote, “new teachers, many of which are new to China, have two days to find an apartment, move in and get ready with little support from administrators. Make the transition easier” (SQ40). Some ways to possibly make the transition easier were provided by another survey participant, who cited “adequate translation services” and “24 hour support from Chinese first language speakers per telephone” (SQ35) as possible ways to bridge language barriers and help teachers get oriented and feel comfortable within the new culture, as well as support them throughout the year.

Many teachers also detailed the need for induction programs to be improved and 47% of survey participants conveyed that induction programs were one of the most influential factors in beginning teachers’ decisions to continuing their employment at international schools in China (SQ37). Comparing her school’s induction programs to those in Ontario for example, Georgia said, back home “you learn new things as you go through this teacher induction course, there are hours that you have to put in, there's accountability...I think there needs to be accountability from both the teacher and the administration” (57:35). Georgia felt that accountability and expectations that teachers need to meet would help them stay motivated to continuously improve their teaching practices. Apart from creating a formalized course with processes teachers need to complete, another possible factor that participants declared could be included in induction programs for international schools was providing teaching strategy workshops for those working outside of their teachable subjects, as well as strategies for working with ESL audiences. Discussing this topic Sophia said:
I think it would be very helpful to give a teacher who's coming in with no experience in that particular domain some kind of guide or even just like a professional development session on what are the methodologies in place for that teachable…I feel like if there's a methodology in place that can really help a new teacher because it's a tool, right? You're giving them a tool that they can then play around with and use as they wish” (30:58).

Another possible way to improve induction programs was discussed by Josh, who suggested having staff social events periodically throughout the year, which he believed could improve staff morale, enhance collaborative communities and provide emotional support for teachers in a non-work-related environment. Remembering his time working for a school in Korea, Josh gave an example of what this looked like based on his previous experience and described how the government program he was in brought teachers together outside of work at different times in the year. “So that was really good to kind of check in and know that they were bringing us together and things like that. So more of a prolonged support” (Josh, 1:03:33). Josh also felt that this would provide opportunities for mentoring to take place and help teachers build positive professional relationships.

On the topic of mentoring, some teachers also expressed the desire for more formalized mentoring programs with effective pairing procedures of teachers both academically and socially. One survey participant wrote, “I truly believe that a formalized mentorship program should be implemented to support new teachers in their roles, especially when they are teaching a subject outside of their specialization” (SQ40). Some of the interview participants helped to elaborate on what this would look like. A survey participant who wrote that administration did not support a mentorship program at their workplace, said “having a buddy who you know you can go to with problems or questions, both professional and personal” (SQ40) would be
beneficial to support and retain teachers. Also discussing what she thought an ideal mentorship program would look like, Sophia said:

If a good mentoring system or program would be in place, I think that would cut down on all of these unnecessary negative feelings…a good academic mentor would be somebody who doesn't forget what it's like to be a first year teacher…I think it's also very important for mentors or anybody in a position of helping, especially in any sort of kind of leadership position where you have followers that are wanting to work with you, to just know different kinds of personalities and to not judge a person right away (26:18-27:48)

Sophia alleged that when leaders take time to learn about the differences that people have, it would reduce the chance of conflict between employees in a workplace and create greater understanding and collaboration between colleagues. Another survey participant felt that a mentorship program to support teachers, “especially when they are teaching a subject outside of their specialization” (SQ40) should be provided to help support and retain teachers.

Further to formalized school support programs like orientation, induction and mentoring, many teachers cited the creation of formalized mental health support systems as a way to help enhance teachers’ well-being as another possible retention factor. One support that teachers described wishing to see in this area was a professional either inside of the school, or access to a professional outside of the school, who could help discuss mental health issues. Thinking about mental health, Marvin for example said, “when I think of resilience I think of the mind, to me that’s the most important thing” (1:19:29), and discussing inner-challenges that teachers might deal with which could affect mental health, one survey respondent wrote, “a lot of teachers struggle with stress management, homesickness and sometimes depression and without family and friends from home it can feel very lonely. It would be good to have a professional to talk to
and get advice from” (SQ39). When asked what kind of mental health professional Marvin
would like to see in his workplace, he said “if there was some kind of mental health support, like
a psychotherapist of some kind, I think that could be very useful” (1:13:00-1:15:24). Thinking on
how the shift in country or residence as well as the loss of constant connections with friends and
family can affect a person’s emotional and mental health, Jennifer too described how schools
could set up mental health support for teachers, saying, “I think it would be nice if there was a
counseling program or station or office to go to” (3:57).

Marvin, recognizing that schools may not always be able to have a mental health
professional integrated into the school itself, said another way to address the issue “might be a
better benefits plan that included a mental health connection or something to see a counsellor”
(1:15:24). Survey participants also helped to describe other potential ways schools could help
support well-being and mental health initiatives for teachers in open-ended responses. Describing
how increased time could help teachers, one participant wrote “teachers already give so much of
their time optionally. Don’t force them. This would improve well-being and offer time to
actually use any supports provided/needed” (SQ40). Another survey participant also wrote that a
helpful support factor that would help staying decisions in international schools would be
“miscellaneous events to encourage staff cohesion and mental health” (SQ39). Many believed
that if international schools addressed teacher mental well-being, it would increase the resilience
of teachers working abroad and in turn boost retention rates.

**Increased opportunities for teacher growth, leadership and professional
development.** Some teachers desired increased opportunities for teacher growth and teacher
leadership from their schools. 28% of survey respondents believed that increased opportunities
for teacher growth, as well as more effective professional development, were some of the most
relevant factors in teachers’ retention decisions (SQ37). Marvin for example described himself as a “very driven motivated person who wants to challenge myself and wants to problem solve and wants the next challenge” (1:03:59). He and others such as Sophia noted that one item that could further challenge teachers and help them continue to learn and grow is having professional learning communities within schools. For teachers “who like the research component, offering them opportunities to do action research, that can benefit the school and can benefit other colleagues as well” (Sophia, 1:09:09). In addition to research bringing in new expertise and ideas into schools, Sophia thought professional learning communities are a great opportunity “because you get different teachers on board working on something, it's a great way to collaborate to do that interdisciplinary collaboration” (Sophia, 1:09:09).

Also describing what improved professional development opportunities might look like, Josh commented that professional development should center around giving teachers opportunities to try new ideas and learn how to effectively and comfortably implement ideas into classrooms. “Whether that's having the technology to do so, or the time to figure [it] out…and the comfort that comes with that and not feeling rushed or administrators are going to say oh you're wasting your time” (1:02:33). Jennifer described wishing to see increased opportunities for teachers to go watch other educators teach in their classrooms, as well as chances to have educational leaders, such as the principal, within her own classroom and have opportunities to learn from them. When asked what she would like from a principal visitation she said, “I think just like constructive feedback and like saying what would I be doing well, what would I need to improve” (Jennifer, 12:31). Another survey participant also described how learning from leadership could be helpful for teachers’ growth, saying better professional development such as “shadowing admin in higher levels so teachers can have something to aspire to longer term”
(SQ40) could be beneficial for teacher retention decisions. Outside of the workplace Marvin said he would like to see “more external professional development. Like maybe there are international education conferences that people can go to to network with people from different schools” (1:08:02). Marvin felt that the sense of comradery and connection that would come from these networking opportunities would help support teacher retention. Other opportunities that questionnaire respondents cited as possible ways to improve professional development and teacher growth were having “more professional development time to just deal with marking and daily tasks”, as well “getting certifications (IB, first aid, mental health training) will boost professional development” (SQ40).

Beyond professional development aimed at helping teachers improve their own practice, Sophia and Mackenzie suggested that there should be greater professional development for teachers who are moving into leadership roles, such as department heads or higher levels of administration, as promotions happen at a quicker pace than in schools in Canada. While Mackenzie discussed the need for more clearly defined leadership roles and what is required of teachers moving into administrative positions so early in their careers, Sophia thought these training sessions should encompass training surrounding leaders’ interactions with teachers. On the one hand, Sophia felt that leaders should take time to get to know their staff beyond just a surface understanding of the person. “By that, I mean, understanding the differences in personalities, because if you understand different people's personalities, you might not cast judgment on them” (1:07:24). Sophia pointed out that this would help educational leaders to focus on individual teachers’ strengths and help them build teachers up for success rather than criticizing weaknesses. On the other hand, Sophia suggested that leaders need to be emotionally intelligent and reflect on their interactions with their followers. Education deals “with human
beings, so I think a leader in today's society, especially in terms of education, should definitely know who their followers are, because if they don't know who's following them, the followers will know that and they’ll lose credibility” (1:07:24). Josh also described the need for qualified experienced teacher leaders to deliver innovative training and ideas to early-career teachers. “Leaders should be experienced or really demonstrate a knowledge in what they are expecting other people to do…[get] the people that have done it before to kind of explain it, or to share their ideas about different systems, different ideas” (Josh, 45:46-56:19). Another survey participant also describing this topic wrote that “competent and truly experienced teachers (5 years minimum of actual teaching in the classroom) providing helpful advice, tips and guidance to new teachers” (SQ40) would help support and retain teachers.

**Increased honesty, transparency and pre-arrival Information.** Some participants implied that more honesty, transparency and pre-arrival information provided by schools and recruiters in Canada could lead to higher retention rates of teachers. Georgia for instance thought that many obstacles or shocks that first year teachers experienced in relation to Chinese culture and school conditions could be avoided with more clarity by schools and recruitment agents prior to teachers coming to China. Schools could create a “10 minute vlog, have somebody go out with a video camera…that’s something that I would watch coming in, you know, something as simple as that takes somebody three hours to complete and it can help somebody immensely” (Georgia, 39:19) to get prepared to go abroad. Another survey participant wrote that “a more accessible document with introductory information for new teachers, maps of the town/schools, important contact information, etc.” (SQ40) would be beneficial to help support and retain teachers.

Beyond resources and more information prior to arrival, Jennifer felt that another important
aspect to retaining teachers related to honesty and transparency. Discussing the recruitment process prior to her arrival in China, Jennifer said:

As a recruiter, as any salesmen, you want to paint this picture because you want people to buy into that picture, which is fair because that's your job, but these are people's lives… and so I just wish that those really true little pictures of what's going to be like were more really told to you. (8:35)

Some teachers for example suggested that more honesty could be given regarding teaching contracts and obligations. “It’s a lot for your whole life, to leave your family and friends and then see you’re promised things that don't always come true…and so that just kind of drags down moral and I think that people get upset with that” (Jennifer, 6:02). Reflecting on her experiences of how she had her courses changed without any communication from her school, Sophia said, if schools “genuinely manage [teachers’] expectations, they don’t need to go through unnecessary stress. Just being very clear and upfront. The way our students expect us to be clear and upfront, I think that should be done for teachers” (1:06:08). Mackenzie, Jennifer and Sophia expressed that transparent processes and constant and honest communication with teachers would help to alleviate these stresses and avoid conflicts upon teacher arrival, as well as make teachers feel more valued within their workplaces. Beyond being clear about contract obligations and what will be expected of teachers, Josh proposed that schools should also have transparent goals and visions that should be communicated to teachers coming to work there. He said:

I think it's very important to have a goal as to what the school is trying to accomplish and how they're going to accomplish it and what is the goal, are we trying to get students out the door, are we trying to get students to the top 10 universities and what kind of students are we wanting to teach? Or are we trying to expand as fast as possible? (Josh, 1:08:29)
He felt that when schools had clear structural goals of what they planned to do and how they were going to achieve it and then communicated those goals to teachers, it helped to avoid circumstances where teachers felt their personal goals or educational philosophies were not aligned with those of their workplace.

**Advice from Current Teachers for New Teachers**

This section discusses the final question asked of participants during the survey processes. Teachers were asked what advice they would give from their own experiences working internationally in China to new teachers just entering the profession in order to help develop personal resilience and well-being as a teacher (SQ41). Over two thirds (65%) of participants provided a response and three main themes emerged from their open-ended responses, including: a) being adaptable to the experience; b) maintaining a balanced lifestyle; and, c) using existing networks. Interview participants also elaborated on these findings in some of the individual interviews.

**Be adaptable to the experience.** Many teachers described the need for new teachers to be adaptable to a new experience, both culturally and within the workplace. Describing how they felt new teachers should be flexible towards culture, one survey participant for example wrote, “if a teacher has made the jump to teach abroad, then they should take advantage of the opportunity to expand their world” (SQ41). Other participants discussed ways they thought new teachers could achieve this. Two survey participants believed that getting “to know the culture and language” and learning “to appreciate and respect the culture and customs of China and avoid racism and cronyism at all times” (SQ41) were important for teachers to adapt and build resilience within their new homes. Another participant suggested that “new teachers in international schools abroad should become involved in local customs, cultures and traditions,
factors that are touched by travel and quality down-time” (SQ41). They continued by writing that partaking in these events would help teachers to feel like “a whole and complete individual” (SQ41) while living and working abroad. Sophia too discussed this aspect in her personal interview and discussed how it was beneficial for new teachers to “expose yourself to different cultures and different worldviews” (1:10:53). Some also described how the international experience required a shift in individual mindset. One survey participant’s advice to new teachers was, “be prepared for some of the things you thought would never happen to you. Come with an open mind and be willing to learn a whole new way of living” (SQ41). Alex also advised teachers to take time for themselves to learn how to adjust and fit into an international culture both physically and mentally. Her instruction to new teachers was “try and fit into the culture to whatever degree you feel comfortable with. These things will help with your mental health because that culture shock will kind of last for as long as you feel that you don’t fit” (1:04:25).

Other than being adaptable to the new or different culture itself, many teachers also described the need for new teachers to be adaptable towards their new professions. Some detailed how working in an international school outside of one’s home country itself requires flexibility, while others conferred on being adaptable to teaching itself. Discussing international teaching, two survey participants wrote, “it is important to be adaptive and understand and accept that you will face some challenges that are unique to international schools” and “be willing to adapt and accept that teaching abroad isn’t the same as teaching at home” (SQ41). They perceived it to be important for new teachers to be open to the cultural differences in order to build resilience and be successful as a teacher in an international setting. Others described how learning how to be a teacher in general requires flexibility on the part of the individual. Discussing this, one survey participant wanted new teachers to know that “work in your first year
will be difficult. Grit through it and as you learn and adapt the career will become easier” (SQ41).

Other participants outlined how teachers could work through their early years and make the transition into teaching easier. One participant for instance wrote that new teachers should focus on taking “one step at a time. Teaching is a learning process as well. Enjoy the experience and don’t be scared to face challenges”, while another said, “if you are entering the teaching profession with altruism and empathy, you will be successful” (SQ41). Alex also illustrated the transition into teaching and wanted new teachers to know that “it’s going to challenging and that’s okay and know that you’re going to make mistakes and that’s okay” (1:04:25). She felt that focusing on the learning process and using mistakes as a chance to grow rather than focusing on attaining perfection would help teachers to build well-being and resilience in the profession. Josh also discussed steps for new teachers to build self-resilience in his interview and said teachers need “the ability to roll with the punches and to take things in stride. When the schedule changes, when a student says something completely inappropriate in class, you need to be you need to be ready for that kind of stuff” (1:06:10). Josh encouraged new teachers to keep an open mind to new experiences whether they are positive or negative. “You can't be too hung up on the small stuff… “resilience is number one and to realize that every challenge and things that are frustrating you are helping you grow” (Josh, 1:06:10). Ultimately teachers conveyed that flexibility, an open-mind, the ability to learn and grow from mistakes and maintaining a sense of altruism would help new teachers build well-being and personal resilience towards the teaching profession, both as an early-career teacher and as a teacher in an international setting.

Maintain a balanced lifestyle. Most participants advised new teachers to divide their time between work requirements and personal needs in order to develop personal wellness and
build resilience as a teacher. “Teaching is a laborious job that requires a lot of energy, time and effort during school hours and outside of school hours as well. As a result, it is important that one takes time for oneself” (Survey participant, SQ41). Most comments made by participants focused on learning how to manage one’s workload during work hours and knowing when to set work aside in order to take time for self-care outside of work hours. Giving an example of how a work-life balance could be achieved within school hours, one participant commented on the relationship with students writing, “don’t over-assess students to the extent of sacrificing your own well-being. Be realistic with your own goals and goals for your students” (SQ41). Another participant also advised teachers to set limits for themselves regarding how much work they want to achieve in a day and wrote, “at first set it a little higher than you prefer but set a hard limit and don’t go past it. If you find you need more time, seek advice for how to increase effectiveness” (SQ41). Describing where teachers could turn for advice, a further survey participant wrote, “lean into senior staff to learn proper strategies to prioritize your workload” (SQ41).

Beyond the common workload for teachers as a result of student assessments and teaching duties, multiple participants also warned new teachers not to “take on too much” in their beginning years of teaching and advised them to “learn how to say no to things” (SQ41). One survey participant cautioned that if teachers take on too many demands outside of their regular requirements, they “will burn out” (SQ41). In her individual interview, Alex also felt that it was important for teachers to take time to take care of themselves not just during work hours, but outside of school time as well. If teachers feel overwhelmed, she said, it is important to “use your voice to say that you need a bit of time or take those days off to catch up on what you need to or to take the evening off to do a little bit of exercise” (Alex, 1:04:25). Alex encouraged new teachers to advocate for their needs and to make sure they were taking care of their personal
mental and physical health. Other advice from teachers regarding maintaining a balanced lifestyle included “finding friends outside of work”, “going home at a decent time” and limiting “take-home work” (Survey participants, SQ41).

**Use existing networks.** The advice provided by teachers in this study stressed the need for new teachers to seek help when needed and to rely on experienced members as well as existing resources around them for assistance. Josh for instance expressed that the first couple months were crucial to teachers’ retention decisions and said during that time “a key to being resilient and lasting is to have the support there” (12:52). Describing already existing supports, one survey participant wrote, “your fellow teachers will be able to provide a lot of support” (SQ41), while other participants advised teachers to use these connections to “talk to each other, share your ideas and your worries” and “don’t focus on doing everything by yourself” (SQ41). Discussing support systems and how they are not always adequate or readily provided however, survey participants also advised teachers to be proactive in these cases, writing “seek mentorship on your own if the mentorship provided is not meeting your own needs” and “if you need help, speak up and say something. You are not in this alone and it is guaranteed you are not the only one” (SQ41). Another participant suggested teachers “ask questions and engage in lots of reflection”, saying “that’s the key to learning” (SQ41). Many teachers also portrayed the need for teachers to use not only the people around them for assistance, but also to use existing networks for resources. Describing this, two participants wrote, “work smarter, not harder” and “use resources from your colleagues, the school’s database if available and from sites like Teachers pay Teachers. You do not need to reinvent the wheel” (SQ41). Another participant’s advice surrounding resources was for new teachers to “start a professional dialogue with your head of department prior to starting to the contract and ask for sample lessons/unit plans to see how they
view the school’s expectations” (SQ41). Teachers felt that by utilizing existing networks such as these they would enhance their own personal well-being and resilience.

**Summary**

The research findings section presented the major themes found in data analysis from the survey and interview data. The themes focused on this study’s research questions and included details on: (a) participants’ motivations for working abroad; (b) factors teachers perceived that could impact turnover decisions; (c) supports teachers felt that helped support retention decisions; (d) supports teachers felt were beneficial to increase retention decisions; and, (e) advice from teachers for new teachers on how to build resilience and well-being in international schools. In the following chapter, I will discuss the findings of this chapter in relation to the relevant literature, provide implications of the findings and discuss limitations of this study.
Chapter 5

Discussion, Implications and Conclusions

This research study explored the issue of turnover and retention in international schools in China in order to enhance knowledge of teacher turnover in a global context and to gain a qualitative understanding of this issue from the people who are affected. Specifically, this study explored Canadian-certified early-career teachers’ experiences of turnover and retention in international secondary schools in China that use a Canadian curriculum. This chapter discusses the key findings of this study, including the nature of turnover and retention decisions in international schools and the factors related to the research questions, and positions these findings in the context of relevant literature. I conclude this chapter with implications for practice, policy and further research and conclude with some reflections.

Discussion of Key Research Findings

When I first began this study, I sought to investigate why early-career teachers made turnover or retention decisions while working in international secondary schools in mainland China that use a Canadian curriculum. By listening to teachers’ voices and exploring teachers’ experiences surrounding factors they had experienced or witnessed while living and working abroad, I learned that the results of my study were consistent with those from previous studies which found that teacher turnover or retention decisions are most likely highly individualistic in nature (Karsenti & Collin, 2013; Nurmsoo, 2013). On the one hand, these decisions appeared to be contingent upon the individuals under study. Similar to the study by Clandinin et al. (2010) that explored the storied lives of teachers, the findings of this study discovered that each teacher has their own unique and complex identity which impacts their turnover or retention decision. No participant’s survey or interview responses were exactly the same as another participant’s,
even though many likely were employed in the same workplaces. In cases where participants did experience the same factor, the different satisfaction levels and emergent findings from participant discussions in open-ended survey questions and individual interviews also showed that not all participants interacted with or perceived each factor in the same way.

In addition to the individual identities of each teacher, the results of this study echo the findings of Karsenti and Collin (2013) and Nurmsoo (2013) which found that teacher turnover or retention decisions are often more the result of a set of complex factors, both individual and contextual, rather than a single factor alone. The complexities of these factors were highlighted within this study as well as in past research. Odland and Ruzicka (2010) for example found that each individual international school has its own independent nature. The schools in this study were located in different cities across mainland China, had different sizes of teacher and student populations and had different support systems and availability of support systems within the workplace or within the local community. Even though all teachers were working within an international school in mainland China that used a Canadian curriculum, based on the variety of answers to questions in both data collection methods, it was clear that not all participants experienced all the factors that were present within the study, and many times participants described their experiences in the context of the differences between their workplaces and local Chinese communities. Often there was no solitary determining factor which caused a turnover or retention decision, but rather multiple influential factors that surfaced through participant accounts. Overall, the findings of this study indicate that teacher turnover or retention decisions in China are highly contingent on the subjective world that individual teachers experience around them both within the workplace and outside of it, as well as on the individual nature of the person themselves.
Despite the individualistic nature of turnover and retention decisions, in this research study many common themes emerged between participants’ accounts of factors they believed were influential in turnover and retention decisions. Many of these themes were consistent with previous findings from the literature, which suggests that certain conditions may influence turnover or retention decisions more when experienced by individual teachers. Findings of this research study are presented alongside relevant research in the sections below in response to each of the research questions.

**Early-career teachers’ perceptions of the challenges and barriers that cause turnover in international schools in China.** The findings of this research study indicated that Canadian-certified early-career teachers perceived challenges with acculturation, seeing the job as a temporary position, differences in expectations versus reality, lack of desired professional growth opportunities, poor school conditions, and lack of or ineffective formalized support programs as the most influential challenges and barriers that cause teacher turnover in international schools that use a Canadian curriculum in mainland China.

**Challenges with acculturation.** While my study supports the findings of earlier studies, perhaps unique to working abroad in an international school in mainland China that uses a Canadian curriculum specifically were the number of comments based on the differences between Chinese and Canadian culture and how the ability or inability to adapt to cultural elements affected one’s turnover decisions. The findings from this research suggest that acculturation is one of the leading factors outside of school conditions that contribute to teachers’ turnover and retention decisions for early-career teachers working in international secondary schools in mainland China that use a Canadian curriculum. This was discussed in a multitude of ways throughout this study. Like Farber and Sutherland’s (2006) discovery, difficulty adapting to
Chinese language, practices, policies and beliefs was often related to increased homesickness, sense of disconnect, isolation, feelings of restriction and lack of belonging by teachers in this study. Location and relationships were further factors seemingly related to turnover or retention decisions. In discussion of location, previous studies have found that the geographic location of a school influences teacher attrition, with small private schools and schools in rural areas tending to have more difficulty recruiting teachers and higher turnover rates than their urban counterparts (Borman & Dowling, 2008; Kono, 2012; Schaefer, Long & Clandinin, 2012). Although Chandler’s (2010) study found that “international schools cannot be certain of keeping teachers who like living in their location longer than those who do not” (p. 224), the findings from this study suggest that teachers in China who feel isolated either by language barriers, work in smaller or more remote Chinese communities, or those that do not have access to supports may feel isolation more strongly which could result in turnover decisions. Further to responses based on location, critical to the discussion was the ability to form and maintain personal relationships. Teachers in this study described how relationships were ever-changing because of the fluid nature of staff coming and going in workplaces in international schools in China. Many determined that the inability to form lasting meaningful or supportive relationships affected turnover decisions. These findings highlight the need for increased cultural adjustment supports and continuous cultural adjustment supports for early-career teachers throughout their first few years working abroad.

**Seeing the job as a temporary position.** Some teachers in this study discussed how they believed that teaching in China may be a temporary opportunity for some. From teachers that were surveyed in previous literature, it was found that few remained in the same international school beyond two or three years even though many felt that five to six years was the optimum
period for a school to retain their services (Chandler, 2010; Farber & Sutherland, 2006; Hardman, 2001). Although the majority of previous studies were quantitative in nature and mainly speculated on the reasoning behind these statistics, teachers in this study provided a variety of qualitative details on past data. Findings from this study for example suggest that international teaching in China is more appealing to younger teachers. Many asserted that a sense of adventure and travel was motivation for taking an international teaching opportunity which was easier to pursue with fewer life commitments. Mancuso et al.’s (2010) findings that middle-aged teachers and teaching couples were more likely to move than younger teachers and those with non-teaching spouses were supported in this study, as it was shown that teachers often returned to their country of origin to accomplish more permanent structures in their lives such as marriage, starting families or beginning retirement planning. Other teachers described the financial factors that may cause turnover and retention decisions, such as saving towards a personal financial goal, paying off student debts and finding employment opportunities that include a pension. For many, these goals were able to be accomplished in China due to lowered cost of living and more employment opportunities than in their home countries, and upon completion of these goals, many teachers then planned to return to their home country. However, as most teachers in this study did not have a predetermined plan of how long they wished to remain in China to teach, these findings suggest that schools that provide more comprehensive benefits may retain teachers for a longer period of time, such as those that offer benefits for families, maternity leave and competitive compensation packages in the absence of a pension.

**Differences in expectation versus reality.** Teachers in this research study discussed being disillusioned by their changing expectations from their pre and post arrival in China. Some noticed differences between promised teaching assignments, differences in levels of English
abilities of students and differences in what was told to them about the life or job in China. Past research studies have discussed some of these issues. Clandinin et al. (2015) discussed the issue of teachers being given teaching assignments or grades to teach where they had no previous experience once they have entered schools. Borman and Dowling (2008) found that new teachers in particular are often given the most challenging assignments within schools without adequate preparation or support. In other studies, role conflict, unclear expectations, teaching contracts, teaching outside of their educational background and inadequate training were cited as problems that new teachers faced (Clandinin et al., 2015; Fantilli & McDougall, 2009; Nurmsoo, 2013; Ryan et al., 2017; Schaefer et al., 2012; Walker et al., 2017). In all studies the researchers found that these issues attributed to higher levels of stress, anxiety and burnout in teachers, and teachers in this study confirmed those feelings in cases where they experienced changes to contractual commitments or what they believed to be broken promises surrounding teaching assignments. Further to stress and anxiety, teachers also commented on feeling ill-prepared when being faced with last minute changes to their teaching schedules.

Previous research also found that when teachers felt that the school or the situation had been misrepresented during the recruitment phase, or if they felt teaching contracts and renewal packages were ambiguous or unfair, this sometimes was connected to their leaving decision (Odland & Ruzicka, 2009). Affirming these findings, participants in this study often described feeling overwhelmed, shocked or disappointed when expectations that they had prior to leaving their home countries were not met after their arrival in China, such as when English abilities of students were misrepresented or quality of resources provided by schools were different than what was promised. These differences caused tensions between teachers and their workplaces, and these tensions were often attributed to turnover decisions.
**Lack of desired professional growth opportunities.** The findings of this study suggest that lack of opportunities for professional growth and ineffective professional development may be cause for turnover decisions within international secondary schools in China. Furthermore, the findings of this study also suggest that teacher turnover itself is an issue related to turnover decisions in international schools in China because of its effect on professional growth opportunities. Similar to previous findings, results from this study showed that teacher longevity is an important issue for school atmosphere, school organization and resource allocation (Karsenti & Collin, 2013; Ryan et al., 2017) and that the loss of teachers from the profession “can lead to an insufficient number of trained and experienced teachers being available to staff schools” (Coulter & Abney, 2008, p. 106). Many teachers described feeling lack of satisfaction with not having enough sufficient experienced teachers or leaders to professionally learn from within their international workplaces in China, having inadequate mentors or not having enough experienced teachers to run a mentorship program, as well as having to cover classes in the event of losing a teacher throughout the school year which resulted in higher workloads. As a result, some teachers felt the need to leave their current workplace in order to continue enhancing their professional skills at other institutions.

Although the majority of participants stated their future intentions were to migrate to another educational institution either internationally or in their country of origin which results in the continuation of their knowledge and experience in other schools, their leaving decision can be problematic for their current workplace because the turnover requires more novice teachers to be hired (Karsenti & Collin, 2013). As many interview candidates suggested, often leaving teachers’ positions are filled with first-year graduates or novice teachers which causes a gap in the number of experienced teachers who are able to impart their knowledge and act as mentors.
for other novice teachers needing guidance (Borman & Dowling, 2008). These findings stress the need for increased attempts at retaining teachers in international secondary schools in China in order to maintain the knowledge, skills and supports that veteran teachers can provide to those just entering the profession in these workplaces.

*Poor school conditions.* Prior research has shown that teachers make turnover or retention decisions because of characteristics associated with individual schools, and these assertions were maintained by participants in this study. Some of the most highly referenced work conditions in the literature related to teacher turnover included excessive workload both at work and outside of the workplace, long working hours, lack of time, test-based accountability, finding a balance between work and home life and meeting the multiple demands of the job (Clandinin et al., 2015; Fantilli & McDougall, 2009; Karsenti & Collin, 2013; Nurmsoo, 2013; Ryan et al., 2017). Other studies mention the lack of school support for teachers outside of the school setting, noting that the education system often discounts teachers’ lives as people, outside their roles as a professional (Clandinin et al., 2015). The results of this study mirrored previous studies as most teachers cited heavy workloads, including large amounts of take-home work, lack of time to complete daily tasks and too many demands outside of teaching as the most influential causes of turnover decisions within their workplace. Teachers from this study also alluded to a lack of resources, limited or unknown budgets for attaining resources, country limitations in accessing resources, difficulty personalizing and assessing standardized courses and difficulty teaching Canadian curriculum to students with lower levels of English as relevant to teachers’ turnover decisions.

In the area of teacher autonomy within schools, Mancuso et al. (2010) previously studied for-profit versus non-profit status, however the researchers concluded that neither was a
significant predictor of teacher retention. Odland and Ruzicka (2009) however found that proprietary schools seemed to suffer “from the perception of operational decisions being driven by a profit incentive” (p. 5). The findings of this research study aligned more closely with the findings of Odland and Ruzicka’s (2009) study as teachers implied that they did not hold conflict with the school itself being for-profit in nature, but rather showed concern when the business aspect of their workplaces took priority over educational needs, or when business decisions affected their ability to make decisions within workplaces, their teaching practices or their contracts. In addition, some teachers referenced lack of autonomy in relation to leadership styles in their workplace. Borman and Dowling (2008) found that attrition rates tend to be higher in schools that show a lack of collaboration, teacher networking, and administrative support. Some teachers in this study expressed disdain when they believed their school leaders did not value or support them, as well as when the school functioned in a negative hierarchal manner. In cases where teachers experienced these issues, they felt that these conditions could impact turnover decisions.

In terms of teachers’ relationships, many studies have found that beginning teachers often experience issues with students, parents, other teacher colleagues and administration which may result in turnover decisions (Fantilli & McDougall, 2009; Karsenti & Collin, 2013; Schaefer et al., 2012; Walker et al., 2017). Although the findings from this research study did not indicate that teachers experienced issues with parent or student groups, it emphasized that professional relationships within the workplace were greatly influential in teachers’ turnover and retention decisions in international secondary schools in China. Factors that influenced professional relationships negatively in past studies included a lack of a collaborative culture, problems with trust and communication, isolation, alienation, pressure from administration, insufficient support
and not feeling able to ask for help out of fear of looking incompetent (Fantilli & McDougall, 2009; Karsenti & Collin, 2013; Schaefer et al., 2012; Walker et al., 2017). Similar to these findings, when teachers felt isolated, had negative interactions with their leaders or teaching colleagues, felt that their administration did not care about them on a personal level, did not feel that they could approach their leadership, or felt that they were not generally supported within the workplace, they often showed greater dissatisfaction with their current employment in this study and related these experiences to increased turnover decisions.

**Lack of or ineffective formalized support programs.** The formalized support programs offered through schools that were discussed in this study were orientation, induction programs and mentoring. Previous studies have discussed these supports extensively. Walker et al. (2017) found that teachers often experience multiple challenges during the induction phase into the profession and these issues can often lead to teacher attrition. Borman and Dowling (2008) found that the teaching profession has typically “been slow to develop a systematic way to induct beginners gradually into a highly complex job” (p. 397), and Kutsyuruba (2013) found this to be especially true in areas where there is no federal regulating agency over the education profession. Similar to the findings of Clandinin et al.’s (2015) study, from this study’s research findings it is currently evident that effective orientation, induction training or mentoring programs are not happening for all early-career teachings working in international schools in China. Although this varied by school and individual experience, many participants said they were unaware of or did not feel that there was an effective formalized support program within their workplace, had orientations which they considered to be too short or vague, or did not have continuous formalized support beyond the first few weeks of school. In some instances, such as when a new teacher was hired after the beginning of the school year, they reported being offered only
minimal orientation before being required to enter the teaching profession. While some teachers noted having supportive and caring mentors, other teachers had no mentoring program at their school, were unaware if there was a mentoring program at their school or found their mentoring program to be ineffective. Also like the findings of Fantilli and McDougall (2009), in some cases where teachers were provided with a mentor, issues surrounding mentor qualifications, motivations and ability to act as a mentor emerged and were related to teachers’ dissatisfaction with their mentors within this study. Many felt these issues were related to turnover decisions from their workplaces.

**Existing supports for overcoming the challenges and barriers associated with turnover in international schools in China.** The most beneficial supports for retention decisions existing within some international schools in China that Canadian-certified early-career teachers highlighted within this study were positive informal support systems and relationships, effective professional development and collaborative communities, and effective formalized support programs.

**Positive informal support systems and relationships.** Past research has found that support from experienced teacher colleagues, teacher collaboration, having a supportive principal, higher administration support, maintaining a happy and respectful working atmosphere, and creating networks helped support beginning teachers were related to retention decisions (Fong, 2018; Hardman, 2001; Karsenti & Collin, 2013; Kutsyuruba, 2013; Lassila et al., 2017; Schaefer et al., 2012). In his study, Fong (2018) also discovered that non-Gen Y teachers in particular exhibited higher job satisfaction when they felt they had likeable, competent, objective and empowering administrators, as well as supervisors that showed interest in the feelings of staff members. Likewise, in this study, when teachers felt supported, had
positive role models to seek advice from, and had a collaborative community, they reported being more comfortable and having higher satisfaction within schools. Critical to the findings of this study was the importance of informal relationships both professional and social. Walker et. al (2017) had discovered that “many teachers benefited from informal support from colleagues and other stakeholders” (p. 129). When faced with difficulties, teachers from this study frequently turned to informal connections such as other teachers, members of their department, informal mentors and administration, roommates, friends, family and community programs to seek advice and gain professional and personal skills. Many believed that informal relationships were one of the highest supporting factors present in international communities and schools in China, and were one of the key factors related to teachers’ retention decisions.

**Effective professional development and collaborative communities.** The findings of this study suggest that while ineffective professional development and hierarchal school communities may influence turnover decisions, effective professional development and collaborative communities may support retention decisions in international secondary schools in China. Past research suggested that high quality professional development consists of access to a range of professional development programs that provide support and care to teachers throughout their careers, as well as opportunities that are geared specifically to the needs of new teachers (Coldwell, 2017; Fantilli & McDougall, 2009). In some schools, teachers noted experiencing what they considered to be positive professional development sessions and collaborative communities, such as being given choice regarding which sessions to participate in, having many opportunities for teacher collaboration and interdisciplinary approaches, and being given time to collaborate with administration. In cases where participants experienced these options, they
noted higher satisfaction within their workplaces and attributed these as potential reasons for increased retention decisions.

**Effective formalized support programs.** In comparison to participants which described their support programs as lacking, some participants noted having great mentor pairings or committees which helped support them as new teachers at different stages during their transition to China and to the teaching profession which they attributed to supporting retention decisions. These findings are similar to previous studies such as those done by Walker et al. (2017) who found that “many teachers benefited from formal supports from administrators, mentors and guides” (p. 129), and Kutsyuruba et al. (2013) who found that mandated support programs and effective mentorship pairings were highly beneficial for early-career teachers. Teachers in this study were most satisfied with formalized support programs that allowed them to collaborate with experienced teachers, when mentors and administration showed care for them individually as a person outside of work concerns, when their workplace had formalized cultural adjustment support systems in place upon arrival to China, and when mentors or administration were supportive regarding work duties. These factors were attributed to supporting retention decisions.

**Supports early-career teachers feel would be beneficial to increase teacher retention in international schools in China.** Participants in this study discussed many ways in which they felt school stakeholders could enhance supports that would increase teacher retention in international schools in China. The most highly referenced ideas noted by participants included increased collaboration and teacher autonomy, creating more formalized and effective support programs, increased opportunities for teacher growth, leadership and professional development, and increased honesty, transparency and pre-arrival information.
Increased collaboration and teacher autonomy. Discussing ways in which collaboration and teacher autonomy can be improved within international workplaces, findings from the literature have discussed the importance of having supportive administrators that give teachers respect, allow teachers to have meaningful input in school decisions, encourage collaboration, work with teachers to solve problems and meet curriculum standards, and have open and frequent communication with teachers, especially regarding school operations and goals (Fong, 2018; Mancuso et al., 2010; Odland and Ruzicka, 2009). Mancuso and colleagues (2010) also found that transformational leadership and distributed leadership styles, in which decision making and influence surrounding school policies and procedures are shared by all school stakeholders appear to be effective in helping to increase job satisfaction for teachers working abroad. Desire for these supports were maintained by teachers in this study and, in addition to these solutions, teachers alluded to the need for supportive administrators who allow them to implement new ideas in schools and individual classrooms, listen to teacher feedback and clearly communicate school attempts at addressing teacher feedback.

Furthermore, increased collaboration was also discussed regarding school working-conditions. Similar to studies that focused on retention supports in country of origin schools (Fantilli & McDougall, 2009; Karsenti & Collin, 2013; Kutsyuruba, 2013; Lassila et al., 2017; Schaefer et al., 2012), within individual interviews and open-ended survey responses, participants in this study highlighted the need for workload support for beginning teachers from veteran teachers, more time within work hours to attend to work responsibilities, understanding and appreciation for work completed outside of contract hours, and increased time to transition into professional duties fully before taking on extra demands outside of teaching tasks. Although teachers in this study reacted positively when schools provided resources for them, as many
teachers shared that they did not have access to or had limited availability of resources, they emphasised the desire for greater resource sharing between teachers, providing clear communication on the kind and quality of resources that will be provided to them, and increased access to English resources in international schools in China.

More formalized and effective support programs. Research has found that formalized support programs can help support beginning teachers and can increase teacher retention both overall and within a school (Karsenti & Collin, 2013; Kutsyuruba, 2013; Lassila et al., 2017; Schaefer et al., 2012; Walker et al., 2017) and the need for effective and ongoing teacher orientation, induction training and mentorship programs within international schools in China was highlighted by examining the participants’ experiences throughout this study. Farber and Sutherland (2006) suggested that leaders in international schools should create comprehensive induction, mentorship, orientation programs for both the school and the host country community and ensure that programs are implemented with consistent practices, procedures, and policies by all stakeholders involved with the school. Quality of mentors and better mentorship pairing was also discussed as an element to retaining teachers by the teachers within this study, as well as increased mentor accountability. Previous research suggests that mentors are the most effective when they value the knowledge and past experiences of mentees, are chosen in collaboration with the beginning teacher, have dedicated time to work with mentees, are skilled in helping mentees learn and are trained to deal with the complex needs of their mentee (Fantilli & McDougall, 2009; Schaefer et al., 2012). As other added support systems, teachers in this study also showed interest in the creation of formal mental health supports, as well as increased time and information to access health supports within their schools and communities in China.
In addition to school support programs, past studies have identified some areas where international teachers identified the need for support and compensation, including: “homesickness, family obligations, good health care, good living facilities, opportunities to travel, professional and personal support, safety, and mechanisms for acclimatising to the culture and mores of the host country” (Farber & Sutherland, 2006, p. 19). When discussing what teachers thought would increase retention efforts in international schools in China, overall within the findings of this study, they described their desire for greater supports for cultural transitions, continued support while living in the host country and supportive communities and programs that addressed life both in and out of the workplace. Suggestions on how to achieve this has been noted in past research. Fong’s (2018) study stated that international schools “need to utilize additional resources, such as relocation and language training, to transition teachers into the host countries” (Fong, 2018, p. 65), while Hardman (2001) and Odland and Ruzicka (2009) recommended that school administrators in international schools may benefit from creating effective induction programs and compensation packages that help teachers deal with challenges that come from transitioning to a new country and culture (Hardman, 2001; Odland & Ruzicka, 2009). Further to these supports, findings from this study suggest that increased time to access informal cultural mentors, increased information from the school to new teachers regarding Chinese culture and available community supports, increased opportunities for new teachers to integrate into Chinese culture and communities, creation of boundaries between work and social lives, access to mental and emotional support groups and language support systems may be beneficial helping teachers adapt to their new host country and to increasing retention of early-career teachers.
Increased opportunities for teacher growth, leadership and professional development.

The findings of this study suggest that effective professional development combined with leadership opportunities specifically for teachers may support retention decisions. However, as it was found that not all schools have what teachers perceive as effective professional development, this data implies that early-career teachers working in international secondary schools in China need better access to programs that engage them and enhance their practice. Previous literature presents many strategies for schools to create effective and engaging professional development opportunities for early-career teachers which may improve overall retention rates. Examples include providing a range of professional development programs that provide support and care to teachers throughout their careers, having time and opportunities to engage in reflective practice, collaboration with other educations, networking opportunities, career-advancement opportunities, subject-specific workshops, release time for planning, having a strong sense of job challenge and fulfilling work, classroom observations, mentor-mentee collaboration time, time to develop necessary planning, programming, assessment reporting and specialized teaching skills, and increased access to subject-specific resources (Coldwell, 2017; Fantilli & McDougall, 2009; Fong, 2018; Hardman, 2001; Odland & Ruzicka, 2009; Walker et al. 2017). The need for these supports were ascertained by the teachers in this study, and further to these requests, teachers also insisted on the creation of professional development programs that were catered to international schools and classrooms in China, individualized sessions that accommodated different years of teaching experience, better leadership training for administration and those moving into leadership roles, increased freedom to explore new ideas, more leadership opportunities for teachers to engage in, and time for both action and research based professional and personal development sessions.
Increased honesty, transparency and pre-arrival information. Teachers who had experienced differences between their pre-arrival expectations to their post-arrival realities in this study confirmed the findings of Odland and Ruzicka (2010) who stressed the need for higher levels of honesty, transparency and pre-arrival information from international recruiters and schools to early-career teachers going to work in China. Many teachers within this study thought that if schools’ had clearly communicated their policies regarding changing course assignments, accurate levels of student English abilities, school goals, and realities about working and living in China prior to their arrival in China, their expectations would have been more accurately managed and tensions that emerged after their arrival could have been avoided. Previous students have also suggested that hiring practices be refined such that new teachers are hired and assigned to grades with ample time to gain familiarity with the school and curriculum (Fantilli & McDougall, 2009). Teachers in this study confirmed this statement as many described the desire to know course assignments prior to arrival in order to prepare in advance for the upcoming school year. The findings suggest that if international secondary schools in China implement policies and practices that adhere to these suggestions, retention of their early-career teachers could increase.

Research Implications

The findings of this study address the address a gap in the literature regarding turnover and retention decisions of early-career teachers in China. The lived experiences, voices, and emotions of the participants can help educational stakeholders and researchers alike understand early-career teachers’ experiences and witnessed accounts of turnover and retention decisions in international schools in China. These insights contribute to our overall understanding of why these decisions are made by teachers and how schools can improve retention rates and increase
teacher satisfaction. For these reasons, in the sections below, I present implications for practice, policy and further research.

Implications for practice. Although the independent nature of international schools and the unique contextual factors within individual schools and their local communities make it difficult to discern a solitary solution that schools can implement to improve retention rates, recognised from the findings of this study is the importance for school leaders, administration teams, department heads, and other stakeholders within international schools in China that have an influence in teachers’ experiences to address beginning teacher challenges, needs, and desired supports to assist in their transition into teaching in a foreign country.

Implications for schools. Teachers within this study alluded to many ways in which schools and school stakeholders could support and encourage retention decisions. As many teachers alluded to high workloads, lack of time, large amounts of take-home work, and too many demands on teachers as leading to turnover decisions, some of the suggestions that some teachers highlighted within this study to combat negative work conditions within international schools in China included better workload support and understanding for work done outside contract hours in order to enhance retention decisions. As workload support both in and outside of school is relative to the individual, school leaders and educational stakeholders that have voice in school decisions are encouraged to communicate with and get to know their beginning teachers both prior to their arrival in China and continuously throughout their first few years to discover which elements would best support them within individual school contexts, and to adapt support practices that fit individual needs to early-career teachers as they grow personally and professionally. Competitive compensation and benefit packages that were aligned with teachers’ interests as they gained experience working and living in a foreign country were also discussed
by teachers within this study. As some felt that compensation packages provided by their workplaces in China addressed only the needs of beginning teachers in country transition costs, salary, and health benefits, it may be useful for retention efforts for international schools and school leaders in China to address needs of teachers as they grow beyond their first two years of experience to encourage retention decisions. Benefits that address the lack of retirement funds, the need for social and emotional support programs, or the needs of families and spouses such as education costs and childcare, might increase the length of time that their teachers remain at their current workplace.

Further to workload supports and benefit packages, teachers also noted the need for more effective professional development that is relevant to international schools and communities in some of their workplaces in China. As many felt that some professional development sessions may be more relevant to a Canadian classroom, supports for altering these sessions and making them relevant to teachers working with a primarily Chinese audience may be required. Suggestions for support may include more time for teachers to explore Canadian curriculum and professional development topics, increased time to practice professional development strategies and adapt them to ESL classes, having access to experts who have experience working with ESL students and providing formalized ESL training to early-career teachers, increased time for early-career teachers to collaborate with veterans on effective strategies for ESL classrooms, and in-school research opportunities aimed at discovering strategies for implementing foreign curriculum and professional development topics in ESL environments. Other implications for schools and school leaders suggested by teachers within this study included improved teacher autonomy within schools and school decisions, more collaboration between all members of the school, and more formalized support programs such as mentoring, induction and orientation that
help early-career teachers transition to the teaching profession. As many teachers discussed feeling as if there was a lack of veteran teachers to learn from within their workplaces, international school leaders in China, especially those in areas that have limited numbers of expat teachers within their schools and communities, may wish to explore other means of mentoring teachers. Possible solutions may include increased collaboration between international schools located in various Chinese communities, increased collaboration with experts outside of local communities, and paid leadership opportunities for early-career teachers including visiting other schools and attending research conferences. These solutions may help to promote networking, skill-building and resource-sharing of early-career teachers working in international schools in China, as well as increase satisfaction in schools and help to promote retention decisions.

Other than supports to help with the teaching profession, as many participating teachers felt that difficulty with acculturation was highly influential in turnover decisions, the findings of this study also recommend increased aid for the transition to the Chinese culture in order to support retention decisions. These supports could include Chinese language training, formalized cultural school support programs such as orientation, induction and mentoring, training teachers in ESL teaching strategies, increased information on community supports, further collaboration and communication between Chinese and foreign teachers in schools that employ both groups, and more time to access cultural supports. In addition, as many teachers described feeling overwhelmed or stressed during one or more instances during their transition to China as an early-career teacher, formal support programs that address mental and emotional support, such as access to a counsellor, formal check-ins from school leadership to see how individuals are coping with personal and professional transitions, or information regarding mental and emotional
supports available in Chinese communities, may be valuable to supporting and retaining early-career teachers in international schools in China. As many teachers noted that these challenges continue well beyond the first few weeks of arriving to China, it may be suitable for schools to develop continuous cultural supports throughout the year to support teachers as new challenges and needs emerge. These recommendations to schools are school leaders are intended to mitigate barriers to beginning teachers succeeding in their transition into the teaching profession and to continuously support them beyond their first year as an educator.

**Implications for teachers.** Further to implications for schools and school leaders, this study also revealed some implications for early-career teachers who were thinking of working within international schools in China. Many teachers who currently work in international schools in China described the importance of personal resilience. New teachers are encouraged to practice work-habits and strategies that enhance their own well-being while transitioning to the Chinese culture and workplaces within China. In particular, new teachers are advised to reflect on their personal well-being and balance the needs of their workplaces with their own personal needs and expectations. As teachers may face new and unfamiliar cultural experiences within Chinese communities and within schools located within those communities, teachers are encouraged to seek advice from veteran teachers and more experienced leaders. In the absence of those experienced members within workplaces and communities, new teachers can reach out to family, friends or global communities of teachers through technological mediums for support both professionally and personally.

**Implications for policy.** Due to the independent nature of international schools and because each school has its own unique policies and procedures, any direct recommendations to all international schools regarding policy implementations or changes to policy cannot be made.
However, general suggestions on where school stakeholders can evaluate their policies and potentially make improvements within individual international schools that use a Canadian curriculum in China are noted. The findings from this study suggest that gaps in policy surrounding formalized support program implementation and gaps in communication are influencing the experiences of new teachers working in international schools in mainland China that use a Canadian curriculum.

Responses surrounding the availability and quality of mentoring, induction and orientation programs within schools were highly varied, with many teachers sharing that they did not have any formal or effective programs within their workplace. Better policy aimed at inoculating new teachers into the profession and supporting them at the beginning of their practice was suggested from past studies (Borman & Dowling, 2008; Kutsyuruba, 2013) and is maintained by teachers in this study. Specifically, based on teachers reports from the analysis of data, school leaders within international schools in China should enhance policy regarding mentor and mentee pairings, roles and accountability of mentors, mentorship training protocols, training procedures for late-arriving teachers and goals of orientation and induction programs. As the needs of teachers were found to be diverse based on the varied individual and contextual factors that they experience within different international schools and Chinese communities, it may be beneficial for educational stakeholders and school leadership to collaborate with beginning teachers in the creation of policies and procedures for formalized support programs to ensure teachers needs are met within independent workplaces in China.

Many teachers also discussed communication throughout this study in various mediums. Some felt that the lack of or dishonest communication prior to their arrival in China influenced their expectations and levels of preparedness within schools and Chinese communities. In
particular, some teachers noted experiencing differences in what was promised to them surrounding quality or availability of resources, levels of English-abilities of students and changing course assignments. Others discussed limited communication surrounding school goals, school-based decisions and attempts at addressing teacher feedback. It is important for school leaders to communicate school policies and goals to their teachers so that they fully understand school expectations, utilize policies in their teaching practices and collaborate with leadership when issues surrounding policies need to be addressed. It is therefore recommended that school stakeholders such as business affiliates, school leaders such as principals, headmasters, superintendents, or those that have direct communication with teachers, should create more clear policies and procedures regarding their communication practices regarding school goals and decisions, including how and when information is delivered to teachers. In addition, consistent policies and procedures regarding communication should be developed for recruitment teams that are hiring for international schools in China to ensure that teachers are receiving transparent, honest and accurate information relating to work opportunities and life in China. This will help to mediate false expectations and tensions surrounding teaching obligations and other realities surrounding the life and job in China prior to arrival and may ultimately aid in the enhancement of retention decisions. Early-career teachers who are considering working in international secondary schools in China that use a Canadian curriculum are also encouraged to ask questions before signing their contracts to ensure their expectations are aligned with the institutions they intend to work for, consistently communicate with school leaders and recruitment teams to discuss school standards, teaching contracts and personal expectations, and to keep an open-mind to new and unfamiliar situations.
**Implications for future research.** This research study gathered data on the perceptions and experiences of beginning teachers who were currently working at an international school in mainland China that used a Canadian curriculum, had five years of completed full-time teaching experience and held a valid Canadian teaching certificate. As such, the voices of other stakeholders involved in international education within international schools in mainland China that use a Canadian curriculum, such as veteran teachers, school leadership or those that held other teaching certificates, were not explored in this study. As ulterior stakeholders may have valuable input on this issue, future research should aim to add the perspectives of a more diverse group of stakeholders within international schools in mainland China to present a more widespread perspective on the phenomenon of turnover and retention.

In addition, this study found that individual nature of the teacher, the school and the individual Chinese communities were influential to turnover and retention decisions. Previous studies have found that, due to the individualistic nature as well as the multitude of variations in international schools’ locations, organizations and staffs, it may be difficult to determine the exact needs of each independent school and how to implement solutions effectively (Burnell, 2016; Chandler, 2010), and in fact, no specific solutions for individual schools were able to be created from the findings of this study. Therefore, future research should focus on individual schools to determine the most effective retention solutions based on individual factors of different workplaces and the individuals working within them. As elements of culture was such a large finding within this study, another factor that future researchers may wish to explore further based on the responses provided by teachers are the individual Chinese communities to determine what supports could be implemented outside of schools to encourage retention decisions.
Lastly, within this study, most early-career teachers indicated that their future plans were either to pursue teaching within a school in Canada or within other international schools. These findings show that the loss of teachers from their current international workplaces in China reflect migration decisions rather than attrition decisions, and that their knowledge is transferable to other educational decisions. As an extension of this research study, future research may wish to explore the impact that the migration of early-career teachers from international workplaces in China has upon other educational institutions in their home country or other international workplaces.

**Research Limitations**

The following limitations were evident in this study: (a) role of the researcher; (b) limited sample size; and, (c) limited scope. An understanding of these limitations is necessary while reviewing the results of this study.

**Role of the researcher.** As in any phenomenological research that implements a level of interpretation from the researcher, a degree of subjectivity is inevitable and risks that the researcher’s biases may be included in the study. Both before and during the research process, careful consideration was given to the researcher’s position in relation to the study because of the researcher’s previous experience working in an international school in mainland China that uses a Canadian curriculum. While this proved to be an important role in understanding early-career teachers’ perspectives and experiences, in the attempts to avoid researcher bias entering the study a bracketing journal was kept to help identify and reflect on areas of the study that could lead to bias. Member checking and triangulation was also performed in order to help eliminate sources of bias and maintain accurate analysis. Participants were sent documents to make changes and
approve after transcription. All participant requests for changes and clarifications were accommodated.

**Limited sample size.** Although previous research indicates that there are currently 83 listed accredited elementary and secondary international schools providing a Canadian curriculum across China which employ hundreds of Canadian-certified teachers (CICIC, 2017), this research study was done with only a small number of international schools that use a Canadian curriculum that were located in mainland China. Further to the limited number of schools contacted for this study, within those schools only 43 early-career teachers responded to the survey while only seven candidates were interviewed to gather further details regarding the findings. Due to this, these findings cannot be generalized to larger populations. In other words, while the targeted number of participants and schools was reached for survey and interview purposes within this study, this research does not reflect the views and experiences of all early-career teachers working in international schools that use a Canadian curriculum in mainland China, nor is it generalizable to all international schools themselves within mainland China or those in a global context. Although not generalizable, the findings of this study offer some level of understanding of the perspectives of early-career teachers on the phenomenon of teacher turnover and retention decisions and why they may happen within some international schools located in mainland China that use a Canadian curriculum.

**Limited scope.** The participants who were recruited for this study may pose a limitation. As this research focused only on the perceptions of Canadian-certified early-career teachers who had completed five or less years of full-time teaching, this focus inherently means that it lacks perceptions from other educational stakeholders in international schools that use a Canadian curriculum within mainland China. Other perspectives that may be valuable to gaining other
perspectives on the issue of teacher turnover and retention decisions may include other educational stakeholders such as school leadership or administrators, business affiliates and teachers within their senior years of full-time teaching experience. In addition, the current study was performed using a small sample of a population of Canadian-certified teachers. Literature and studies on teacher turnover and retention are available from many countries in the world. A repeat of the study using teacher populations certified from other countries could further verify the relationship between the international school environment and turnover and retention factors. However, these elements do not negate the issue of turnover and retention in international schools or this study’s recommendations to support early-career teachers working abroad. Given that this research ultimately aims to present the lived experiences or witnessed accounts of some early-career teachers regarding turnover and retention in international schools, the recommendations made here can be considered beneficial for school stakeholders looking to work towards higher levels of retention and staff satisfaction within their international workplaces.

Conclusions

This research journey began with the hope of addressing a gap in the literature and gaining a further understanding of why Canadian-certified early-career teachers make turnover or retention decisions in international secondary schools that use a Canadian curriculum in mainland China. Although no one determining factor that resulted in definitive turnover or retention decisions in these schools was found, in looking at survey findings provided by teachers across multiple schools tied together with the testimonies of seven Canadian-certified early-career teachers through the use of individual interviews, a more comprehensive
understanding of beginning teachers’ perceptions and experiences surrounding the phenomenon of turnover and retention decisions was gained.

In particular, these research findings speak to the complex and multi-faceted nature of turnover and retention decisions and the individualistic nature of these choices based on varied experiences. In exploring the participants’ experiences, there was no mistaking the presence of challenges to the successful long-term retention of teachers in some of the international workplaces in China. Some of the barriers were experienced by almost all participants, such as the lack of formalized induction programs, while other barriers, such as the lack of adequate resources, were experienced by only some of the participants. Often, the reoccurrence or experience of multiple challenges within international schools in China, or when faced with continuous difficulties surrounding acculturation without support, influenced turnover decisions either immediately or over time throughout early-career teachers’ transitions to the teaching profession.

Despite the challenges that presented themselves throughout this research study, most participants identified positive and meaningful experiences gained from working internationally in China. For most participants, lasting impressions from their experience included the gaining of valuable teaching experience which they could carry forward to future educational workplaces both in Canada and in other countries, rewarding opportunities to travel in China or experience new cultures outside of China, and the ability to earn a living wage immediately after graduation with the ability to save money towards future goals. For some, the positive experiences also included the creation of enriching personal and professional relationships. From the collection of their responses, there was no doubt that the overall experience of teaching internationally within secondary schools in China was a worthwhile experience for those who participated in the study.
If international school stakeholders in China address early-career teacher needs and concerns and work to support them as individuals throughout their acculturation period to China, as well as in their transition to the teaching profession, these experiences may become long-term placements for many teachers who choose to work in China.

Overall, the importance of supporting early-career teachers both individually and professionally during a new teacher’s transition period into the teaching profession and throughout their first few years as teachers, especially while working in a foreign country such as China, was highlighted throughout this study. This inquiry however only begins to address the topic of turnover and retention in international secondary schools in China, and further research should be done to gain an enhanced and varied perspective on the phenomenon and create more individualized solutions for these schools.
References


Appendix A: Ethics Clearance Letter

October 31, 2018

Miss Samantha Fitter
Master's Student
Faculty of Education
Queen’s University
Duncan McArthur Hall
311 Union Street West
Kingston, ON, K7M 5R7

GREB Ref #: GEDUC-915-18; TRAQ # 6024480
Title: "GEDUC-915-18 Teachers in the Trenches: Exploring teachers' experiences of turnover and retention in international schools"

Dear Miss Fitter:

The General Research Ethics Board (GREB), by means of a delegated board review, has cleared your proposal entitled "GEDUC-915-18 Teachers in the Trenches: Exploring teachers' experiences of turnover and retention in international schools" for ethical compliance with the Tri-Council Guidelines (TCPS 2 (2014)) and Queen’s ethics policies. In accordance with the Tri-Council Guidelines (Article 6.14) and Standard Operating Procedures (405.001), your project has been cleared for one year. You are reminded of your obligation to submit an annual renewal form prior to the annual renewal due date (access this form at http://www.queensu.ca/traq/signon.html; click on "Events;" under "Create New Event" click on "General Research Ethics Board Annual Renewal/Closure Form for Cleared Studies"). Please note that when your research project is completed, you need to submit an Annual Renewal/Closure Form in Krome/traq indicating that the project is 'completed' so that the file can be closed. This should be submitted at the time of completion, there is no need to wait until the annual renewal due date.

You are reminded of your obligation to advise the GREB of any adverse event(s) that occur during this one-year period (access this form at http://www.queensu.ca/traq/signon.html; click on "Events;" under "Create New Event" click on "General Research Ethics Board Adverse Event Form"). An adverse event includes, but is not limited to, a complaint, a change or unexpected event that alters the level of risk for the researcher or participants or situation that requires a substantial change in approach to a participant(s). You are also advised that all adverse events must be reported to the GREB within 48 hours.

You are also reminded that all changes that might affect human participants must be cleared by the GREB. For example, you must report changes to the level of risk, applicant characteristics, and implementation of new procedures. To submit an amendment form, access the application by at http://www.queensu.ca/traq/signon.html; click on "Events;" under "Create New Event" click on "General Research Ethics Board Request for the Amendment of Approved Studies." Once submitted, these changes will automatically be sent to the Ethics Coordinator, Ms. Gail Irving, at University Research Services for further review and clearance by the GREB or Chair, GREB.

On behalf of the General Research Ethics Board, I wish you continued success in your research.

Sincerely,

Dean Trapp, Ph.D.
Chair
General Research Ethics Board

c: Dr. Benjamin Kutsyuruba, Supervisor
Dr. Benjamin Bolden, Chair, Unit REB
Mrs. Erin Rennie, Dept. Admin.
Appendix B: Survey Recruitment Pamphlet

PARTICIPANTS NEEDED FOR RESEARCH ON TURNOVER AND RETENTION IN INTERNATIONAL SCHOOLS

My name is Samantha Fittler and I’m a master’s student conducting research at Queen’s University-Faculty of Education. As someone who has worked in an international school, I know that working abroad can be both joyous and challenging for beginning teachers who work in an international setting.

As such, I am currently conducting a research study called Teachers in the Trenches: Exploring teachers’ experiences of turnover and retention in international schools. This study focuses on early-career teachers’ perceptions and experiences of working in Canadian-accredited international secondary schools in China and how these experiences can affect turnover and retention decisions. To conduct this study, I am reaching out to teachers who are currently working in these international schools to gather data. Your email was obtained through your school’s educational system-wide email database. If interested, this research is an opportunity for teachers to share their beliefs surrounding the challenges, barriers and supports in international schools, and to have their voices portrayed in academic research.

The study consists of two phases:

1. **Online Surveys**: Surveys will gather initial insights on teachers’ demographics and their experiences of factors related to turnover and retention present in international schools. Surveys are expected to take approximately 20 minutes of your time and are anonymous.

2. **Interviews**: Interviews will be conducted to gain a deeper understanding on the contexts (the why and how) of turnover and retention issues. If interested, participants may provide contact information for a follow-up interview at the end of the survey. Although all those who show interest are greatly appreciated, only 5 participants will be chosen for an opportunity to interview in this research study. Interviews will remain confidential (your name and contact information will not be revealed) and are expected to take up to an hour of your time.

To participate in this study, teachers must:

| ✓ | Hold a valid teaching certificate from a Canadian province/territory |
| ✓ | Be in their first five years of full-time teaching |
| ✓ | Work at an accredited international secondary school in mainland China that teaches a Canadian curriculum |

If you are interested in being a participant in this study, please use the link below to access the on-line questionnaire: https://queensu.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_3VKaR193gtAEZox

For extra protection, participants are able to use a VPN service if they wish to mask their IP address during the completion of the survey. For any questions regarding the study or this survey, please contact the researcher via the contact information provided below. Thank you for your time. Your interest in participating in this study is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

Samantha Fittler 12slf8@queensu.ca

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Appendix C: Survey Cover Letter and Consent Form

Letter of Information

Teachers in the trenches: Exploring teachers’ experiences of turnover and retention in international schools

This research is being conducted by Samantha Fittler under the supervision of Dr. Benjamin Kutsyuruba, in the Faculty of Education at Queen’s University in Kingston, Ontario. This study has been granted clearance by the General Research Ethics Board according to Canadian research ethics principles (http://www.ethics.gc.ca/default.aspx) and Queen’s University policies (http://www.queensu.ca/urs/research-ethics).

What is this study about? The purpose of this research is to explore the experiences and perspectives of Canadian-certified early-career teachers working in international secondary schools in China that teach a Canadian curriculum in order to discover how those experiences relate to teachers’ turnover and retention decisions.

What is involved to participate in this study? The study will require participants to answer questions regarding their general demographics and teaching experience, as well as their personal perceptions and experiences surrounding challenges, barriers and supports in international schools and their perceptions of how these items relate to turnover and retention decisions. The survey is provided fully on-line and can therefore be done from a location deemed most appropriate by the participant. It is expected to take up to 20 minutes to complete. The survey is completely anonymous: At no point throughout the process is a participant required to identify themselves or their place of work. For extra protection of anonymity, participants can use a VPN service throughout the completion of the survey to further mask their IP address. Participants do however have the option of providing their contact information at the end of the survey if they wish to be considered for a follow-up interview.

Interviews will be conducted to gain deeper insights on the issues of turnover and retention in international schools. Interviews will remain confidential and are expected to take approximately 60 minutes to complete. More details about the interview process can be obtained by contacting Samantha Fittler at 12slf8@queensu.ca. Although the researcher thanks all those who are interested in participating in an interview, only a small number of candidates will be chosen to participate in this process. Those who are selected for an interview will be contacted by phone or email after the closing date of the survey.

What are the risks and benefits of this study? There are no known physical, economic, or social risks associated with this study. Psychological risks are minimal and may include evocation of certain emotions based on personal experiences. The benefit to this study is filling a gap in literature and providing a positive contribution to educational research on understanding the experiences of Canadian-certified secondary school educators related to turnover and retention in international schools.

Is survey participation voluntary? Yes. You should not feel obliged to answer any questions that you find objectionable or that make you feel uncomfortable. You may choose to withdraw from the study at any time during the completion of the survey without pressure or consequence of any kind by exiting your browser. After submission of the survey, it is not possible to withdraw your data as the survey is anonymous.

What will happen to your responses? Your responses to the survey will remain anonymous to the extent possible. If participants elect to provide contact information for a follow-up interview their
information will be kept confidential. Only Samantha Fittler and her graduate supervisor, Dr. Benjamin Kutsyuruba, will have access to this information. The findings from the survey will be compiled, summarized and analyzed for a master’s dissertation. None of the data will contain your name or the identity of your place of work. Results from this study may be published in professional journals or presented at academic conferences, but any such presentations will only be of general findings and will maintain individual confidentiality. In accordance with the General Research Ethics Board Standard Operating Procedures, data will be securely/password protected for a minimum of five years or beyond. If data are used for secondary analysis they will contain no identifying information. You are entitled to a copy of the findings if you are interested. If you would like a copy of the findings, please provide your email or postal address on the consent form. Although in doing so your anonymity will be void, confidentiality of your responses will still be maintained.

Will you be compensated for your participation? No. You will not receive compensation for participation in the questionnaire.

What if you have concerns? Any questions about study participation may be directed to Samantha Fittler at 12slf8@queensu.ca or Dr. Benjamin Kutsyuruba at ben.kutsyuruba@queensu.ca. Any ethical concerns about the study may be directed to the Chair of the General Research Ethics Board at chair.GREB@queensu.ca or 613-533-6081.

Thank you for your interest in participating in this research study.

Consent Form

1. I have read the Letter of Information and have had any questions answered to my satisfaction.

2. I understand that I will be participating in the study called Teachers in the Trenches: Understanding teachers’ experiences of turnover and retention in international schools. I understand that this means that I will be asked to complete an anonymous survey which will inquire about my experiences and perceptions of turnover and retention in international schools.

3. I understand that my participation in this study is voluntary and I may withdraw at any time during the completion of the survey by exiting the browser before submission. After submission withdrawal of information will not be possible. I understand that every effort will be made to maintain the confidentiality of the data now and in the future. Only researchers affiliated with this study will have access to my data. The findings may also be published in professional journals or presented at conferences, but any such presentations will be of general findings and will never breach individual confidentiality. I understand that I am entitled to a copy of the findings if I am interested.

4. I am aware that if I have any questions, concerns, or complaints, I may contact Samantha Fittler at 12slf8@queensu.ca or Dr. Benjamin Kutsyuruba at ben.kutsyuruba@queensu.ca. Any ethical concerns about the study may be directed to the Chair of the General Research Ethics Board at chair.GREB@queensu.ca or 613-533-6081.

Please click this box if you agree to the terms listed above and consent to participating in this research: 

Date: ____________________________

Please print a copy of this consent form now if you would like to retain one for your records.

If you would like to request a copy of the results of this study, please provide an email or postal address in the space below:
Appendix D: Survey

Consent Form and Study Requirements

i) Please read the following Letter of Information and Consent Form

ii) Please click the "I consent" box if you agree to the terms listed above and consent to participating in this research. Please note that this consent is only for the survey. If chosen for an interview, a separate letter of information and consent form will be provided at a later date:

☐ I consent
☐ I do not consent - This will end the survey

iii) To participate in this survey, you must meet all three of the following requirements:

1) You currently hold a valid teaching certificate from a Canadian province/territory
2) You are an early-career teacher within your first five years of full-time teaching (This includes all full-time teaching experience in international and country of origin schools)
3) You currently work at an accredited international secondary school in mainland China that teaches a Canadian curriculum

Do you meet all of these requirements?

☐ Yes
☐ No

Part 1: Participant Information

A) Demographic Information
1) Are you a Canadian citizen?
   a. Yes    b. No
2) If you are not a Canadian citizen, which country are you a citizen of? Please fill in your answer in the space provided below.
3) Which gender do you identify with?
   a. Male    b. Female    c. Other    d. Prefer not to answer
4) In what age range are you?
   a. >19    b. 20-29    c. 30-39    d. 40-49    e. 50+    f. Prefer not to answer
5) What are your academic credentials? Choose all that apply.
   ☐ Bachelor of Education
   ☐ Bachelor Degree (outside education)
   ☐ Master of Education
   ☐ Master Degree (outside education)
   ☐ Doctorate in Education
   ☐ Doctorate Degree (outside education)
   ☐ Other. Please specify:

B) Teaching Experience
6) Based on your Canadian teaching certificate, what subjects are you certified to teach?
   ☐ English    ☐ Health/Physical Education
   ☐ History/Social Studies/Geography    ☐ Special Education
   ☐ Math    ☐ Business
   ☐ Science    ☐ French
   ☐ Fine Arts/Music    ☐ Technology Education
7) Based on your Canadian teaching certificate, what grade levels are you certified to teach? Choose all that apply.
   ☐ Kindergarten          ☐ Grade 7
   ☐ Grade 1               ☐ Grade 8
   ☐ Grade 2               ☐ Grade 9
   ☐ Grade 3               ☐ Grade 10
   ☐ Grade 4               ☐ Grade 11
   ☐ Grade 5               ☐ Grade 12
   ☐ Grade 6               ☐ Other, please specify...

8) Do you have experience as an employed occasional (i.e., non-permanent, temporary, teacher on call, or long term occasional) teacher either in Canada?
   a. Yes     b. No

9) Did you work as a full-time teacher for a school in Canada prior to teaching abroad?
   a. Yes     b. No

10) Do you have any experience as an employed occasional teacher or as a full-time teacher in a school outside of Canada (i.e. Schools that teach their own country's curriculum)? Choose all that apply.
    a. Yes- Full Time    b. Yes-Occasional    c. No

11) Do you have any experience as an employed occasional teacher or as a full-time teacher at any other international schools prior to your current workplace? (i.e. A school that offers students an international/foreign curriculum). Choose all that apply.
    a. Yes-Full Time    b. Yes-Occasional    c. No

12) How many international schools have you worked in prior to your current workplace?
    a. 1    b. 2    c. 3    d. 4    e. 5+

13) What countries were the international schools located in? Please write your answer in the space below.

14) Did the other international schools you taught at previously use a Canadian curriculum?
    a. Yes     b. No

15) Were your previous full-time teaching experiences within the grade level (e.g. Primary, Intermediate, Secondary) in which you completed your B.Ed degree/practicum/experiential learning?
    a. Yes- All of my previous teaching experiences were in grade levels I was trained to teach
    b. Mostly- The majority of my previous teaching experiences were in grade levels I was trained to teach
    c. Somewhat- Some of my previous teaching experiences were in grade levels I was trained to teach
    d. No- None of my previous teaching experiences were in grade levels I was trained to teach

16) Were your previous full-time teaching experiences within the subject areas for which you were prepared (e.g. English, Math, Science, etc.)?
    a. Yes- All of my previous teaching experiences were in courses I was prepared to teach
    b. Mostly- The majority of my previous teaching experiences were in courses I was prepared to teach
    c. Somewhat- Some of my previous teaching experiences were in courses I was prepared to teach
    d. No- None of my previous teaching experiences were in courses I was prepared to teach

17) In total, how many years of full-time teaching experience do you have from both Canada/your home country and teaching in a foreign country? (i.e. If you completed the exact number of years, choose the lesser option. ex. For 1 year of teaching, choose 0-1. For 1 year + 1 week of teaching, choose 1-2)
    a. 0-1    b. 1-2    c. 2-3    d. 3-4    e. 4-5    f. 5+
18) In total, how many years of experience do you have teaching a Canadian curriculum? (i.e. If you completed the exact number of years, choose the lesser option. ex. For 1 year of teaching, choose 0-1. For 1 year + 1 week of teaching, choose 1-2)
   a. 0-1      b. 1-2      c. 2-3      d. 3-4      e. 4-5      f. 5+

C) Current Workplace Information
19) Of the years you have been teaching full-time, how many of them have been at your current international school in China? (i.e. If you completed the exact number of years, choose the lesser option. ex. For 1 year of teaching, choose 0-1. For 1 year + 1 week of teaching, choose 1-2)
   a. 0-1      b. 1-2      c. 2-3      d. 3-4      e. 4-5      f. 5+
20) In China, the location of your current workplace is best described as a:
   a. Within a large city
   b. Within a small city
   c. Within a town/village
   d. Within a rural area
   e. Within a remote area (50 or more km from nearest hospital)
21) What grade levels are you currently teaching? Choose all that apply
   a. Grade 9      d. Grade 12
   b. Grade 10     e. Other, please specify: _______
   c. Grade 11
22) Are you currently teaching within the grade level (e.g., Primary or Secondary) in which you completed your B.Ed. practicum/experiential learning?
   a. Yes       b. No
23) Which subjects are you currently teaching? Choose all that apply.
   ☐ English     ☐ Special Education
   ☐ History/Social Studies/Geography    ☐ Business
   ☐ Math       ☐ French
   ☐ Science     ☐ Technology Education
   ☐ Fine Arts/Music    ☐ Other:
   ☐ Health/Physical Education
24) Are you currently teaching within the subject area for which you were prepared (English, Math, etc.)?
   a. Yes (All of my courses are within my teachable subject areas)
   b. Somewhat (Some of my courses are within my teachable subject areas)
   c. No (None of my courses are within my teachable subject areas)
25) Do you currently have any extra positions of responsibility beyond teaching? (ex. Department Head, Administrator, etc.)
   a. Yes       b. No
26) Before beginning work at your current international school, did you have a predetermined plan on how many years you wanted to teach at an international school in China?
   a. Yes       b. No
27) How many years did you originally plan on working at an international school in China?
   a. 0-1      b. 1-2      c. 2-3      d. 3-4      e. 4-5      f. 5+
28) What were your original motivations for choosing to work at an international school in China? Choose all that apply:
   a. Take a job opportunity     f. Better economic stability in host country
   b. Offered your dream job     g. Good job benefits (ex. Time off, medical/dental, bonuses, etc.)
   c. Limited jobs in home country  h. Desired length of opportunity
   d. Competitive salary       i. Desired location of opportunity
   e. Ability to save money (ex. Lower cost of living)
j. Opportunities for career growth (promotions, training, certifications, etc.)
k. Personal/professional development (skills, traits, etc.)
l. Gain experience to apply to jobs back home
m. More freedom (political, religious, etc.)

29) Do you think you will continue to work at your current international school next year?
   a. Definitely yes
   b. Probably yes
   c. Might or might not
   d. Probably not
   e. Definitely not

30) Whether next year or in the future, what do you think you will do after you leave your current international school?
   a. Return to Canada/my home country to teach
   b. Work at another international school outside of Canada
   c. Leave teaching and seek other employment in education
   d. Leave the teaching profession altogether and seek employment outside of education
   e. Return to school (ex. To pursue another degree, enhance skills, etc.)
   f. I plan to continue working at my current international school long-term
   g. Not sure at the current time
   h. Other. Please specify:

Section 2: Participants’ Experiences with Factors Related to Teacher Turnover

31) Teacher turnover is described as a teacher leaving one school to work at another or leaving the teaching profession altogether. The following factors have been found from past academic research to be challenges/barriers associated with teacher turnover in American, Canadian, Australian and UK schools. Please rate on a scale of from 0-7, 0 being not at all and 7 being always, if you feel you experience any of these challenges at your workplace.

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<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>0 Not at all</th>
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<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7 Always</th>
<th>Not available</th>
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<td>Problematic relations with students/classroom management</td>
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<td>Conflicting relationships with parents</td>
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<td>Conflicting professional relationships (ex. Colleagues, admin, etc.)</td>
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<td>Low levels of professional support (ex. Admin, department heads, other teachers)</td>
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<td>Lack of resources</td>
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<td>Lack of/unsatisfactory initial training or an induction program</td>
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<td>Lack of/unsatisfactory professional development</td>
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<td>Lack of a collaborative school environment</td>
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<td>Heavy workloads</td>
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<td>Large amounts of take home work</td>
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<td>Lack of time to complete daily tasks</td>
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<td>Lack of autonomy/control of what happens in the school</td>
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<td>Inadequate Salary</td>
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<td>Too many demands unrelated to teaching</td>
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<td>Low feelings of personal wellness/resilience</td>
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32) Out of the factors listed in the chart above, which three do you feel are the most influential in beginning teachers’ quitting/leaving decisions from international schools in China?

33) Out of the factors listed in the chart above, which three do you feel are the least influential in beginning teachers’ quitting/leaving decisions from international schools in China?

34) Are there any other challenges/barriers not listed in the chart above that you feel are influential to turnover decisions in international schools in China? If so, please provide a brief description. Point form is acceptable.
35) Are there any factors unrelated to challenges/barriers that you feel are influential in beginning teachers' turnover decisions in international schools in China? If so, please provide a brief description. Point form is acceptable.

Section 3: Participants’ Experiences with Factors Related to Teacher Retention

36) Teacher retention is described as a teacher continuing to work in their current school. The following factors have been found from past academic research to be supports associated with teacher retention decisions in American, Canadian, Australian and UK schools. Please rate on a scale of from 0-7, 0 being not at all satisfied and 7 being extremely, if any of these supports are available at your current workplace and your overall satisfaction with them.

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<th>Factor</th>
<th>0: Not at all satisfied</th>
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<th>7: Extremely satisfied</th>
<th>Not available/offered at my workplace</th>
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<tr>
<td>Induction Program for New Teachers (i.e. Structured program that aids new teachers throughout first few years of teaching)</td>
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<td>Training Sessions (other than professional development)</td>
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<td>Resource Sharing/Access to Resources</td>
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<td>Informal Mentorship (i.e. Between Colleagues, Department, etc.)</td>
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<td>Formal Mentorship (Established Through a Program)</td>
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<td>New Teacher Orientation</td>
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<td>Peer Observations (advice from others watching you/time to observe other teachers)</td>
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<td>Peer Evaluations</td>
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<td>Networking with Other New Teachers</td>
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<td>Meetings with School Administration</td>
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<td>Community Involvement/Programs (Parent support, community programs, etc.)</td>
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37) Out of the factors listed above, which three supports do you feel are the most influential in teachers’ decisions to continue employment at international schools in China?

38) Out of the factors listed above, which three supports do you feel are the least influential in teachers’ decisions to continue employment at international schools in China?

39) Do you feel there are any other support factors not listed in the chart above that influence teachers’ retention or staying decisions in international schools in China? If so, please provide a brief description of the challenge/barrier. Point form is acceptable.

40) Are there any supports/factors that you feel should be implemented at your workplace that do not currently exist which would be beneficial to help support and retain teachers? If so, please provide a brief description. Point form is acceptable.

41) As you think of those who are just entering the teaching profession, what advice from your own experience for developing personal resilience/well-being as a teacher would you offer them?

Thank you so much for partaking in this survey. If you are interested in signing up for an interview or receiving a copy of the results of this study please indicate your preference below and provide your contact information, including your name and a phone or email address where you can be reached. If you select both choices, contact information only needs to be provided once.

☐ I would like a copy of the results of this study. Contact Information:

☐ I would like to be considered to participate in an interview. Contact Information:
Appendix E: Interview Letter of Information and Consent Form

Letter of Information

Teachers in the trenches: Understanding teachers’ experiences of turnover and retention in international schools

This research is being conducted by Samantha Fittler under the supervision of Dr. Benjamin Kutsyuruba, in the Faculty of Education at Queen’s University in Kingston, Ontario.

What is this study about? The purpose of this research is to explore the experiences and perspectives of Canadian-certified early career teachers working in international secondary schools in China that use a Canadian curriculum in order to gain an understanding of the challenges, barriers, supports and how they influence teacher turnover and retention decisions.

What is involved to participate in this study? The study will require you to answer questions regarding your perceptions and experiences surrounding turnover and its causes in international schools. Interviews are being conducted to gain a deeper understanding of the contexts surrounding the challenges, barriers and supports that relate to teacher turnover and retention in international schools. You will be asked to describe your opinions and experiences surrounding these topics. Interviews will remain confidential to the best of the researcher’s ability and are expected to take approximately 60 minutes to complete. More details about the interview process can be obtained by contacting Samantha Fittler at 12slf8@queensu.ca.

What are the risks and benefits of this study? There are no known physical, economic, or social risks associated with this study. It is not predicted that this study will pose any psychological risk, however some questions may cause you to experience different emotions based on your personal experiences. There are no direct benefits to participants. The benefit to this study is filling a gap in literature and providing a positive contribution to educational research on understanding the experiences of Canadian-certified secondary school educators related to turnover and retention in international schools.

Is participation voluntary? Yes. You should not feel obliged to answer any questions that you find objectionable or that make you feel uncomfortable. You may choose to withdraw from the study up to one month prior to publication without pressure or consequence of any kind. If you withdraw, you may request removal of all or part of your data from the study. To withdraw from the research please contact the researcher, Samantha Fittler, by email at 12slf8@queensu.ca.

What will happen to your responses? Your responses will remain confidential to the best of the researcher’s ability. Only Samantha Fittler and Dr. Benjamin Kutsyuruba will have access to this information. The findings from the interviews will be audio-recorded, transcribed and analyzed thematically for a master’s dissertation. Quotes from the interviews may be used in the presentation of findings. However, none of the data will contain your name or the identity of your place of work, and every attempt will be made to make sure quotes do not include information that could indirectly identify you. Pseudonyms will be used to protect your identity. Results from this study may be published in professional journals or presented at scientific conferences, but any such presentations of findings will maintain individual confidentiality. You are entitled to a copy of the findings if you are interested. If you would like a copy of the findings, please provide your email or postal address on the consent form.

How will data be protected? In accordance with the General Research Ethics Board Standard Operating Procedures, all data will be securely stored and protected indefinitely. Paper materials will be kept in the researcher’s home in locked cabinets while electronic data will be password protected/encrypted on the
researcher’s computer and backed up on an external hard drive. If data are used for secondary analysis they will contain no identifying information.

Will you be compensated for your participation? Yes. You will receive a $20 gift card for Amazon, Starbucks or Chapters as compensation for your time.

What if you have concerns? Any questions about study participation may be directed to Samantha Fittler at 12slf8@queensu.ca or Dr. Benjamin Kutsyuruba at ben.kutsyuruba@queensu.ca. Any ethical concerns about the study may be directed to the Chair of the General Research Ethics Board at chair.GREB@queensu.ca or 1-613-533-2988.

Thank you for your interest in participating in this research study.

Interview Consent Form

Name (please print): ________________________________________

1. I have read the Letter of Information and have had any questions answered to my satisfaction.

2. I understand that I will be participating in the study called Teachers in the Trenches: Understanding teachers experiences’ of turnover and retention in international schools. I understand that this means that I will be asked to complete a confidential interview which will inquire about my experiences and perceptions of turnover and retention in international schools.

3. I understand that my participation in this study is voluntary and I may withdraw my responses up to one month prior to publication by contacting the researcher by email. I understand that every effort will be made to maintain the confidentiality of the data now and in the future. Only researchers affiliated with this study will have access to my data. The data may also be published in professional journals or presented at conferences, but any such presentations of findings will never breach individual confidentiality. I understand that I am entitled to a copy of the findings if I am interested.

4. I am aware that if I have any questions, concerns, or complaints, I may contact Samantha Fittler at 12slf8@queensu.ca or Dr. Benjamin Kutsyuruba at ben.kutsyuruba@queensu.ca. Any ethical concerns about the study may be directed to the Chair of the General Research Ethics Board at chair.GREB@queensu.ca or 1-613-533-2988.

Signature: _____________________________

Date: ____________________

Please print a copy of this consent form now if you would like to retain one for your records.

If you would like to request a copy of the results of this study, please provide an email or postal address in the space below:
Appendix F: Interview Protocol and Semi-Standardized Guide

Interview Protocol

The interview will be conducted in English and at a date and time agreed upon by the participant and researcher. In person interviews will be the preferred method if possible, however online or phone interviews may be conducted in the case of travelling restrictions. In advance of the interview, participants will receive the letter of information and consent form by email and will be required to return them to the researcher. These will be reviewed again during the time of the interview.

Introductory Elements (5 minutes)
- Provide participant with brief history of myself including where I am from, what I have studied, etc.
- Explain the research intentions of the study: Gain a deeper understanding of teacher’s perspectives of turnover and retention in international schools including but not limited to: challenges, barriers, existing supports and support needs
- Review the letter of information and consent form. Remind participant of their confidentiality and their ability to withdraw at any point leading up to publication.
- Explain the format and operation of the interview, expectations for the participant and the approximate duration of interview.
- Remind participant that the interview will be audio-recorded, and field notes will be taken. Ensure they are comfortable with this process.
- Ask the participant if they have any questions prior to beginning the interview session.
- Remind participant that they should not feel obligated to answer any questions that make them feel uncomfortable.

During Interview Process (60 minutes)
- One question will be asked at a time
- Probing will be used to clarify and expand responses
- Other verbal and non-verbal cues will be used to indicate that I am listening and encourage participants to continue their stories
- At the end of the interview I will ask the participant if they have any other comments or would like to revisit any of the previous questions

Concluding Elements (5 minutes)
- Thank the participants for their time and efforts.
- Answer any questions participants may have.
- Reassure confidentiality and secure processing and storage of data.
- Request permission to follow-up either in-person, by email, or through a phone call regarding data that may seem unclear during transcription or analysis
- Give participants my contact information in case they would like to ask questions, expand answers, etc.
- Present participant with $20 gift card

Semi-Standardized Interview Guide

Participant name: _________________________________
Date: ______________________________________
Time: _________________________________
1. How did you decide to work in an international school in China?
   Possible Probes:
   a. What drew you to the country?
   b. What drew you to the school?
   c. Did you have any ideas about what the experience might be like before you left?

2. How did you prepare to work abroad?
   Possible Probes:
   a. Did you conduct any research?
   b. Did you have any prior experience that you could draw on to help you prepare?
   c. Did your school have any supports/advice available to help you prepare?
   d. Did you receive any outside support apart from yourself or your school? (Friends/Family)

3. Think back to when you first entered the school. Tell me how you were feeling.
   Possible Probes:
   a. What were you excited about?
   b. Did you have any reservations? What were you nervous about?
   c. Did you feel ready to begin teaching? Why or why not?

4. Describe your first impressions of working in your school.
   Possible Probes:
   a. Tell me more about the demographics of the school.
   b. How would you describe the atmosphere or culture of your school? Did this change as the year went on?
   c. Tell me more about your classes. Were you teaching the subject you were trained for? What were the students like?
   d. Were there any elements of the school, its culture, or the people that really stood out to you in those first few months?

5. What were some of the largest challenges you faced when you first started working at the international school?
   Possible Probes:
   a. Communication with parents, classroom management, resources, workload, etc.
   b. Findings from the questionnaire-Issues you experienced? Issues experienced by others?

6. What are some of the challenges that you still face currently in your work? Describe your feelings surrounding these challenges.
   Possible Probes:
   a. Are the issues the same as when you first started? How have they changed?

7. Are there any barriers outside of your control that you feel influence your work as a teacher? Can you describe some examples?
   Possible Probes:
   a. What level of autonomy do you have when it comes to making school decisions?
   b. Do you feel you are given adequate funding for your classroom needs?

8. How important do you feel the challenges and barriers that you’ve mentioned are in terms of teachers’ turnover and retention decisions?
   Possible Probes:
a. How do you personally feel about them? Are there any significant moments/stories that stand out in your own turnover/retention decision?
b. How do you think other teachers feel about them? Are there any general challenges that you really feel influence teachers’ leaving decisions?
c. Are there any major items outside of challenges and barriers that influence turnover and retention decisions?

9. What supports already exist at the school to help you overcome challenges and barriers?
   Possible Probes:
   a. Findings from questionnaire-Supports you mentioned? Supports mentioned by others?
   b. Did you participate in any professional development? If so what kinds of professional development was offered?
   c. Are there any training opportunities outside of professional development? Can you describe them?
   d. Are there any formal support programs set up at the school? (i.e. mental health initiatives, days in lieu, etc.)
   e. Was there an induction program available at your school? Can you describe it?
   f. Was a mentor assigned or available to you? What was your working relationship with your mentor like? In what ways did they support you? Do you feel your mentor was effective?
   g. What worked best for you in terms of your development as a teacher?

10. Who did you turn to when you needed support? In what ways did they help?
    Possible Probes:
    a. Describe your relationship with other teachers.
    b. Describe your relationship with school leaders and administration.
    c. Describe your relationship with other school stakeholders (counselors, parents, etc.)
    d. Are there any groups present outside of the school that helped to support you?

11. What factors or supports do you feel would be beneficial to helping you continue your future work at the school or retaining teachers at large?
    Possible Probes:
    a. Existing supports that influence this?
    b. Supports that you wish to see implemented that do not already exist?
    c. How would you picture these new supports functioning?

12. Are there any other comments that you would like to share regarding your experiences that we have not discussed or would like to provide more detail on?
    Possible Probes:
    a. As an early-career teacher in an international school
    b. In relation to turnover and retention in an international school

Thank you for investing this time to talk to me today. Your insights as an early career teacher are invaluable to our understanding of the experiences of teachers in international schools and how they relate to turnover and retention decisions.
Appendix G: Ethics Amendment Letter

March 20, 2019

Miss Samantha Fittler  
Master’s Student  
Faculty of Education  
Queen’s University  
Duncan McArthur Hall  
511 Union Street West  
Kingston, ON, K7M 5R7

Dear Miss Fittler:

RE: Amendment for your study entitled: GEDUC-915-18 Teachers in the Trenches: Exploring teachers’ experiences of turnover and retention in international schools; TRAQ # 6024480

Thank you for submitting your amendment requesting the following change:

1) To change the number of interview candidates from 5 people to 7 people.

By this letter, you have ethics approval for this change.

Good luck with your research.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Dean Tripp, Ph. D.  
Chair  
General Research Ethics Board

c.: Dr. Benjamin Kutsyuruba, Supervisor
Appendix H: Introduction of Study Protocol for Additional Permissions

The following protocol was used in discussion with school leaderships when seeking additional permissions to conduct the study within their international schools.

Introductory Elements
- Introduce myself and the proposed study:
  - Myself: Who I am, previous teaching experience, what I am currently studying
  - Abstract: Teacher turnover has been a growing worldwide concern for many years, particularly for teachers within their first five years of the teaching profession. Multiple studies have been conducted that identify the causes of teacher turnover within schools and the possible teacher retention strategies that can reduce the impact of this problem. Despite having knowledge of the factors that cause attrition and potential solutions, much of the research available on teacher turnover is both American and quantitative in nature, and as a result the unique and descriptive accounts of the human voices that experience the issue are often underrepresented from outside North America. This proposed qualitative study aims to address the gap in literature by discovering and exploring the unique experiences of Canadian-certified early career teachers surrounding teacher turnover and retention in international secondary schools in China that use a Canadian curriculum.
- Explain the research intentions of the study:
  - Gain a deeper understanding of teacher’s perspectives of turnover and retention in international schools including but not limited to: challenges, barriers, existing supports and support needs and how those experiences influence turnover and retention decisions.
  - From the thesis perspective, it is not a study of a particular school or a system itself, but an exploration of the perspectives surrounding the phenomenon of teacher turnover and retention in international schools and their contexts.

Detailed Points of Discussion
- Review data collection methods:
  - To carry out this study, this proposed study will entail a combination of a 3-part questionnaire and individual interviews. Questions primarily focus on the challenges, barriers and supports that have been connected to teacher turnover and retention from previous research studies.
  - Data collection tools have also been adapted from previous academic studies and will be piloted prior to use in this study
  - Review the recruitment pamphlet (appendix C)
  - Review the letters of information and consent forms for each tool (appendices D & E)
  - Review data collection tools (appendices A & F)
- Review collection of participants:
  - Required parameters of the study: This study is intended for early-career Canadian-certified teachers working in international secondary schools in China that teach a Canadian curriculum
It is hoped that approximately 50 teachers will take part in the questionnaire, of which 5 will be interviewed to discuss their answers further.

Questionnaires will be done via web-link using the quantitative software Qualtrics. This will be accessible via a recruitment pamphlet, while interviews will be done in person or via the online platform Zoom.

- **Review predicted risks/benefits:**
  - There are no known physical, economic, or social risks associated with this study. Psychological risks are minimal and may include evocation of certain emotions based on personal experiences. The benefit to this study is filling a gap in literature and providing a positive contribution to educational research on understanding the experiences of Canadian-certified secondary school educators related to turnover and retention in international schools.

- **Review anonymity/confidentiality:**
  - As this study is anonymous, it will not contain any proprietary information. Specifically, in regard to our University ethics policy, we follow a stringent list of procedures to ensure that no identifying information is revealed. Any reference to these items made by participants will be removed by myself during the writing process. If needed, any references to schools will simply be stated as “teachers working in an international school” and all names will be replaced with pseudonyms.
  - Questionnaires are anonymous and are done by access to a web-link. Neither the researcher nor any involved parties will be able to identify the participants. For the interviews, the participants identities and responses are kept confidential and will not be shared with anyone outside the research team.
  - Participants are not obligated to answer any questions that make them feel uncomfortable.
  - Myself and my graduate supervisor will be the only ones who have access to the raw data at any given time, and he will be reviewing my work to ensure that it always maintains a policy of confidentiality.
  - Online data will be securely stored using password protection and physical materials will be locked in a secure location.
  - This study has been reviewed by the General Research Ethics Board at Queen’s University.

- **Review what will be required from the school leadership:**
  - If leaders oversee more than one school they can decide which schools best fit the parameters of this study.
  - Permission to access system platforms to send out the recruitment pamphlet. This would include school email groups, school newsletters and school social forums.

**Concluding Elements**

- Thank the individual for their time and consideration of the study.
- Answer any questions they may have.
- Reminder of my contact information/time of availability in case they would like to ask further questions.
Appendix I: Interview Candidates Recruitment Script

Subject box of email: INTERVIEWEES NEEDED FOR RESEARCH ON TURNOVER AND RETENTION IN INTERNATIONAL SCHOOLS

Hi __________________

My name is Samantha Fittler and I’m a master’s student conducting research at Queen’s University- Faculty of Education. Recently you filled in a questionnaire for my research study called Teachers in the Trenches: Exploring teachers’ experiences of turnover and retention in international schools. I am contacting you today because you filled in your contact information at the end of that questionnaire in response to potentially participating in an interview for my study. If you are still interested, I would love to have the opportunity to interview you and to hear more on your beliefs surrounding the challenges, barriers and supports in international schools.

These interviews will be conducted to gain a deeper understanding on the contexts (the why and how) of turnover and retention issues and will consist of 13 questions which are expected to take approximately 60 minutes of your time. Interviews will remain confidential and your name and contact information will not be revealed in the study.

If you are interested in being a participant in the interviews, please contact me by _____(date)_______ through email at 12slf8@queensu.ca or by phone at +86-155-0263-9370. Upon your response I will happily send you the letter of information and consent form which consist of further details for the interview process, as well as answer any questions that you may have. A copy of the interview questions will also be provided to you for your review upon receipt of your consent form. If you have changed your mind and are no longer interested in participating in an interview, it would be appreciated if you could please let me know at your earliest convenience, so I may contact other interested candidates.

Thank you for your time. Your interest in participating in this study is greatly valued.

Sincerely,

Samantha Fittler
**Appendix J: Sample Interview Transcript**

**Individual Interview #4, Transcript Page 1**

Interview 4, Wednesday, January 23, 2019, 9:00am – 10:19am

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Speaker</th>
<th>Text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction 0:00</td>
<td>[Introduction to interview and administrative items]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewer 0:42</td>
<td>Alright, so the first question of course is how did you decide to work in an international school in China?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 0:54</td>
<td>Well uh, essentially fellow graduates from teachers’ college were going abroad and they seemed to have pretty good experience or good things to say about, about working abroad. And so, I just kind of, because I was a little bit delayed I kind of tagged on afterwards, I guess. And so, asked them about their experiences and like I say they're relatively positive. So, I thought why not? And I did want to travel and, and see the world while teaching.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewer 1:29</td>
<td>For sure. And was there anything that drew you specifically to China other than kind of other people?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 1:57</td>
<td>Not really. Like I done a year in Korea for ESL before Teacher’s College and so I knew I wanted to go probably back to Asia and so China was just the just another option, essentially, and because it was, it is one of the most powerful countries in the world and maybe that's what drew me as well. And that was pretty much about it. Yeah, and uh maybe the school just being more established, yeah.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewer 2:04</td>
<td>So was there anything else about the school that kind of like [pause] drew you in?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 2:10</td>
<td>Not really. Like I said, other than the kind of, it seemed to have a solid system, it seemed to be established, it used a Canadian curriculum, it was, it seemed like a known quantity, if that makes sense, like it made sense kind of thing. It didn't look too sketchy or, or anything like that.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewer 2:21</td>
<td>Yeah, for sure. So how did you get prepared once you kind of got the job?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>