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Concordia University–Portland

College of Education

Doctorate of Education Program

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A Phenomenological Study of the Lived Experiences of International Educators Working
Abroad: A Global Perspective

Sarah Catherine Thomas

Concordia University–Portland

College of Education

Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the College of Education
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education in
Professional Inquiry, Leadership, and Transformation

William Boozang, Ed.D., Faculty Chair Dissertation Committee

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Abstract

Teaching and leadership assignments abroad have become highly sought after largely due to globalization and the opportunities for educators to explore the world, gaining cultural sensitivity and awareness while utilizing his or her educational qualifications. The rationale of this qualitative phenomenological study was to understand the complexity surrounding the experiences of international school teachers and administrators and their decisions concerning longevity with international schools. Twelve veteran international educators participated in this study sharing their lived experiences in working in international schools outside of their home countries. The study was designed to answer four research questions: (a) What lived experiences do international educators identify as contributing to a decision to remain or leave a position in an international school?, (b) According to the lived perceptions of international educators, how do international school administrators build and promote a positive school climate and how is this impacted by frequent teacher turnover?, (c) How do international school educators describe measures taken to ensure school improvement initiatives are continued with fidelity, while balancing the need to train new teachers on a much more frequent basis?, and (d) Based on the lived experiences of international educators, how can international school leaders attract and retain qualified instructors who seek longevity in their role? Six emergent and recurring themes were distinguished: the importance of geographical location to the individual educator, tangible salary and benefits packages, school environment or climate, effective leadership, autonomy and trust, and professional/personal growth.

Keywords: International education, teacher retention, school environment, effective leadership, phenomenology, school culture.

Dedication

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my children, Samantha, Derek, and Naomi for growing up with a mom very busy working and attending classes. You were all so patient as I worked my way through my degrees, giving up much needed time with your mom so she could concentrate on her studies. I did all of this for you. I worked so diligently to someday be at the point I am today. I wanted to give you everything and show you the power in knowledge. I love you all than words can express, you are my everything, and I thank you for having faith in me throughout these years.

I also dedicate this dissertation to Dr. Melanie Marrone who has been my inspiration in pursuing this degree and my number one support person and cheerleader. You have always believed in me and I am eternally grateful for your friendship and that our paths crossed as they did. If not for your wisdom and dedication in helping me through this journey in writing this dissertation, I would have not been able to see this come to fruition. Your knowledge and patience astound me every day. The world is a better place with you in it and there is no way to express my gratitude to you and for you.

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Mom and dad, you showed me the value of hard work and in education. Thank you for your support over all of these years as I have pursued my degrees.

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I would like to acknowledge my students and educator colleagues who over the years have had such a profound influence on my practices as a teacher and as an administrator. Each of you has a special place in my heart.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Against a backdrop of rapid globalization, the world is undergoing substantial change (Falk, 2015). With ease and accessibility to the internet, the world has become increasingly networked, which influences interconnectedness through globalization, and the distance between us lessening (Chacko & Lin, 2015; Saudelli, 2012). Places and customs which once seemed strange, exotic, distant, and inaccessible are easily viewed and appreciated, subsequently removing the fear of the unknown and opening the door to exploration and cultural change (Smolcic & Katunich, 2017). In combination with job shortages, civil unrest, and a fractured economy, Americans are looking for opportunities to work and live abroad (Saudelli, 2012). Teaching internationally can be an appealing possibility for educators seeking employment opportunities in foreign countries and in cultures which differ from their own (Hauerwas, Skawinski, & Ryan, 2017). Some international schools were developed to serve an ideological purpose, as a means to promote international understanding through education and these values are attractive to many international educators (Poole, 2018). The opportunity to teach abroad can be appealing for many reasons including the opportunity to develop cultural sensitivity as well as increasing one's cultural knowledge base (Cross & Dunn, 2016; Hauerwas, Skawinski, & Ryan, 2017).

For the past eight years, this researcher has worked abroad in international schools as both an educator and administrator and has witnessed the rise in popularity in international teaching, as well as the challenges in establishing a consistent educational environment conducive to learning with the capacity for retaining qualified faculty (Gray & Summers, 2016). Low teacher retention rates are a common occurrence at international schools, partially due to the transient nature of international teaching staff who often undertake international teaching

with the intention to see and experience the world, and therefore often move from location to location (Allen, 2016). School dynamics are often varied due to inconsistencies in staffing and can feel unpredictable to teachers and the school community at large making it challenging to establish a cohesive educational environment encouraging members to remain (Gray & Summers, 2016). “Teacher turnover rates tend to be high in international schools for a variety of reasons, including cultural differences, a desire to travel, salary, benefits, and perceived effectiveness of the school leadership” (Gray & Summers, 2016, p. 4). Teacher turnover has an impact on international schools comparable to schools in the United States.

The goal of this research was to establish the challenges faced by international schools in retaining qualified staff for longer periods of time and to generate solutions for international school administrators hoping to create successful learning environments for students and desirable school cultures which encourage teachers to renew their teaching contracts. The focus of this study was centered on teacher and administrator perspectives concerning international schools and international education. Understanding the unique challenges presented in international schools and the reasons teachers choose to either stay with a school or to leave was also investigated as a means to generate potential solutions for international school administrators.

High teacher turnover has been known to negatively impact school environments and with attrition rates in education escalating, it is important to seek answers to solve this problem in order to better help students have successful educational outcomes (Craig, 2017; Mancuso, Roberts, & White, 2011). The impact of teacher turnover affects not only learning, but the culture and morale of the school community, losing qualified teachers on a regular basis has an impact on the school community and student achievement (Glennie, Mason, & Edmunds, 2016).

“Even in the world’s best school systems, the quality of the teacher is a primary driver of variation in student learning outcomes” (Ring & West, 2015, p. 106). Increasing student achievement, lessening economic burdens, and improving school climate are important goals for international schools (Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018).

Background, Context, History, and Conceptual Framework for the Problem

Staff continuity and consistency in the educational environment, has a significant impact on student achievement and environmental satisfaction, regardless of the location of the institution (Wood, Finch, & Miericki, 2013). School administrators understand fostering sound, trust-based relationships within the school community coupled with building meaningful cultural and climate initiatives is imperative for developing the kind of school environment where faculty want to remain (Bennell, 2015; Schenck, 2016). “Consistency and leadership by example is key for any organization to be successful” (Cook, 2014, p. 10). Effective leaders should be innovative, flexible, value a variety of viewpoints, and capitalize on potential leaders throughout the entirety of the organization (Bennell, 2015).

Building and maintaining a healthy and effective environment can be challenging in any workplace or school setting and becomes increasingly difficult when faculty come and go frequently, as is often the case in many international schools with contracts containing short durations (Chandler, 2010). While there is evidence indicating a transience among international educators, there is inadequate data concerning specifics regarding teacher retention and satisfaction in international schools outside the U.S. from a global standpoint (Allen, 2016; Chandler, 2010). The frequent turnover in faculty and administrators make it difficult to establish trust in the environment, which is crucial for instituting and maintaining effective relationships within the school community (Gray & Summers, 2016). Developing inroads to

allow for healthy, meaningful, and trusting relationships, while anticipating some changes and proactively planning ahead for them, permits an effective and successful international school environment to transpire (Bryant, Escalante, & Selva, 2017). The effectiveness and quality of leadership influences the nature of school culture; administrators play a fundamental role by applying time and resources in support of an environment which cultivates professional innovation and organizational development (Antinluoma, Iilomäki, Lahti-Nuutila, & Toom, 2018). Investigating the factors international educators consider when renewing contracts or seeking employment with international schools will provide data and generate potential solutions for international school administrators which will increase organizational effectiveness and reduce teacher turnover in the international school environment (Mancuso et al., 2010).

Statement of the Problem

Given the transient nature of international teaching staff, it is important for school leaders to develop a positive school culture in order to maintain traction in retaining qualified educators. Frequent teacher turnover makes it difficult for school leaders to sustain academic and school climate initiatives, which may, in turn, contribute to teachers electing to leave after one or two years (Ingersoll, 2001). In addition to short contractual expectations, there is a lure of enhancing one's geographical location and cultural experiences by proceeding to another country. With salary and benefit variances, living conditions, and administrator support to consider there are many factors teachers consider when making decisions to stay or remain with a school (Chandler, 2010). Maintaining a consistent environment without consistency in staff can be a difficult task in international schools; predictable proceedings, patterns, and protocol in a school environment are important and without veteran faculty well versed in these elements, the environment can lose structure (Handford & Leithwood, 2012). Fullan (2011) challenged

administrators to take on the task of evoking change by becoming *change leaders* who provide direction in creating the conditions for effective work environments. Leadership behavior influences teacher satisfaction and administrators should reflect upon what may have been done unsuccessfully in the past and work towards developing original initiatives individually suited for international schools as well as their own unique educational community (Rodgers & Skelton, 2014). These are facets of an effective school environment, and leaning upon foundational values such as trust, collaboration, support, and care are the basis for establishing effective environment and can have a positive impact on teacher retention (Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018).

Purpose of Study

The intent of this transcendental phenomenological study was to authenticate whether challenges existed in teacher retention in international schools who employed native English-speaking teachers, with English as the standard language of instruction. Via a transcendental phenomenological design, an examination of the lived experiences and perceptions of 12 international educator participants was completed. To further aid in answering the research questions posed in this dissertation, motivations for seeking international employment, perspectives about working and living abroad, and expected length of assignment when accepting an international position were also explored. Through this process the researcher hoped to identify strategies for international school leaders to commission, in support of the development of efficacious climate initiatives, and that these strategies would be constructive in stabilizing the international school environment and benefiting the international school community.

The researcher employed a qualitative research method by means of a phenomenological design interview approach, which allowed the researcher to examine the lived experiences of international teachers and administrators and described the culmination of their shared experiences of the phenomenon of living and working abroad as educators (Creswell, 2013). Phenomenology is the reflective study of the conscious world as people immediately experience it prereflectively, before they conceptualize, theorize, or reflect on it (Moustakas, 1994).

Through the lived experiences described by the participants, the researcher gathered rich, descriptive data that helped to determine and understand the motivations and practices of international teachers and administrators. Understanding the motivations and practices as encountered by international educators provided insight into improving teacher retention in international schools.

Research Questions

Frequent teacher turnover makes it difficult for school leaders to sustain academic and school climate initiatives, which may, in turn, contribute to teachers choosing to seek employment in a more stable school environments (Glennie, Mason, & Edmunds, 2016). This researcher sought to answer the following questions:

- What lived experiences do international educators identify as contributing to a decision to remain or leave a position in an international school?
- According to the lived perceptions of international educators, how do international school administrators build and promote a positive school climate and how is this impacted by frequent teacher turnover?

- How do international school educators perceive the measures taken to ensure school improvement initiatives are continued with fidelity, while balancing the need to train new teachers on a much more frequent basis, based on their lived experiences?
- Centered on the lived experiences of international educators, how is it perceived international school leaders are able to attract and retain qualified instructors who seek longevity in their role?

Rationale, Relevance, and Significance of the Study

Teacher retention and its significant impact on student achievement and school satisfaction has been explored by researchers in the past, with studies focused on the United States and largely in the public-school sector (Gray & Summers, 2016). There is less research addressing these same concerns within schools outside the United States. What exists bears a noticeable focus on pre-service teachers or specific countries; from a global standpoint there appears to be a critical gap in research associated with contracted foreign teachers in international schools with English as the standard language of instruction (Chacko & Lin, 2015; Chandler, 2010). Due to the relaxed structure and independence of international schools, the collection of comprehensive data on teacher turnover and other issues is very limited (Odland & Ruzicka, 2009). Through this study, the researcher hoped to provide information about challenges unique to international schools and to solicit viable solutions to be shared with the international school community with expectations to inform international school administrators of the critical elements in attracting and retaining qualified educators and approaches for creating consistency in the international school environment.

Once the challenges were effectively identified and corroborated, the researcher sought collaborate with participant's successful strategies for addressing the challenges. The researcher

also collaboratively explored potential causes for failure and sought suggestions for reducing the problems. Creating initiatives to enhance student learning and curtail excessive teacher turnover will benefit international leaders and teachers and evoke progressive change for the global educational population (Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018).

Definition of Terms

This section provides definitions for key terminology utilized throughout this study:

Attrition. Percentage of teachers at a given level of education leaving the profession in a given school year (UNESCO, 2018).

Extrinsic rewards. Engaging in an activity in order to receive an external reward, such as money (Marston., 2014).

Globalization. The increasing free movement of people, goods and services, information, and money across national borders and physical distances that are traditionally limited by their movement within political, economic, and geopolitical boundaries (Chacko & Lin, 2015).

Hierarchy of needs theory. A theory suggesting humans require safety, security, physiological needs to be met, along with a sense of belonging to achieve self-actualization (Stoyanov, 2017).

Intercultural competence. The ability to develop targeted knowledge, skills, and attitudes that lead to visible behavior and communication that are both effective and appropriate in intercultural interactions (Hauerwas, Skawinski, & Ryan, 2017).

Intrinsic rewards. Engaging in an activity because it is personally rewarding (Marston, 2014).

International educator. Global educators who practice in diverse geographical locations and function outside their country of origin (Saudelli, 2012).

International school. International schools vary greatly. For the purposes of this study, international schools of focus are outside the United States serving students in other countries. The standard language of instruction is English, and the schools employ native English-speaking foreign teachers (Gray & Summers, 2016).

Mentorship. Pairing seasoned professionals with novice teachers to proactively facilitate professional growth for both the mentor and mentee (Lochmiller, Adachi, Chesnut, & Johnson, 2016).

Phenomenological. Defines the lived experiences of participants and focuses on commonalities between their stories (Moustakas, 1994).

Professional development. Develops teaching and learning by providing teachers new ideas and methods supported by sound theory and practice (Rodgers & Skelton, 2014).

Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). Participants build professional skills through collaborative learning endeavors, sharing points of view and knowledge, and building a stronger learning community (Gray & Summers, 2016).

School climate/ culture. School climate refers to the quality and character of school life. School climate is based on examining patterns of students', parents' and school personnel's perceptions of school life. It reflects norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices, and organizational structures found within a given school (National School Climate Center, 2018).

Servant leadership theory. A theory suggesting a leader's main objective is the good of the group, putting others before themselves. Individual members of the group prosper along with the community (Greenleaf, 2002).

Transformational leadership theory (TLT). A theory suggesting leaders encourage followers to flourish and develop their own skills and abilities, allowing for personal transformation while benefitting the environment (Yammarino & Dubinsky, 1994; Morrison, 2014).

Assumptions, Delimitations, and Limitations

There were several assumptions related to this study, which were critical to the significance of the research. The first was the assumption there were significant challenges concerning teacher retention in international schools globally. Another assumption was international teachers have a predilection towards transience in the workplace. It was an assumption that participants in this study would understand and answer all interview questions and be comfortable with the interview process. An additional assumption was the belief that leadership and school culture significantly impacted teacher retention in international schools, regardless of a transient nature in faculty. Furthermore, assumptions were made as to the importance in understanding how the interactive and interconnected theories of transformational leadership theory, servant leadership theory, and Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory could be applied by international school leaders affording greater stability in international schools. It was also assumed the in-depth interviews with teachers, using a phenomenological approach, would garner a substantial amount of data about lived experiences of international educators and therefore, was the best approach to use in conducting the study. The researcher assumed

transparency and sought honest input from all participants, encouraging genuine feedback with the goal to improve the field of international education.

The delimitations of this study were established to impart boundaries, limiting the scope of the study. One of the delimitations of this study was the focus on international schools with English as the standard language of instruction, utilizing native speaking foreign staff to teach under contract. Another delimitation came with the inclusion of native English-speaking teachers with similar cultural backgrounds hailing from North America, England, and Canada contracted in international schools, narrowing cultural differences. The study was restricted to a qualitative methodology and a phenomenological approach. To collect applicable data, participants were chosen corresponding to specific criteria. The participants were limited to teachers and administrators who had experience in international education for more than two years. Participants were further limited and were chosen due to the varied locations where international schools are prevalent worldwide.

In transcendental phenomenological research, a great extent of dependence is placed on the description of the experiences of the research participants with less focus on the interpretations of the researcher (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994). Consequently, the quality of the data depended on how forthcoming the participants were when imparting information. Though all participants were agreeable to share their lived experiences in international education, some of the participants in the study were more loquacious and descriptive in giving their accounts of teaching or working abroad than other participants. Accounts also varied according to each of their professional backgrounds and lived experiences. Additionally, the information provided was personal and thus highly subjective. Another limitation of the study was the number of participants, as the researcher utilized a relatively small sample from a large

population of native English-speaking international teachers and administrators. Although the sample was small and provided only a glimpse of international education and its challenges, the varied locations of participants provided a global perspective in hopes of garnering participants from all corners of the world and established a wide lens of the issues and challenges faced. Additionally, limiting the participants to native English-speaking international educators and administrators confined the results potentially omitting other viable experiences and solutions.

Summary

The world is becoming more accessible and the distance has been lessened between populations allowing availability for international teaching opportunities to offer a variety of cultural and learning advantages for globalization minded educators (Chacko & Lin, 2015). International teaching opportunities can be an appealing means for educators to travel the world while utilizing professional skills. This combination often stimulates a transient nature in international faculty and they frequently remain in one location no longer than the length of their contract (Chandler, 2010). A “revolving door” of teaching and administrative staff makes it difficult for schools to establish an environment conducive to learning, as well as developing consistency in curriculum or climate initiatives, leaving the international school experience lacking for many stakeholders (Ingersoll, 2001). While there may be factors outside the administrator’s control in international schools, there are elements which can be regulated as in ensuring teacher satisfaction; when teachers are satisfied in their positions, they tend to have more positive feelings towards their schools increasing their likelihood to remain (Glennie, Mason, & Edmunds, 2016). Continuity in staff is essential as it has a multidimensional impact on the school environment.

A goal of this transcendental phenomenological study was to distinguish the reality of and identify the challenges concerning teacher retention in international schools, through in-depth interviews with international educators and to ultimately suggest solutions to benefit international schools and educators. An additional goal of the research was to address a lack of data concerning international school teacher retention from a global perspective.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Recruiting and retaining qualified teachers can be a difficult task for schools in the United States and equally exigent for international schools (Odland & Ruzicka, 2009). According to a 2013 interview with Richard Ingersoll, between 45%–50% of teachers leave teaching within the first five years, which includes almost 10% who leave before the end of their first year (Zhang & Zeller, 2016). While salary is a significant factor in both recruitment and retention, there are other intrinsic considerations that are deemed important as well (Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018). Leadership that develops a positive school climate by cultivating solid relationships built on trust, nurtures an environment focused on personal and professional growth, and institutes a collaborative workspace based on a sense of shared responsibility correlates to staff retention and the ability to recruit qualified teachers (Boyd et al., 2011). When these attributes are associated with school climate, teachers have positive feelings, which influence his or her decision to remain (Glennie, Mason, & Edmunds, 2016).

Various urban and rural school districts in the United States have had similar difficulties in attracting and retaining qualified educators (Ingersoll, 2001). International institutions hiring native English-speaking foreign teachers have an additional challenge in preserving their foreign faculty, as often those choosing to teach abroad do so out of a desire to see the world while utilizing their teaching credentials (Hauerwas, Skawinski, & Ryan, 2017). A typical international teaching contract has a duration of two-years but can be written for as little as one year and as many as three years (Chandler, 2010). Teachers often fulfill their duties for the length of their contract and then move on to explore a different country as the next destination for employment and to have an intercultural/multicultural experience (Trilokekar & Kukar, 2011).

Hauerwas et al. (2017) described the development of intercultural competence as “a continual learning process in which individuals must choose to try on other cultures and situate their identity in a broader context” (p. 203). Teaching can be the medium for travelling the world, exploring new cultures, and gaining intercultural competencies for many that choose this career path (Chacko & Lin, 2015).

Some international schools have a deficit involving retaining qualified teachers for more than a year or two, which contributes to a “revolving door” phenomena with teachers and administrators filtering in and out; schools suffer hardships in multiple ways, including retaining qualified teachers and building a positive and sustainable school culture (Ingersoll, 2001). Implementing a sense of community and cohesion amongst faculty, students, and families, is vitally important to the success of the school and the individuals within and is difficult with the influx of new staff to train (Keith, 2015). Leadership is responsible for establishing a positive school climate by employing a variety of principles and finding innovative ways to maintain this climate (Cook, 2014). Creating a trusting atmosphere where individuals are supported and cared for both personally and professionally has a powerful and positive impact on overall school satisfaction and teacher desire to remain in that school setting (Tasdan & Yalcin, 2010). Transformational leadership theory, Maslow’s hierarchy of needs theory, and servant leadership theory with a focus on Keith’s (2015) work in conjunction to give direction to school leadership as a guide for instituting a culture of care within the school environment.

Given the transient nature of international teaching staff, it is important for school leaders to develop a positive school culture in order to maintain traction in retaining qualified educators. Frequent teacher turnover makes it difficult for school leaders to sustain academic

and school climate initiatives, which may, in turn, contribute to teachers choosing to leave after one or two years. In this dissertation the researcher sought to answer the following questions:

- What lived experiences do international educators identify as contributing to a decision to remain or leave a position in an international school?
- According to the lived perceptions of international educators, how do international school administrators build and promote a positive school climate and how is this impacted by frequent teacher turnover?
- How do international school educators perceive the measures taken to ensure school improvement initiatives are continued with fidelity, while balancing the need to train new teachers on a much more frequent basis, based on their lived experiences?
- Centered on the lived experiences of international educators, how is it perceived international school leaders are able to attract and retain qualified instructors who seek longevity in their role?

Conceptual Framework

The following section describes the theoretical frameworks used for this dissertation. These theories support leaders in creating a positive school climate and culture, which in turn leads to higher incidents of teacher satisfaction and may support teacher retention. In a changing environment where both teachers and administrators are in a recurring state of coming and going, implementing academic and climate initiatives becomes a difficult task for administrators at international schools and traditional methods may be fallible (Schenck, 2016). It is widely accepted that staff continuity and a stable and dedicated faculty with effective administration is associated with student achievement and school satisfaction (Wood, Finch, & Mirecki, 2013). Cultivating robust relationships and assembling an environment based on trust is mutually

advantageous for school community members and the leadership team (Bennell, 2015). Administrators understand this and strive to create meaningful climate and cultural initiatives well suited for the school (Schenck, 2016). In the international setting however it can be difficult, as often when a program gains some momentum, those playing key roles, teachers and administrators, leave for new positions in other schools or other countries. Leadership which remains is then forced to re-train the new influx of faculty and the environment endures a constant state of rebuilding. This condition of rebuilding falls outside the vein of transformation as it does not seem to reach goals for a length of time (Benoliel & Berkovich, 2017). Administrators often implement new initiatives and faculty with longevity at the school, are forced to embrace new ideas leaving behind the previously used procedures, relinquishing much needed consistency and losing momentum, on an ongoing basis (Cook, 2014; Gautam, Alford, & Khanal, 2015; Glennie, Mason, & Edmund, 2016).

The research for this dissertation was situated within the complimentary frameworks of transformational leadership theory, servant leadership theory, and Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory. There is a need for leadership to look toward a unique approach and evolve in its methods. Utilizing traditional and more modern approaches and combining them may provide a new path toward becoming a more effective leader (Gage & Smith, 2016). Developing effective leadership strategies exercising a collective approach could also strengthen administrator-teacher relationships and transform the environment by creating a cohesive environment suited for learning as well as faculty constancy (Bryant, Escalante, & Selva, 2017). In developing effective leaders with the skills to cultivate positive school culture, environments also progress, thus contributing positively to teacher retention in international schools (Prelli, 2016).

Transformational Leadership Theory

Transformational leadership theory (TLT) was first introduced in 1978 by James MacGregor Burns and was associated with descriptive research on political leaders (Bass & Avolio, 1993). It has a central idea surrounding the relationship between leader and follower, in that the leader is accountable in many areas, but particularly in creating transformational leaders from their followers (Lippstreu, 2010). Antonakis and House (2014) suggested “Leadership is important for motivating followers and mobilizing resources towards the fulfillment of the organization's mission; it is also essential for organizational innovation, adaptation, and performance” (p. 746). TLT supports this concept by utilizing a reciprocal arrangement between the members of the workplace community and their leaders, with emphasis residing on the school community (Andersen, 2014). The framework is designed to inspire and empower one another with the leader or leadership team embodying and employing specific strategies with staff members (Berkovich, 2016). “Transformational leaders integrate creative insight, persistence and energy, intuition and sensitivity to *forge the strategy-culture alloy* for their organizations” (Bass & Avolio, 1993, p. 112). Yammarino and Dubinsky (1994) suggested leaders find ways to inspire and encourage faculty rather than imparting a list of requirements associated with a tangible reward for task completion. Nurturing staff members while channeling their skills and abilities for the benefit of the environment, is another component of TLT (Berkovich, 2016).

Bass and Avolio (1993) stated:

Transformational leaders are thought to expand the followers’ conceptions of their possible selves, and having a well-defined possible self suggests that one will have

greater and broader aspirations related to leadership compared to those who have an unclear or limited sense of possible self. (p. 113)

Once the leader has supported and encouraged team members to reach a deeper potential, they may then go on to complete higher-level tasks and interchange what they have gained by giving back, allowing for reciprocally efficacious organizational performance (Andersen, 2014).

Bernard Bass derived his TLT theory from James MacGregor Burns transforming leadership and transactional leadership theories (Andersen, 2014). These theories emerged based on the premise of leaders and followers collaborating to achieve a common purpose. There are similarities between Bass' transformational leadership theory and Burns' transforming leadership theory. Both theorists based their assertions on the belief that leaders should do more than give orders and expect compliance, instead they suggested, there are more honorable aspirations behind being an effective leader (Berkovich, 2016). Creating a positive atmosphere, caring about the individual, and inspiring and empowering others towards personal and professional success are traits of a transformational leader (Hanford & Leithwood, 2012).

Fairholm (2001) suggested "Motives are the source of action and determination that move us in certain directions and the source of meaning for our behavior" (p. 3). Motivation is a highly personal phenomenon and plays an important role in adult performance (Schenck, 2016). Salary, one potential motivator, may have a direct correlation with employee satisfaction, but other elements factor into the overall contentment of the employee as well (Ingersoll, 2001).

Effective leaders inspire and empower colleagues based upon how well he or she knows them and the depth of the relationship (Kempa, Ulorlo, & Wenno, 2017). Leaders who build connections with their staff, view them as valuable contributors to the organization and understand what inspires each individual to take responsibility for their growth and development,

professionally and personally (Neufeld, Purvey, Churchley, & Handford, 2015). Utilizing a strategic process and interconnecting motivation, empowerment, and building connections, create a culture in which the environment benefits all who are a part of it (Avolio, 2005).

Consistency and equity amongst faculty directly affect morale and motivation and contribute to a more positive school climate and culture. Giving teachers a voice in the school decision making processes and empowering them to look beyond their direct responsibilities to consider other contributions they may make, motivates and encourages them to have a vested interest in the school and its community (Brown et al., 2012). Studies depicted “there is a relationship between the leader and the formation of an environment which encourages creativity” (Allen, 2016, p. 4). Transformational leadership theory suggests successful leadership practices promote positive school culture by recognizing and valuing the contributions of their employees (Leithwood & Seashore-Louis, 2011).

Bass and Avolio (1993) asserted, “Culture affects leadership, as much as leadership affects culture” (p. 113). If the school culture has been purposefully designed, there will be a sense of community with trust in one another, individuals will have a sense of purpose and shared responsibility and it may feel like a family, where members know they can rely on each other (Bass & Avolio, 1993). This sense of belonging, family-style relationships, and trusting bonds are what people gravitate toward and want to remain a part of. When people feel they belong, they take pride and ownership over the organization, rather than just their own responsibilities; they care for the organization and each other (Glennie, Mason, & Edmunds, 2016). A positive and supportive school culture can be a determinant factor in teacher satisfaction, resulting in positive outcomes for students and teachers (Buchanan, Prescott, Schuck, Aubusson, & Burke, 2013).

There has been some criticism of TLT as the theory is purported to resemble other leadership theories such as, participative and ethical leadership theories (Berkovich, 2016). To counter these criticisms, it is important to remember individuals have different traits and characteristics as do leaders, who may possess qualities of more than one leadership style (Berkovich, 2016). Northouse stated, “Transformational leadership is a process that changes and transforms people and is concerned with emotions, values, ethics, standards, and long-term goals. It includes assessing followers’ motives, satisfying their needs, and treating them as full human beings” (as cited by Lamm, Sapp, and Lamm, 2013, p. 185). Furthermore, “Leadership is important for motivating followers and mobilizing resources towards the fulfillment of the organization's mission; it is also essential for organizational innovation, adaptation, and performance” (Antonakis & House, 2014, p. 746). TLT is based upon these considerations and holistically connects with other theories focused on the individual traits within. TLT is distinguished from transactional leadership behaviors, which are based on punishment and reward. TLT focuses on intrinsic rewards rather than extrinsic (Turnnidge & Côté, 2016). Transformational leadership theory offers one framework for recognizing and valuing the contributions of employees. Servant leadership theory compliments TLT and offers additional insights for school leaders.

Servant Leadership Theory

Greenleaf (1970) is known as the founder of servant leadership theory. He posited the idea that the [organizational] whole is greater than simply a combination of parts. He asserted true leadership comes from a genuine desire from within the individual to serve others even before themselves (Thompson, 2017). The good of the group is more important than the individual parts and empirical research depicts the practice of servant leadership as having a

positive influence in educational settings (Russell, 2014). Individuals who advance the welfare of the community allows the community to prosper as whole and the individuals prosper as well. Serving others and assisting them in accomplishing their goals or overcoming challenging situations has an invaluable impact on the person and their situation and allows for the development of the servant leader and the environment around them (Gage & Smith, 2016). Greenleaf (2002) illustrated this concept through the depiction of Herman Hesse's mythical journey east, in which a group of men traveling with the character Leo. Leo portrayed a servant for the travelers, caring for them, and taking care of their needs. There was nothing remarkable about the journey until Leo disappeared and the group disbanded because they could not function without Leo; years later Leo was deemed a great and gallant leader due to his selfless nature. From this tale it is understood Leo was actually leading their journey, but he was mistaken for a servant. He cared for the others in the party and quietly organized, motivated, and encouraged them towards accomplishing a goal. This is the essence of servant leadership.

Servant leadership is not a new philosophy and many cultures embody this model (Gage & Smith, 2016). Native American, Latin American, African, and African American cultures are centered around the premise that the importance lies within empowering the community before the individual (Keith, 2015). There is a popular quote, "it takes a village to raise a child" and while its origin is disputed, many groups have reason to believe it pertains to their culture and its use is pointed out in Native American, Latino, and African African-American traditions (Goldberg, 2016). Whether it is raising a child or creating a successful school environment, much can be gained if a servant leadership approach, recognizing the value of the group over the individual, is utilized (Šumi & Mesner-Andolšek, 2017).

Hines (2011) related insight on servant leadership based on the movie *Hoosiers* (Anspaugh, 1986). Hines described how the main character, Coach Dale, hired the town drunk Shooter as his assistant with the hopes Shooter would help in building a winning team. However, it is not until Coach Dale helps Shooter overcome his drinking habit that Shooter could shine as an individual; in turn the team, school, and community at large benefited from his transformation in the end. Coach Dale took the time to recognize the strengths within Shooter and instead of demanding he get sober on his own, took action in helping him face his challenges. An effective leader's genuine desire to care for others around him or her can ensure collective school success (Prelli, 2016). Keith (2015) quoted John Wesley who said, "do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the ways you can, in all the places you can, at all the times you can, to all the people you can, as long as ever you can" (p. 2). Servant leaders embody this quote, disregarding a "me first" attitude and authentically demonstrating a strong sense of values and a mindset to care for others before themselves (Turnnidge & Côté, 2016).

Keith is a key contributor in expanding Greenleaf's message on the contributions a servant leader imparts on his or her surroundings. To best utilize servant leadership theory as a model for international education leadership we can apply Keith's (2015) suggested key practices of: "self-awareness, listening, changing the pyramid, developing colleagues, coaching instead of controlling, unleashing the energy and intelligence of others, and the use of foresight" (p. 35).

Self-aware leaders understand their actions and words define the kind of leader one really is (Russell, 2014). When words and actions do not match, there will be a lack of trust amongst school community members. The mood or tone leadership establishes inspires others to act similarly, whether for the good or bad (Keith, 2015). Self-aware servant leaders are adept in

understanding the effect their demeanor has on the organization and lead accordingly (Allen, 2016). A second key practice requires leadership to listen to their colleagues and never terminate the practice (Keith, 2015). Often, with a change of leadership in a school or organization, the new leader arrives with preconceived ideas or thoughts about how to perform in their new position and he or she implements these new ideas without first listening to stakeholders and asking the right questions to distinguish needs (Murphy, Ozturgut, & French, 2013). Beginning by listening is not enough. Effective leaders need to constantly assess the needs of their community, as situations are always changing (Keith, 2015). Valuing ongoing open communication contributes to ongoing understanding of organizational needs.

Keith (2015) suggested leaders “change the pyramid,” by looking at the traditional hierarchal method of organizational structure in a new way. In many organizations, the top of the pyramid is small, indicating there are few people in leadership positions while the base at the bottom is much bigger, with a greater population, and can be thought of as the part which strengthens and holds the pyramid securely in place (Šumi & Mesner-Andolšek, 2017). One way to change the shape of this organizational mindset, is by changing the view of leadership as a position (Keith, 2015). Leaders who view an organization as requiring a group effort to create successful outcomes, may choose to look at the organizational structure as more of a circle than a pyramid (Šumi & Mesner-Andolšek, 2017).

“Primus inter pares,” ancient Greek for a leader of equal rank amid a group, was the template used in the university setting in feudal European times and helps further explain the uses for servant leadership practices (Keith, 2015). Creating an environment with an elected facilitator will allow for changing the pyramid and other changes to occur such as more authentic communication. Instead of trying to please the boss, faculty transfer that mindset to positive

changes for the school and beyond (Keith, 2015). Removing the pyramid, is a thought process which institutes a more authentic platform for communication and relevant feedback, which in turn, allows for accurate self-awareness and care for the community (Šumi & Mesner-Andolšek, 2017). Conversely, leadership within the traditional pyramid hierarchy is likely to receive less accurate and more filtered feedback, leading to a skewed image of their capabilities and effectiveness (Wheeler, 2011).

In connection with a growth mindset in developing colleagues, effective leaders take great pleasure in the success and growth of others and apply a coaching model of feedback, which unleashes the energy and intelligence of others (Keith, 2015). By developing leadership skills and talents of the individual and moving away from the control aspect of a manager, a servant leader provides for the success of the individual along with the success of the organization (Lehman, Boyland, & Sriver, 2014). Nurturing the skills and abilities of faculty and staff and then allowing them to utilize their skills, gives the working environment and the individuals whom encompass it, a sense of shared sense of power and fulfillment (Wheeler, 2011).

Greenleaf (1970) determined foresight as the central element of effective leadership. To have accurate foresight in working with a group of individuals in a school or workplace leadership needs to understand and know their people. Foresight is a judicious process and leaders are constantly evaluating their own abilities, their colleagues and assessing the organization and its functions (Allen, 2016).

In many educational settings, including international school venues, leaders demonstrating the virtues of servant leadership, can have a positive impact on the environment and in turn will contribute positively to the school atmosphere, resulting in teachers feeling a

sense of commitment to the institution and potentially becoming more likely to remain with their school (Russell, 2014). For schools, the servant leadership model is a natural fit as teachers are often caregivers by nature and teachers give of themselves in servitude to their students, to ensure their future successes (Russell, 2014). Teachers frequently embody the essence of servant leadership. When management is likeminded and returns that sense of care and nurturing, teachers respond and have a greater sense of stability and satisfaction in their environment; what occurs is a reciprocal “ripple effect” (Crippen, 2012). Creating a climate where individuals lead themselves in a distinctive way, in conjunction with the mindset to serve others produces an environment where people feel comfortable, cared for, and want to remain (Bryant, Escalante, & Selva, 2017). Servant leadership also contributes to the perceived and understood integrity of the leadership and the institution itself (Šumi & Mesner-Andolšek, 2017).

Transformational leadership theory and servant leadership theory provide an understanding of how to promote self-efficacy amongst teachers. Combined with Maslow’s hierarchy of needs theory, the frameworks offer educational leaders, concrete strategies for creating a caring and supportive school environment.

Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs Theory

Humans gravitate toward others or groups that have similar outlooks and views, and within these groups find the much-desired sense of belonging. This need to belong transcends to the workplace as well. “Only when one feels connected, safe, and a sense of belonging at their place of employment can the higher-level needs, such as self-esteem and self-actualization occur” (Larkin, Brantley-Dias, & Vega, 2016, p. 28). Abraham Maslow (as cited by Maforah, 2015) discovered people generally strive to pursue satisfaction in life and are motivated by a series of needs in which he put into order according to importance. He stated the needs in a

hierarchical fashion with physiological needs as most important, followed by safety, sense of belonging, esteem, and finally self-actualization (Maslow, 1954). Considering these needs as those which individuals strive to attain, and the amount of time spent in the workplace each day, it is important to provide opportunities to meet similar needs at work (Stoyanov, 2017).

Individuals are most successful in an environment that feels safe and where physiological needs are, or can be, met (Marston, 2014). An environment which provides physiological necessities, while also contributing to a feeling of purpose and sense of belonging, and allows for personal and professional growth, will be an environment which can successfully maintain its staff members (Larkin et al., 2016). School leaders must strive to be as efficacious as possible by developing goals with members and enhancing the likelihood for the organization to realize goals (Adiele & Abraham, 2013).

Maslow believed caring for, being able to relate to, deeply empathize with, and feel compassion for people, are qualities effective leaders need to possess (Stoyanov, 2017). When we care, we are also moved to learn and understand what it is that motivates others and to understand our motivations are a direct result of our needs; care and understanding contributes to the creation of an environment in which people feel safe and supported both personally and professionally (Larkin et al., 2016). Maslow (1954) provided us with a framework depicting the needs of human beings in a general way. Effective leaders can naturally develop trusting relationships with faculty if they care about the individuals in the school community.

This dissertation combines the theories of transformational leadership theory, servant leadership theory, and Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory to frame participant data addressing the research questions. Further, the frameworks help define appropriate strategies for school

leaders to develop reciprocal, caring schools with the intention of promoting better teacher retention.

The next section of this dissertation reviews the literature relevant to this dissertation. Included will be aspects of effective leadership, positive school culture, and the comprehensive effect of teacher retention, attrition and overall job satisfaction.

Review of the Research Literature and Methodological Literature

This section explores foundational aspects of effective leadership and positive school culture, as well as the comprehensive effect on teacher retention, attrition, and overall job satisfaction. The works within the literature review deliver a substantial snapshot of the issues faced by educational leaders in recruiting and retaining qualified teachers, with emphasis on the United States' and Canadian education systems and educators (Craig, 2017). Though utilizing a viewpoint aimed at the United States and Canada as an example, findings can be applied to similar challenges faced by international schools. A view of the literature concerning teacher retention depicted a gap addressing challenges faced in international schools worldwide. The modest literature found focused on the challenges found within specific regions of international education (Chandler, 2010). The literature also revealed frequent teacher turnover had a negative impact on the educational environment as well as learning outcomes for students. As stated by Mancuso, Roberts, White, Yoshida, and Weston (2011),

Turnover affects everyone in a school, especially those in international schools: students, teachers, and administrators. Students suffer because teacher attrition destabilizes the school curriculum and disrupts the attachments they make with teachers. Teachers suffer because relocating disrupts their lives and is stressful to their families. (p. 819)

A school's ability to provide consistency and continuity in its teachers, curriculum, pedagogies, and climate, are key elements in creating an effective learning environment for the school community and ultimately the success of the individual student (Chacko & Lin, 2015). "Turnover rates are lower in schools where teachers report better principal leadership, more autonomy within the classroom, and richer opportunities for professional development. Where teachers report higher levels of participation in school decision-making, turnover is also lower" (Glennie, Mason, & Edmunds, 2016, p. 245). Conversely, teacher turnover and attrition negatively affect the climate and culture of the learning environment. Ingersoll (2001) claimed certain organizational conditions hold special importance because they provide a means by which school leaders can influence teacher retention: salary, benefits, teaching assignment (subject or grade level), workplace conditions (e.g., facilities, classroom resources, school safety, relationships with fellow staff members, input into decision making), support from administrators, job description or responsibilities, autonomy over one's classroom, and opportunities for professional development. Ingersoll's assertions provide a basis for further exploration of said organizational conditions and the possible benefit for international schools as well.

A thorough review of current educational literature indicates a breadth of research pertaining to the impact of teacher retention on school climate and the impact of school climate on teacher retention in the United States, however, there is little to denote study of international schools in the same regard (Chandler, 2010; Mancuso et al., 2010). The international studies which exist focus on specific countries or regions of the world, and do not examine international education in the broadest sense and from a global perspective. Low salaries, in combination with stressful working conditions, are focal points and the literature makes it clear these are driving

forces behind teacher attrition, but they are not the only factors (Pivovarova & Geiger, 2018). Depicted in the literature is the importance of a positive school culture and the need for effective leadership to set the tone for a successful school (Day & Sammons, 2016). “If school reform models promote better leadership and shared decision-making, and if teachers feel supported, these reforms may influence teachers’ perceptions of their working conditions and decisions to stay in their jobs” (Glennie et al., 2016, p. 246). Providing training, mentorship, ongoing professional development opportunities, or instituting professional learning communities (PLCs), establishing an atmosphere built on trust, care, and collaboration; and advocating for teacher autonomy should be key initiatives for leadership (Stewart, 2014). Both extrinsic and intrinsic factors impact teacher desire to remain in the teaching profession, remain within their current positions, or to seek occupational opportunities elsewhere. A disadvantage denoted in the literature is the emphasis on school leaders attempting to address teacher retention by focusing on each individual employee versus a more global understanding how their school climate and culture contributes to teacher attrition.

Teacher Retention and Attrition

There is a tremendous cost when teachers leave their schools, both monetarily and regarding student success and achievement (Zhang & Zeller, 2016). Teachers leave their positions in different ways and for a variety of reasons, but two significant motives are low salaries in relation to the amount of work the job entails and lack of support from leadership and the school community at large (Lazarev, Toby, Zacamy, Lin, & Newman, 2017; Scherer, 2003). Schools which suffer from low teacher satisfaction will find they lose teachers to other schools or districts offering better salaries and/or a more cohesive school climate; teachers also may quit the profession altogether and find employment in another field that offers more pay, improved

opportunities for advancement, and better working conditions (Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018). Satisfied teachers are known to have positive outlooks concerning their schools because of effective leadership and good relationships with colleagues, and therefore are less likely to leave (Glennie et al., 2016). There are a small percentage of teachers who leave because they are eligible for retirement, but this portion only makes up 16% of the 500,000 teachers leaving U.S. schools each year (Boyd et al., 2011). Negative work environments can be stressful on teachers and in turn has a profound effect on their health, which affects job performance and adds to teacher attrition rates (Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018).

In the United States 40%–50% of teachers leave their schools within the first five years of teaching (Darling-Hammond & Berry, 2006). Annually, between 14%–28% of teachers leave their schools and this statistic considers higher numbers of teachers leaving poverty-stricken areas to lower numbers of teacher attrition in areas less impacted by lower socio-economic populations (Marston, 2014). Globally, schools face the same problem, apart from high performance countries such as Finland, Korea, and Singapore which have teacher turnover rates as low as 1% (Xu, 2017). Australian schools have similar attrition rates of 30%–40% in the first five years of teaching (Buchanan et al., 2013). Internationally, it has been established teachers that leave the United States to teach abroad are often doing so to travel and to experience the world while creating a “home culture” in another country (Trilokekar & Kukar, 2011, p. 1142).

Teacher retention clearly impacts school climate and academic outcomes and low retention rates for teachers and administrators have a direct relation to student achievement (Lochmiller, Adachi, Chesnut, & Johnson, 2016). “The retention of good teachers comes about when a school improves itself for the sake of its students” (Scherer, 2003, p. x). Beginning with student success in mind and modeling successful practices are solid approaches for leadership to

employ in improving school culture (Prelli, 2016). Connor (2015) suggested, “School climate almost always or usually influences student achievement, then these data are the conduit needed to develop the school climate through strengthening the relationships between educators by increasing authentic collaboration” (p. 20). Administrators are ultimately responsible for school climate and “with principal accountability in the area of student achievement ever increasing”, it is crucial principals lead schools in directions that positively impact student achievement (Wood, Finch, Mirecki, 2013, p. 1). An environment based on trust and appreciation provides a solid foundation for other initiatives to work and student success and teacher satisfaction to thrive (Hanford & Leithwood, 2012).

Schools offering meaningful professional development, teacher autonomy, and effective leadership have lower turnover percentages (Glennie et al., 2016). Higher pay as an incentive for positive teacher and administrator retention is a factor which cannot be ignored, but intrinsic rewards experienced by the employee, for example, a sense of belonging or community, play a role in retention and satisfaction as well (Adiele & Abraham, 2013; Lazarev et al., 2017).

To be effective, administrators must strategize a tactical approach to build a positive school culture which prepares for the likelihood of changing staff, while planning for ways to retain the qualified teachers already employed (Day & Sammons, 2016). Working conditions contribute to a teacher’s decision to stay with a school or even remain in the teaching profession (Gulosino, Franceschini, & Hardman, 2016). According to Ingersoll (2001), school environments in which teacher retention is an issue, are often deficient in basic but essential foundations, quality training and mentoring for new teachers, a trusting environment where faculty feels valued, and supported by administration; such environments are unable to retain their teaching staff. Furthermore, educational sociologists have stated a harmonious

environment and sense of community amongst all stakeholders is vital to the achievement of the individuals and the school community as well (Ingersoll, 2001). Building robust and trusting relationships will create a cohesive school community where individuals feel valued, recognized for their roles, and reflect positively on teacher retention (Marston, 2014). Gulosino, Franceschini, and Hardman (2016) stated, “the degree of relational trust” (good social relationships) between teachers, and between teachers and students, is related to achievement (p. 3).

Another important factor contributing to teacher retention is the opportunity for growth through on-going professional development. Effective leaders recognize the ways in which education specific training contributes to feelings of comfort and confidence for teachers. This is discussed in the next section.

Professional Development

When schools introduce programs to train incoming faculty, leadership ensures preparedness for new teachers, allowing them to feel confident and comfortable in their new position and surroundings (Darling-Hammond, 2017). In doing so, partnerships are initiated and fostered between administrators and teachers (Castro, Germain, & Gooden, 2018). As stated by Ring and West (2015), “the Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies” (INEE), argues that certification is just as important as teacher training and that it plays a critical role in the education system: it can represent an important investment of the teacher’s time and limited family resources” (p. 111). Both traditionally and alternatively trained teachers are more likely to continue in their profession and have a greater chance of remaining at their schools (Haj-Broussard et al., 2016). Professional development should not end upon completion of a pre-service teacher program; instead, professional development should be offered as part of any

teaching contract and may be offered by the hiring school or through reputable workshops or trainings outside of the school setting. As new teachers are recruited, the more training they receive, the more likely they are to remain in the profession (Zhang & Zeller, 2016).

Additionally, training for all new staff, including administrators, who have a considerable impact on student achievement, should take place continuously (Lehman, Boyland, & Sriver, 2014).

Principals need the necessary knowledge and skillset to foster a positive school climate and in best practices in on-boarding new teachers (Wood, Finch, & Mirecki, 2013).

Teachers and administrators in international schools require training similar to what they would receive in their countries of origin, but there may be additional trainings and team building exercises specific to working internationally or to the country or region (Schenck, 2016). Brown and Shaklee (2014) stated,

Yet certain facets of international education prove elusive and cause for concern. One is expressed regarding the global ignorance of United States citizens. Numerous educators and researchers believe that internationalization of teacher education at the pre-service and in-service levels should provide the solution to this concern, in addition to training teachers to teach in international settings. (p. 99)

Preparing teachers and administrators with knowledge specifically designed for their school and equipping them with a broad set of skills applicable to their immediate environment, allows them to experience a greater amount of self-assuredness (Real & Botía, 2017). Knowing how to act or manage situations which may be unfamiliar to them, eases the transition to a new school and country for teachers and contributes to overall job satisfaction (Fong, 2018).

Professional development is offered through a variety of means; examples include workshops, classes, book studies, and mentorship programs. Mentoring may be offered for both

teachers new to the profession and teachers new to a specific school. This is described in greater detail below.

Mentorship

Rodger and Skelton (2014) suggested, “Mentoring programs provide a support structure by pairing novice teachers with seasoned professionals and mentoring programs offer guidance in managing classroom routines and promoting successful teaching and learning experiences” (p. 2). Mentoring programs range in both duration and intensity and can vary between a single meeting at the beginning of the year to highly structured and high frequency interactions between mentors and protégés throughout the school year (Ingersoll & Smith, 2004). Instead of waiting for a problem to arise, proactive school administrators focus on continual progression and development organizationally (Gautam, Alford, & Khanal, 2015). Furthermore, mentoring programs have been proven to positively correlate with teacher and administrator retention (Lochmiller et al., 2016; Wood, Finch, & Mierecki, 2013). As cited by Buchanan et al. (2013),

Positive experiences among early career teachers were often associated with having a supportive and empathic mentor. Carter and Francis (2001) and McLoughan (2004) examined mentoring in large-scale ($n = 465$) and small-scale ($n = 7$) studies respectively. Carter and Francis concluded that positive experiences and continuing professional learning were associated with mentoring that was collaborative and encouraged reflection in the workplace. They added that partnerships between schools and universities were also valuable for professional learning. (p. 113)

According to Ingersoll (2001) and as cited by Gulosino, Franceschini, and Hardman (2016),

Teachers tend to leave their current teaching assignments when they encounter environments that lack essential professional supports that include: support from school leadership; organizational structures and workforce conditions that convey respect and value for them; and induction and mentoring programs for new and experienced teachers. (p. 2)

Mentoring has also been associated with negative sentiments in situations when there are too few mentors available or mentors cannot give the proper care and attention to the protégé, making the endeavor seem pointless (Hofmeyer, Sheingold, Klopper, & Warland, 2015). It is important for school administrators to train mentors, monitor the mentor program, and remain cognizant of the necessity between balance and continuity for mentorship to be a positive experience for both the mentor and mentee (Ingersoll & Smith, 2004).

In the succeeding section, Professional Learning Communities or PLCs is defined and an explanation is offered for how structured PLCs provide professional development and mentorship-like collaboration. When implemented correctly and with fidelity, PLCs are valuable learning experiences for all involved.

Professional Learning Communities

Professional Learning Communities or PLCs have become a popular mechanism for schools to engage staff members and share knowledge with one another, and while doing so, promoting professional collaboration (Stewart, 2014). Often school leaders look to outside opportunities for professional development, which can be costly, but distribution of instructional leadership within their own school allows school leaders to utilize the talent they have in accomplished faculty members. This leads to positive change and improved instructional practice from within, without large expenditures (Antinluoma, Iilomäki¹, Lahti-Nuuttila, &

Toom, 2018). Successful PLCs has been associated with schools where teachers have autonomy to select their learning objectives and are trained collaborators (Stewart, 2014). PLCs can be formal, informal, or administrators can utilize a combination of both, but trusting relationships, supportive leadership and collaborative conditions are elemental for the PLC to function effectively and to be maintained effectively (Gray & Summers, 2016). It is important that PLCs be developed and implemented by teachers, not simply a leadership mandate, and teachers are given the time to participate consistently (Freeman & Randolph, 2013). Teachers from schools without PLCs report dissatisfaction with their environment calling them “bureaucratic and authoritative”, conversely, teachers from schools with PLCs, report feeling respected as professionals and treated as valued team members (Brown, Finch, MacGregor, & Watson, 2012). Day and Sammons (2016) stated,

In terms of building professional learning communities in schools it would appear that distributed leadership also plays an important part. Research concludes that extending leadership responsibility beyond the principal is an important lever for developing effective professional learning communities in schools. A range of other studies also points towards a positive relationship between organizational change and distributed forms of leadership practice (p. 52).

School administrators play a key role in nurturing a school culture which, in turn, encourages professional innovation, by providing time and resources as well; without strong support from leadership, PLCs cannot be fruitful (Antinluoma, et al., 2018).

In addition to the tangible elements related to teacher retention described in the previous sections, other intangible factors contribute to reasons why teachers remain in a specific school

or within the teaching profession. These include trust, collaboration, and autonomy; each is explained below.

Trust

Trust is an essential concept for school leaders to embrace and develop as it is the one value that allows all the aforementioned facets of an effective organization to thrive. “Trust is an enabler of change” (Handford & Leithwood, 2013, p. 194). Without trust, which is an impalpable and difficult value to gauge, there are perilous and palpable outcomes (Covey, 2009). Strong relationships and interpersonal trust between principals and teachers create a strong sense of empowerment (Lai, Wang, & Shen, 2017). Building authentic relationships with faculty based on trust will be the number one objective for members of the leadership team (Bassett & Robson, 2017). In establishing an atmosphere based on trust, “frequent interactions, intimacy and sharing, and reciprocity in exchanges allow for mutually confiding, trust-based interactions”, and positively enhance the environment (Benoliel & Berkovich, 2017, p. 924). Individuals who value trusting leaders also value being trusted and are more likely to contribute more effectively to individual and school-wide objectives (Cook, 2014). Trust impacts many facets of an organization and good leaders understand its importance, and it is the behavior of leadership which can have an indelible influence on school morale (Ring & West, 2015).

Stephen Covey (2009) identified 13 behaviors exhibited by recognized trusted leaders:

- speaking truthfully
- demonstrating respect
- creating transparency
- righting wrongs
- showing loyalty

- delivering results
- being concerned with self-improvement
- confronting reality
- clarifying expectations
- practicing accountability
- listening
- keeping commitments
- extending trust

Administrators should model these behaviors, so others will follow suit (Šumi & Mesner-Andolšek, 2017). Being consistent and exemplifying honorable and trustworthy behaviors will, over time create a trusting school community and produce positive results (Gray & Summers, 2016). In doing so, collegial relationships are built, authentic collaboration will occur, and members of the school community will feel safe in sharing with and supporting one another, creating collective responsibility (Conner, 2015). Gray and Summers (2016) added, “trust is the keystone of successful interpersonal relationships, leadership, teamwork, and effective organizations. Furthermore, we assert that teachers will have greater collective efficacy in these collaborative learning environments” (p. 2).

Collaboration

Collaboration occurs in school through a variety of avenues. “Authentic collaboration is a profound, collective purpose to achieve a shared goal among two or more. Collaboration among peers includes an ethical priority to model collegiality, collaboration, and effective teaching” (Connor, 2015, p. 14). In an atmosphere where the input of the collective team is valued and appreciated, individuals enjoy a sense of ownership, greater collective efficacy, and

shared responsibility (Gray & Summers, 2016). Through collaboration, the environment can become transformed through inspiration and sharing of ideas and input, which ultimately transforms practice (Bennell, 2015). Teaching culture is improved when teachers collaborate, empowering one another, breaking down walls of isolation, thus creating collective responsibility (Antinluoma et al., 2018). Teachers often work in isolation from other colleagues; instilling a collaborative environment as the norm can help to offset those feelings of isolation (Ingersoll & Smith, 2004). Expanding collaboration to include parents, extended families, and the community at large is beneficial to all stakeholders and with the technology available today, collaborative global ventures are limitless (Bennell, 2015). When principals value collaboration and teamwork it influences teacher satisfaction and assists in creating a positive school climate (Allen, 2016).

A collaborative school environment is often viewed as teachers working together to reach a common goal, but it is also important for leadership to share high levels collaboration which demonstrates a more advanced form of leadership and stimulates a positive school culture or climate; “collaboration must extend beyond leadership instruction to include partnerships between academics and practitioners in the development of leaders” (Hite, Nandekar, Mercer, & Martin, 2014, p. 99). When leadership engages in a collaborative mindset, it demonstrates authentic collaboration, bolsters the collaborative school community and enriches trusting relationships (Conner, 2015). International schools are further enhanced through collaboration as inter-cultural partnerships augment reciprocal learning and personal and professional development (Brown & Shaklee, 2014). Collaboration is an important component of any school environment. Autonomy is also valued by teachers and when allowed for, leads to increased feelings of job satisfaction and higher teacher retention rates.

Autonomy

Schools allowing for greater autonomy for teachers find lower rates of turnover (Glennie, Mason, & Edmunds, 2016; Ingersoll, 2001). Teachers feel empowered and respected when they have autonomy in their classrooms and beyond and report higher levels of trust in their principals (Lai, Wang, & Shen, 2017). The way people feel in their work environment has an effect on the outcome of their duties and “empirical studies demonstrate that teachers' ability to deliver effective instruction and facilitate learning for their students is deeply affected by the context in which they work, but also that this context may vary greatly from one school to another” (Gulosino, Franceschini, & Hardman, 2016, p. 4). Administrators who develop and encourage an autonomous work environment, cultivate competence and purpose gained through empowerment for their employees and correspondingly, people are motivated to learn and assume higher-level responsibilities, setting an example for others (Lippstreu, 2010). Autonomous educators are self-driven and self-motivated which add meaning and purpose to their work and can provide incentive to develop and improve skills and capabilities and this can emerge as self-actualization and in accomplishing broader school-wide objectives (Lippstreu, 2010).

A key component of Maslow’s hierarchy of needs is autonomy (Adiele & Abraham, 2013). When teachers are given autonomy, they feel trusted and empowered to carry out their job responsibilities, unbound by rigid rules (Gray & Summers, 2016). Teachers who found their work personally meaningful and who reported having a significant amount of autonomy and substantial influence over their work environments had higher levels of interpersonal trust in their principals (Lai, Wang, & Shen, 2017, pp. 318 – 319). Autonomy requires accountability,

professionalism and responsibility; self-motivated and well-qualified educators, function successfully when they are allowed autonomy (Real & Botía, 2018).

Review of the Methodological Issues

Several studies have examined factors concerning teacher retention, job satisfaction, and the influence of these on a teacher's decision to continue in their positions within in their field. Job satisfaction is closely associated with teacher turnover; when teachers feel valued and trusted, they are more professionally satisfied; therein adding longevity in retention (Hughes, Matt, & O'Reilly, 2015). Identifying what contributes to teacher satisfaction, was the objective of many of the studies reviewed. Glennie, Mason, and Edmunds (2016) researched North Carolina Public School teachers, utilizing a four-point Likert Scale online survey. They had an 89% response rate from classroom teachers ($n = 91,490$). Survey questions were designed to garner an understanding of how working conditions affected teacher satisfaction. Questions surrounded perceptions of instructional support, leadership's responsiveness to teacher concerns, and shared leadership (Glennie et al., 2016). Eighty-five percent of educators surveyed stated regular communication with their administrator the chief form of support deemed most necessary over other forms of support, including formal time with a mentor, which received 55% as the second highest rated support (Glennie et al., 2016). While this study did not take the international school setting into consideration, it does relate indirectly as it estimated schools in a restructuring process, as having additional challenges in gaining organizational capital. Though utilizing a domestic, U.S. lens, the area of reform in the educational setting can be related to the challenges in retaining staff internationally as urban and rural districts face many of the same problems faced in the international educational setting (Rodgers & Skelton, 2014).

Hughes, Matt, and O'Reilly (2015) conducted a nonexperimental correlational design using the Administrative Support Survey with the express purpose of determining the bearing administrative support had on the retention of teachers in hard-to-staff schools. In this survey both teachers and administrators were selected to participate, with 58 contributors in total, 17 administrators and 41 teacher respondents (Hughes et al., 2015). "Data evinced from this study found support of teachers has a critical and important impact on teacher retention in hard-to-staff schools" (Hughes et al., 2015, p. 132). Emotional support was more correlated with teacher retention; 64.5% of teachers indicated this was the most important factor; principals were in agreement the highest correlation with teacher retention was through the provision of emotional support at 70.3% (Hughes, et al., 2015).

Environmental and instructional support came in second and third respectively behind emotional support as designated once again by both teachers and principals. When principals provide emotional support to teachers, teachers recognize their efforts and feel cared for and supported, impacting their decision to stay with their current schools (Hughes et al., 2015). Ronfeldt, Loeb, and Wycoff (2013) noted effective, supportive leadership is a deterrent for frequent teacher turnover, which allows for a more consistent, conducive environment for learning and student engagement and achievement. Ultimately, the more time teachers and principals remain on the job in the same school, the more effective they become each year, markedly in their first three years (Lehman, Boyland, & Sriver, 2014). Wood, Finch, and, Mirecki's (2013) claimed it takes five years for a new administrator to influence the environment both academically in student outcomes or to implement new policies or procedures, indicating the importance of administrative retention as well.

Wood et al. (2013) randomly selected 40 school superintendents serving in rural schools throughout the Midwestern United States using a six-point Likert Scale to determine what they considered the challenges in recruiting and retaining administrative staff. The study found the chief concern in retaining administrators was geographic isolation ($M = 3.03$) and the concern with the lowest score of significance, pertained to working conditions ($M = 2.97$). Low salary was also a point of concern but fell below some of the other indicators such as social and cultural isolation, which would have been directly connected to geographic location (Wood et al., 2013). Being geographically isolated may create cultural and social isolation by default and generate challenges for administrators in recruitment and retention (Lazerev et al., 2017).

Superintendents sampled through Wood et al.'s (2013) study offered an interesting opportunity to consider the similarities between rural U.S. schools and international schools. For foreign United States teachers working abroad, there is often a disconnection even in the most urban of settings which feels like geographic isolation; this is especially salient when combined with feelings of social and cultural isolation (Buchanan et al., 2013).

Synthesis of Research Findings

Teacher turnover is a significant phenomenon in schools and when it occurs, pervasive consequences ensue (Ingersoll, 2001). Institutional memory, faculty interactions, climate, economics, instructional programs, and student achievement suffer due to significant teacher turnover (Rondfelt et al., 2013). As stated by Glennie et al. (2016),

Low organizational functioning and turnover influence each other. Teachers are more likely to leave schools that have low organizational function, and in schools with high turnover and low stability, leaders have difficulty enforcing organizational norms and establishing organizational functioning. (p. 245)

While some subtleties of teacher retention cannot be controlled: retirement, changes in family dynamics, and illness; there are other factors school administrators can address in: supporting staff, and a positive school climate, which can influence teacher satisfaction to reduce teacher turnover (Marston, 2014).

Although much of this literature review focused on schools in the United States, global educational systems, particularly those in Finland and Singapore, offer important lessons as well (Falk, 2015). Darling-Hammond (2017) suggested these countries' educational transformation can be attributed to their commitment to change and the high value placed on education within their countries. These, and other countries, globally recognized for education, place value on teachers and esteem life-long learning and professional autonomy (Falk, 2015). Finland has distanced themselves from outcome-based learning and instead develops schools as learning communities, emphasizing interaction, collaborative practice, and positive emotional experiences (Antinluoma, et al., 2018).

In the general context of teacher retention in international schools, existing research has established supportive administrators, interaction between leadership and educators, and collaboration environments where teacher input is valued, is important school decisions are connected to teacher retention (Fong, 2018). These results align with Ingersoll's (2001) findings correlating the impact of organizational characteristics on teacher retention.

There are many efficacious institutions around the globe and conversely, there is an abundance of schools that face challenges in creating the ideal environment for higher student achievement and for teachers to feel successful and satisfied in their positions (Ronfeldt et al., 2013). Noteworthy practices are found in schools in which leadership seeks to address their own needs and challenges within their school; further excellence may be found when school leaders

collaborate to address the overall educational system within their specific country (Bradley - Levine, 2016).

Critique of Previous Research

Investigation of the related literature revealed the factors surrounding administrators' important role in contributing to teacher retention and the overall success of an educational environment (Ingersoll, 2001; Lowery-Moore, Latimer, & Villate, 2016). Additionally, research suggested the need for educational leaders to advance their own leadership styles and create new, or reform current climate initiatives (Allen, 2016). Generally, the findings are honed toward defining the one attribute most beneficial in creating a positive school climate or that assists in retaining qualified teachers (Marston, 2014). Connor (2015) approached this slightly differently, researching the importance of trust, relationships, and team building and its effect on authentic collaboration, within a multi-faceted framework, framing what a collegial environment should reflect. Benoliel and Berkovich (2017) suggested teamwork is the essential component for schools to function effectively and that the concept of a team could potentially encompass collaboration, trust, professional learning communities, care, teacher autonomy, and mentorship holistically.

An important factor emerging from the literature depicted there is little research on data concerning teacher turnover and the means for retaining teachers in the international setting, but there is a significant amount of research focused on U.S. schools with a concentration on hard-to-staff schools, which are mainly described as rural or urban (Freeman & Randolph, 2013; Hughes et al., 2015). The literature depicted rural and urban U.S. schools' issues can be associated with similar challenges in schools internationally. Available literature concerning

teacher retention in international schools and international educational challenges is sporadic and concentrated on individual countries or regions abroad.

Mancuso, White, and Roberts (2010) conducted a beneficial study in which surveys were sent to 22 international school directors and 248 international school teachers seeking answers regarding the impact of leadership on teacher retention. While Mancuso et al. (2010) sought answers to similar questions to those posed by this study, they focused strictly on Near East South Asia international schools (NESA) utilizing the 2006–2008 time period and concentrated on Western-trained teachers with demographics playing an important role. The researchers found organizational conditions such as physical working conditions, salary and benefits, and class size of the schools, factored in to teacher decisions to remain or leave their positions, which aligned somewhat with the findings presented in this study. Results of the investigation were important, but were outdated and did not provide a broad look at teacher retention within international schools from a global perspective (Mancuso et al., 2010).

Odland and Ruzicka (2009) also presented pertinent and comprehensive evidence of teacher retention issues in international schools in their 2007 mixed method questionnaire study of 281 international educators drawn from the Council of International Schools (CIS) database. In order to qualify as a participant, teachers needed to have left a school after their initial contract period. The logic in participation selection allowed for inclusive and highly relevant responses from international teachers who had recently decided to vacate their positions at the end of their first contract. Additionally, CIS covers a wide range of schools globally, so it would be fair to say the study would provide a wide lens for challenges in teacher retention internationally, however location of participants was not recorded and therefore does not advance knowledge from a global perspective.

Most notable of international studies regarding teacher retention is Hardman's (2001) questionnaire enquiry of 30 international educators based in Tanzania, Indonesia, Argentina, and Egypt. They sought to identify factors influencing decisions to seek posts abroad and factors influencing them to stay with a school abroad. 88.5% of respondents claimed professional advancement as a key motivator in contractual decisions. Hardman (2001) found three additional factors, which were significant motivators for educators to remain at their current school: monetary incentives, positive school climate, and feeling challenged professionally. While similar results were garnered and varying locations for participants utilized, location was not a focal point of the study. Furthermore, there was no discourse or allowances made for the lived experiences the educators may have shared which would have added to the depth and breadth via a phenomenological study.

There is little to denote studies addressing international schools' teacher retention from a global perspective. Further research is needed to explore the challenges impacting international schools as well as research regarding effective ways to meet these challenges, particularly with a multi-cultural staff and student population.

Chapter 2 Summary

Schools face significant challenges in retaining good teachers regardless of where they are located and it is not an unambiguous, linear process creating a school environment where students are learning, and teachers are satisfied and choose to remain (Ingersoll, 2001). There are identified characteristics regarded as factors contributing to the overall wellness of the school environment and described as desirable attributes for administrators to instill within themselves as well as implement within the school environment.

International schools employing native English-speaking faculty have an additional challenge in sustaining a positive school climate and in retaining teachers for any length of time as often the international educator is teaching abroad to travel the world and this may increase difficulties in retaining foreign hires and implementing climate initiatives (Trilokekar & Kukar, 2011). Research based on U.S. retention usually does not have to consider teachers that may leave after two years, regardless of job satisfaction, in order to pursue additional multicultural experience living abroad (Hauerwas, Skawinski, & Ryan, 2017).

This chapter provided a literature review which included tangible and intangible factors school leaders should consider when developing a school climate initiative and what qualities effective leaders exhibit. The factors depicted included, trust, importance of relationships, collaboration, training, mentorship, and autonomy. Each aspect plays a unique and equally vital role in creating a cohesive, stable, and consistently gratifying environment for all stakeholders. Additionally, three theories were intertwined: servant leadership, illustrating the importance of care for others before oneself (Greenleaf, 1970); transformational leadership theory, which strives to empower others to take on leadership roles (Antonakis & House, 2014); and Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory which explains the human being's strong desire to have purpose and belonging (Stoyanov, 2017).

What emerged from this extensive literature review was the understanding that administrators bearing the characteristics of effective and cognizant leaders, as described throughout this chapter, are most likely able to construct a school environment based on care, trust, shared responsibility, and commitment to personal and professional growth. In doing so, teachers may be more likely to remain at their school, providing environmental consistency, ultimately benefiting the entire school community from this mutually advantageous venture.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

A qualitative approach was utilized for this phenomenological study which focused on native English-speaking international educators and international school administrators' challenges in retaining qualified North American or native English-speaking teachers. There is a great deal of research concerning teacher attrition and retention in U.S.-based schools, but there is little to depict the unique challenges faced by international schools with English as the standard language of instruction (Craig, 2017; Fong, 2018). While there are certain similarities between United States schools and international schools' difficulties in retaining highly qualified faculty, especially in urban and rural areas, there remain distinctive circumstances pertaining solely to international schools in retaining staff (Wood, Finch, & Mierecki, 2013). International educators face additional complexities in living and working in foreign countries and adapting and adjusting to cultural, religious, language, and various other differences while employed abroad. As stated by Saudelli,

Crossing a national border to live as a participating member of a new and very different community can be challenging for the most seasoned educator. Due to the potential joys and stressors of living an international life, it is crucial to understand the nature of hybridity and accommodation from those who have made an international existence their preferred lifestyle. (p. 102)

A phenomenological design method was utilized and was based on the lived experiences of North American or native English-speaking teachers and administrators living and working for schools in countries outside the United States (Creswell, 2007). The pursuit of this research detailed the international school experience as illustrated by a group of international teachers and

administrators; a collective story was captured from the perspective of those who lived it. “To hear someone’s story is to enter a world of thought, action, emotion, and circumstance through another’s perspective” (Mears, 2009, p. 14). The lived experiences of the participants were examined in-depth, describing the phenomenon of working and living abroad as expatriate teachers and administrators (Saghafian & O’Neill, 2017).

The lived experiences of the participants included native English-speaking teachers and leaders living outside of their English-speaking countries of origin and whom were working in international schools. These participants answered questions pertaining to their lived perceptions of the unique experiences and challenges experienced in working in international schools and in living abroad. This chapter begins with a reiteration of the research questions guiding this dissertation, followed by a reassertion for why the study was conducted, and concludes with the rationale for utilizing a phenomenological research design methodology. Ethical issues and unexpected findings were also addressed and summarized.

Research Questions

Through the lived perceptions of international educators, what factors are included in decisions to settle or not to settle with a particular school or location while working abroad? This principal question will be supported by the following related set of subquestions:

- What lived experiences do international educators identify as contributing to a decision to remain or leave a position in an international school?
- According to the lived perceptions of international educators, how do international school administrators build and promote a positive school climate and how is this impacted by frequent teacher turnover?

- How do international school educators perceive the measures taken to ensure school improvement initiatives are continued with fidelity, while balancing the need to train new teachers on a much more frequent basis, based on their lived experiences?
- Centered on the lived experiences of international educators, how is it perceived international school leaders are able to attract and retain qualified instructors who seek longevity in their role?

This research is supported by a qualitative approach and a transcendental phenomenological design, and utilized in-depth interviews conducted with international school administrators and teachers working in international schools with English as the standard language of instruction.

Purpose and Design of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological research study was to determine factors contributing to frequent teacher turnover within international schools, the impact on school climate or culture initiatives, and to identify potential strategies or solutions for international school leaders seeking to retain highly qualified teachers for longer than an initial contract expectation of two years. This research is significant, due to the current gap in literature around international education and teacher retention (Craig, 2017; Gray & Summers, 2016).

The work of Moustakas (1994), a seminal author in phenomenological research methodology, guided the design of this study. Phenomenological approaches to research include using interviewing techniques to summarize the lived experiences of participants, seeking common “phenomena” identified within the data. Prior to beginning the research phase of this dissertation, a phenomenon of a continuous rotation of faculty in international schools was pre-determined to exist (Chandler, 2010; Odland & Ruzicka, 2009). Constant changes in staff leave

students and school community members discouraged and currently the literature offers no definitive answers in which to solve this problem (Fong, 2018; Gray & Summers, 2016). Recognizing these challenges exist globally and throughout different types of schools and cultures provided the necessary background to conduct this study and purposely addressed viable and potential solutions. Phenomenological pursuit of the truth through lived experiences depicted through the perception of the person experiencing them was an essential component in collecting data for this study (Moustakas, 1994).

Studying the lived experiences of teachers and administrators in international education provided a clear picture as to the depth of the problem in international teacher retention and offered insight towards solutions to resolve the issues (Lowry-Moore, Latimer, & Villate, 2016). International educator participants had stories to tell, laden with commonalities, along with idiosyncrasies going beyond what a simple quantitative survey could cover with accuracy. It was important to delve into the lives of the participants, as well as listen fastidiously to their extensive narratives to uncover their shared challenges and perspectives of international education.

When a question cannot be answered in a manner which quantitative data can validate, a qualitative design is needed (Creswell, 2006). Creswell (2013) suggested this type of study necessitates a collection data from the unbiased communication between researcher and participants.

In phenomenological studies the investigator abstains from making suppositions, focuses on a specific topic freshly and naively, constructs a question or problem to guide the study, and derives findings that will provide the basis for further research and reflection. In phenomenological science a relationship always exists between the external perception

of natural objects and internal perceptions, memories, and judgments (Moustakas, 1994, p. 47).

During this inductive phenomenological investigation, the researcher conducted interviews, which probed beyond the compulsory interview and took great care in searching for a multifaceted understanding of the individual participants and their experiences (Kempa, Ulorlo, & Wenna, 2017). The type of inquiry included in this research is well-suited for a phenomenological approach, as it is the lived experiences of the participants which clearly depicted the evidence of challenges experienced by international teachers and administrators and avenues in which enhancements can be made (Poole, 2018).

To begin the process of recruiting participants, announcements were posted via social media websites geared toward international educator groups, describing the type of study to be conducted, and publicizing the need for qualified participants. Participants were selected using a purposive sampling method as well as a snowball sampling method ensuring the individuals were appropriate candidates for the research proposal, well-informed about the course of action, and willing to participate in the intensive interview process (Fricker, 2011; Hughes, Matt, & O'Reilly, 2014). Questionnaires were sent to potential candidates asking them to identify whether the candidate was a teacher or administrator, their number of years spent abroad in education, the number of countries and schools in which they had been employed, their home country, and the status of educator certifications (see Appendix D). Candidates were intentionally chosen from schools in countries representing a broad spectrum of international regions across the world, by the researcher specifically and not just from a concentrated region or country to cast a wide net of experiences.

The study was intended to create an expansive scope in identifying international school challenges, and the research extended beyond regional or specific country pockets as were common in previous studies. Past research had a propensity in focusing on a region or country, limiting challenges to specific cultural influences or differences. Presenting a broad approach and garnishing data from international schools in a variety of countries provided details into the presence of this phenomenon as one of a shared experience of living and working in international schools, rather than a situation occurring in one region of the world or another (Creswell, 2013). Results of this study and suggested strategies for improvement will be offered to international school leaders seeking to transform international schools into thriving institutions supporting student growth and teacher satisfaction.

Research Population and Sampling Method

Within this phenomenological study, the researcher identified 12 native English-speaking expatriate international school administrators and teachers for participants. The sample size fell within the suggested 6–12 participant range for explaining the meaning of a phenomenon in a study, as described by Saghafian and O’Neill (2017). A purposive sampling method was employed, in which candidates were selected based on current location of employment in order to broaden the study by utilizing a global lens (Allen, 2018). In addition, a snowball sampling method was utilized, in which experts in the field were consulted to assist in determining possible candidates who fit the criteria for the study (Fricker, 2011). Once announcements describing the study were posted via social media platform, the study acquired significant interest and a larger group of interested contributors developed than was originally anticipated and while the researcher had a list of potential participants from her own colleagues and associates she decided to enlist only participants without prior connection with her, as to ensure

greater accuracy in data collection and analysis. An additional determinant in participant selection, was present or previous employment within a school in which English was the standard language of instruction.

Participating teachers and administrators' countries of origin were Canada, England, and the United States. The participants, both teachers and administrators, varied in gender, race, country of origin, ethnicity, years of experience, and current country of employment. Economic status also varied, but there were some similarities in salary ranges as it is field related. It was the goal of this researcher to include participants from each of the typical regions employing native English-speaking foreign teachers. These regions included: Asia, the Middle East, South America, Central America, Africa, and Europe. Each region had at least one contributing member, as to gain a significant scope of insight regarding the collective challenges and to ultimately address questions in international education from a global perspective.

Since potential participant interest was higher than anticipated, the researcher needed to narrow the study to incorporate only those who most closely matched the initial criteria, those with the most experience, and those most accessible and available. When the final list of participants was confirmed, each were asked to sign a consent form in which participants were made aware they could leave the study at any time and under any circumstances (see Appendix A). Each individual then participated in a two to three-hour long interview conducted via online video conferencing applications. School names associated with each participant were also given a pseudonym to safeguard privacy and when participants referred to a school by name it was changed to "my school" in the transcription process.

Instrumentation

The structure of this qualitative study was based upon a phenomenological design method, which incorporated probing questionnaires, and in-depth interviews, depicting the participants' lived experiences as international educators. International teachers and leaders, through the nature of their occupations and their expatriate status, are inundated with a variety of environmental experiences. Open-ended, probing interview questions were developed by the researcher and a pilot test was conducted to ensure reliability of the instrument. Utilizing a team of international educator colleagues, the researcher conducted pilot interviews where questions were modified and honed in a collaborative fashion. The questions included topics such as: motivation for teaching abroad, disposition towards remaining abroad or returning to home country, the timeframe anticipated in working internationally, the kind of school or environment which would influence longevity on the job, cultural stimuli factoring into decisions to remain or to depart, and identifying challenges and benefits specific to international education. The open-ended questions brought forth comprehensive responses from participants and expressive discourse which provided data surrounding teacher retention in international schools.

The principal instrumentation tool for this study was a set of open-ended questions (see Appendix A) delivered in in-depth interviews, which elicited participant understandings of their experiences. Logs of interviews, recordings of interview sessions, and transcriptions of interview recordings served as documentation:

The data collection method is an effective way of soliciting and documenting, in their own words, an individual's or group's perspectives, feelings, opinions, values, attitudes, and beliefs about their personal experiences and social world, in addition to factual information about their lives. (Saldaña, 2011, p. 32)

This investigation was designed to study a small group of educators based outside their home countries and utilized extended communication processes to develop patterns and relationships of meanings. This type of research requires the researcher set aside her own personal understandings as to fully and without bias, become deeply connected with the unique experiences of the participants (Creswell, 2006). Questions relating to what the participants experienced and how they experienced was the quintessential focus of this study (Creswell, 2013). Centered on Moustakas' (1994) transcendental approach to phenomenology, the researcher removed any emphasis of her own interpretation from her lived experiences as an international educator and administrator and honed in on the participants' experiences. The teacher interviews were centralized towards the participants' experiences with causation for ending contracts, school culture, professional development opportunities, mentor programs, cultural experiences, school environment, and leadership involvement. Interviews designed for administrators were focused on teacher retention, school climate initiatives, professional development, and cultural experiences in the country in which they were currently located. While questions were created and focused on specific questions and topics, the researcher expected to improvise conversation and encouraged a dialogue as a means of discovering unexpected insights (Saldaña, 2011).

To safeguard data collections would be represented accurately, all interviews were recorded, transcribed, and verified by participants. To further ensure familiarity and accuracy with the data, the researcher participated in the transcription process. Interviews took place over a one and one-half month period and were between two and three hours in length each.

Data Collection

Relevant questions were developed to ensure participants could descriptively portray their reasons for leaving their home countries to work in education abroad, how they came to decisions as to whether to stay with a school or leave at the end of their contract, and to identify challenges particular to the international school and international educator. Questions were open-ended and were designed to bring forth further conversation about the broad scope of the issues as they arose. The use of universal questions, in addition to responses from open-ended questions, allowed the researcher to burrow deeply into the lived experiences of each of the participants and to develop themes or patterns which emerged from the conversations. “One approach to understanding the social world is to discern its patterns and to construct human meanings that seem to capture life’s essences and essentials” (Saldaña, 2011, p. 90). The researcher anticipated one lengthy interview per participant suitable in which to collect data necessary for this phenomenological study (Marshall & Rossman, 2015). All interview interactions were conducted via video conferencing applications, where data were collected and recorded.

Prior to interviewing participants, the researcher devised a full written description of her own lived experiences as an international teacher and administrator and segregated these experiences as not to conflict with or distract from the experiences of interviewees, fully engaging in the epoché phase of phenomenological research (Marshall & Rossman, 2015). This epoché or bracketing allowed the researcher to effectively clear away her own experiences as much as possible in order to give unsullied perspective toward the phenomena in question (Creswell, 2013).

Identification of Attributes

The participants in this phenomenological study were either teachers or administrators employed by an educational institution outside the United States with English as the standard language of instruction. Participants were required to be native English speakers from English speaking countries of origin as well. Other variables which were applied, included having more than one international teaching or administrative assignment, this criterion was included as the researcher determined the greater number of placements the greater depth in lived experiences could be shared. Assignments in more than one country was not a requirement but was more desirable for the study's specific purposes. Other attributes such as ethnicity, gender, religious affiliation, age, licensure, and civil status did not impact the ability to participate in the study and were not deemed a determining factor in the selection process as they had no bearing on this particular study.

Data Analysis Procedures

Phenomenological research in this study encapsulated the lived experience of teachers and administrators working abroad in a way in which standard survey research could not (Sohn, Thomas, Greenberg, & Pollio, 2017). "Analytic choices are most often based on what methods will harmonize with your genre selection and conceptual framework, what will generate the most sufficient answers to your research questions, and what will best represent and present the project's findings" (Saldaña, 2011, p. 90). Building upon the data collected, analysis of the research questions and transcribed interviews provided significant criteria to which close attention was paid (Creswell, 2013). The researcher understood the importance of taking cognitive ownership of the data and anticipated reading and re-reading the data retrieved from interviews (Saldaña, 2011). Rich descriptions of multifaceted experiences and conditions were

rendered from interview transcriptions (Marshall & Rossman, 2015). When common themes emerged from the data collection from repetitive words, patterns, or short phrases, themes were color coded for clarification, tracking, distinction between themes and highlighting shared premises (Moustakas, 1994). Each color-coded category then received a number signifying the invariant constituents and level of occurrence, as a shared experience amongst participants (Saldaña, 2011). The coding process was a cyclical one in scrutinizing data until no new theories, ideas, words, connections, or themes emerged (Saldaña, 2011). The themes were woven together to describe their general relationship as well as grounds for which the phenomenon was to be understood (Sohn, Thomas, Greenberg, & Pollio, 2017). Comprehensive data collection, coding, and analysis ensured the results were effectively triangulated.

Limitations and Delimitations of the Research Design

In this phenomenological study, the researcher recognized the limitations in inviting only native English-speaking participants, originating from North America and England and acknowledges this segment does not fully represent the actual cultural diversity of international school leadership and faculty populations. The researcher attempted and was successful in covering a wide geographical area to retrieve a global perspective but needed to narrow the scope of the field of participants to a manageable number. A logical place to begin was to consider only English speakers as this matched with the researcher's primary spoken language and the language the analysis was prepared in. Another limitation was in the consideration of utilizing only international schools to participate with English as the primary language of instruction, eliminating bi-lingual schools for example, which narrowed the scope further restricting other international school with differing standard languages of instruction.

Regarding delimitation, foresight considering how the researcher's own experiences might have intertwined and inadvertently influenced interviews with participants, was carefully addressed, planned for in advance, and maintained as the researcher was constantly aware and diligent in reflecting upon all interactions; the epoché phase in documenting the researchers experience as to separate them from the study was utilized at the onset of the study (Marshall & Rossman, 2015). The epoché portion of the study allowed the researcher to clear a space by voiding her own experiences through written reflection of her own experiences as an international educator allowing her to set them aside and enable her to set aside any biases (Moustakas, 1994). Peer debriefing and outside auditing were essential elements for the duration of the process, so that credibility and dependability were core components of the findings.

Validation

Removing and avoiding bias from this study was of the utmost importance to the researcher. The validation process in qualitative research is more subjective and requires practical and thorough procedures (Dellinger & Leech, 2007). Though phenomenological research is open-ended, measures were put in place to substantiate credibility in the study. The nature of the phenomenological approach allows inquiry into the subjects' experience in working abroad in international schools. Unlike a quantitative study, the qualitative phenomenological study is personal and subjective, and this subjectivity may lead readers to question the validity of the research. To ensure that the research was both credible and dependable, the researcher spent an extended length of time through prolonged engagement, quantified data by creating codes, themes, and counted occurrences in a qualitative manner (Creswell, 2006). Peer debriefing through file sharing, revisions, and practice runs with international educator colleagues not participating in the study, external auditing occurred through consultation with outside university

doctoral candidates, and rich, descriptive transcriptions of interviews were additional measures utilized throughout the process further ensuring credibility and accuracy.

Dependability bore equal importance and the study depicted data which were consistent and stable through prolonged engagement with participants; reliably and accurately depicting their lived experiences. Including all supporting documentation from questionnaires, rich and thorough data supporting answers to research questions, and exhaustive examination of interview transcriptions allowed for dependable data source triangulation (Creswell, 2006).

Expected Findings

It was expected to uncover common themes and shared experiences amongst the data collected from participants. A transient nature has been commonly associated with international teaching staff, as the motivation to work abroad often stems from a desire to see the world and to develop cultural awareness (Hauerwas, Skawinski, & Ryan, 2017). There were traces of a naturally occurring teacher turnover due to this phenomenon. The researcher expected to discover transience among participants, but also expected to find some participants searching for longevity in employment. Safeguards, such as financial penalties for early termination of contract, are often built into international school contracts to ensure the educator will remain for at least two-years and educators are generally aware this is a typical expectation. Other items, such as bonuses tied to length of stay are also instituted to entice educators to remain at their schools after the typical two-year contract is completed. In this study, the researcher hoped to gain an understanding of how international school administrators can prepare for teacher turnover and establish initiatives that can withstand an influx of new teachers every couple of years as well as uncovering strategies to be used to retain teachers who are amenable to remain at the school and in the country.

Determining whether this occurrence in teacher turnover was an issue in international schools globally and the depth of the challenges for international school leaders concerning retention was uncovered and corroborated through rigorous and appropriate procedures in comparing emergent themes to transcript details, and cyclical bracketing and reflexive coding. This study provided further clarity to close the gap in the current research available and confirmed the theory that teachers working abroad are often transient in nature, with many factors contributing to decisions in remaining at a school or moving on to another.

Ethical Issues in the Study

This study employed all of Concordia University standards for research conventions, including the IRB process along with the consent of the participants and assigned pseudonyms for confidentiality. The ethical issues related to the research study included the researcher's position in international education, and conflict of interest. There were no other issues regarding ethics during the course of the study and all of the participants entered into the study voluntarily, signed consent forms (see Appendix C), and were free to withdraw from the study at any point in time without any repercussions. Ethical questions concerning the researcher as an international school leader were addressed and all other measures were enacted, guaranteeing personal bias did not penetrate the research. Identities of participants were changed and countries where participants were currently working were referred to by region or continent to further ensure confidentiality. All participants were made aware of all aspects of reasoning and expectations for the research and were invited to review results and outcomes. Contributors were all consenting adults and no students or people under the age of 18 were involved in the process, further removing any ethical unease. Participants signed consent forms which will be stored on a password protected external hard drive for the duration of five years after the completion of the

interview process. All interview transcriptions or hard copy correspondence were scanned and placed on a password-protected external hard drive and hard copies shredded at the completion of the study. No one received any information directly connecting participants outside of the researcher herself who was the sole person with knowledge of names and personal information of the participants. Participants were informed they could withdraw from participation in the study at any time, for any reason, and without repercussion during the process.

Conflict of Interest Statement

It was understood within the role of a social scientist, the researcher's personal experience as an international educator and school leader meant she had first-hand knowledge of experiences and challenges faced in the international educational arena. Having experienced the difficulties in retaining qualified teachers and the challenge in creating a stable school environment enriched by faculty committed to remain, was a foundational appeal in conducting research responding to this phenomenon. The researcher outlined her personal experiences with the participants to be transparent and to build rapport, highlighting a common understanding of their lived experiences (Creswell, 2013). Once the researcher described her own experiences with the participants, it was emphasized that the interviews were to be strictly focused on the participant experiences only and the researcher did not reflect further about her own experiences once the open-ended, probing questions commenced.

At the time of the data collection for this dissertation, the researcher was employed with a school outside the United States as an education consultant and while the school is classified as an international school, they do not typically hire foreign teaching staff. Additionally, this school was a bi-lingual institution with Spanish and English serving as dual languages of instruction. This type of school did not match the criteria for the international school the

researcher sought as part of the study. The researcher had a supervisory role with teachers and students and makes critical decisions concerning school improvement and enhancement. None of the participants were from or had any direct or indirect connection to her school of employment. The researcher had no prior affiliation with the schools the participants were employed with and had no personal nor financial gain by conducting this research. In the past, the researcher had worked as both a teacher and administrator in international schools in two countries outside the United States and hopes to offer critical information regarding effective means for restructuring the international school environment in hopes of retaining qualified faculty for longer periods of time and/or catering to the expectation that faculty may be transitional and finding in-roads to offset the negative impact rotating staff may have on schools and student achievement.

Researcher's Position

Ingersoll (2001) asserted research from the past 20 years substantiates teacher turnover is largely due to the characteristics of the individual as well as organizational concerns. As an international educator, the researcher witnessed issues in teacher retention internationally for several years and wanted to explore the legitimacy what she had witnessed as being a pervasive problem throughout international schools. If validated, she sought to explore the depth of the issues and to pursue viable solutions to address the problem. There is a significant lack of research which seeks to understand the organizational component in teacher decisions to stay or leave a school in an international setting. The intent of this research was to better understand the organizational impact on the international school educator and introduce viable solutions for schools in response to findings. Triangulating similarities from the participant's lived

experiences and insights concerning successful improvement initiatives will allow for inferences to be drawn and findings to be presented.

Summary

The phenomenological methodology presented an enlightened and customized research design that provided comprehensive information about a particular phenomenon or lived experience. International schools face unique challenges in creating stable and consistently flourishing environments for students and faculty due to regular transitions of staff members. This phenomenon was cause for concern as it can affect students and their academic and social outcomes as well as the school community and climate. This study focused on identifying challenges as depicted by participants, reasons for teaching abroad, criteria contributing to decisions in remaining at a school or moving on, selection processes in recruitment, professional development, and other themes as they arose from interviews.

Within the transcendental phenomenological research, individuals who had the shared experience as international educators and school leaders were interviewed answering open-ended and probing questions to uncover common themes from their responses. In-depth interviews with participants were conducted and results cyclically analyzed, which garnered prolific and comprehensive data about the phenomena of working in international schools in countries foreign to them. The phenomenological approach respected the voice and lived experience of the participants of this study and the phenomenological lens provided realistic and relevant data while remaining sensitive to each participant's unique experiences. In the next chapter the researcher will provide a comprehensive examination of the data collected and analysis of findings.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Results

Introduction

Frequent teacher turnover has an impact on the educational environment as well as learning outcomes for students (Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018). School leadership's ability to provide consistency and continuity in its teachers, curriculum, pedagogies, and climate, are key elements in creating an effective learning environment for the school community and ultimately the success of the individual student (Hanford & Leithwood, 2012). Equally, teacher turnover and attrition negatively affect the climate and culture of the learning environment (Fong, 2018). A thorough review of current educational literature indicates a breadth of research pertaining to the impact of teacher retention on school climate in the United States and Canada; however, there is little to denote study of international schools in the same regard (Craig, 2017).

This research began based on a problem statement asserting international educators have a reputation for transience and international school leaders face challenges in establishing effectual academic and school climate initiatives due to frequent shifts in staffing. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to identify the perceived challenges encountered in the international education arena regarding teacher retention and to determine solutions, if any, directly applicable and efficacious, related to these challenges as depicted by the lived perceptions of the participants. The researcher sought to gain insight from the lived perceptions of the participants, as to whether or not retaining qualified teaching staff is accurately problematic for international schools and to determine where there may have been successes in addressing the issue. Additionally, the researcher wanted to understand if lived experiences of participants denoted that leaders possessed specific personality traits or specific skills that

contributed to a more effective school environment and to hone in on those qualities and their influence on teacher retention.

Phenomenological researchers seek to provide understanding of, and propose meaning to, lived experiences and perceptions of an individual or group of related individuals (Moustakas, 1994). The foundation of this research was to investigate the role of school leadership, and the intricacies surrounding the international school experience for both teachers and administrators.

Questions designed specifically for this research were:

- What lived experiences do international educators identify as contributing to a decision to remain or leave a position in an international school?
- According to the lived perceptions of international educators, how do international school administrators build and promote a positive school climate and how is this impacted by frequent teacher turnover?
- How do international school educators perceive the measures taken to ensure school improvement initiatives are continued with fidelity, while balancing the need to train new teachers on a much more frequent basis, based on their lived experiences?
- Centered on the lived experiences of international educators, how is it perceived international school leaders are able to attract and retain qualified instructors who seek longevity in their role?

This chapter includes a description of the sample population, the data collection process, the data analysis process, and introduces the significant findings acquired from 12 in-depth interviews. These results contribute to an understanding of the issues surrounding teacher retention in international schools by the use of a transcendental phenomenological approach in acquiring the participants' lived experiences depicting (a) a concern about longevity in teaching

and leadership roles and the effects on student achievement; (b) difficulties in maintaining effectual atmospheres for learning due to continual changes in staff; and (c) viewpoints on methods to improve the issues.

Description of the Sample

Careful consideration and preparatory methods were applied at the commencement of this study in meticulous reexamination of the purpose of said study and its design, in conjunction with the makeup of the population of possible participants prior to making a choice in sampling methods (Daniel, 2012). The researcher employed a purposive sampling method for the selection process and utilized social media platforms to recruit interested and qualified participants, specifying the interest in international school teacher retention and climate (Creswell, 2007). In addition to the purposive sampling method, the researcher employed snowball sampling in allowing purposive selected recruits to identify others who would be interested in participation in the study as well as match the criteria necessary for involvement.

Criteria necessary for participation in the study were; to be a citizen of an English-speaking country, to be currently employed abroad as either a teacher or administrator, and to be retained by international school/s with English as the standard language of instruction. Each of the 12 participants chosen were current or recent native English-speaking international school teachers or administrators employed by schools with English as the standard language of instruction. Of the 12 participants, six were teachers and six were administrators. The researcher acquired contributors in areas of the world in which international schools are most common, providing a broad scope of the issues while utilizing a relatively small study sample. Table one below, provides a visual representation of various countries where international teachers are often employed. These areas included the Middle East, Europe, Asia, Africa, and

Central and South America. The numbers represent current number of available positions in that region.



Figure 1. *Map of international school regions* (Tieonline teaching jobs: International job teaching search, 2019)

Study participants were all native English speakers with countries of origin in the United States, Canada, and England. All teachers were licensed to teach within his or her subject area from their home countries or state and four of the six administrators held administrator certifications from their home states in the United States. The other two administrators without licensure held expired educator certificates from their home countries or states, but their countries of employment did not require them to have current administrator credentials. Of the 12 participants, eight were male and four were female, and ages ranged from 28 to 65 years old. The researcher did not seek to solicit the ethnicity of the individuals and did not find any necessity for petitioning or documenting this type of data as it had no bearing on the study. All six of the teachers had at least eight years of teaching experience both within their home

countries and abroad and had been contracted in no less than two different international schools in differing countries as well. All of the administrator participants had prior experience in teaching abroad and in their countries of origin and held leadership positions in at least two different countries internationally.

All participants partook in one interview lasting two to three-hours long, via video conferencing applications. Each answered a set of open-ended questions and was encouraged to describe in detail their lived experiences as an international educator or administrator. Those who were able to assist with corroboration of their experiences did so via email. There were no dropouts or deviations from protocol as specified in Chapter 3 and all participants provided their consent to participate prior to beginning the interview process. While it was not necessarily sought, all participants were currently or recently employed as secondary school teachers or administrators, although three participants had had past experience in primary schools.

Initially, the intention had been to seek 12 participants in hopes of having at least 10 potential candidates respond within the timeframe set for the study, qualify to participate, and see the process through from beginning to end. The study gained more popularity than anticipated and 30 qualified candidates expressed interest through social media announcements. The researcher was able to hone the selection process to choose participants with the greatest amount of experience in international education and in specific but varying geographic locations which would create a sizeable global spectrum, demonstrating a broad picture of the issues in international teacher retention and environmental consistency. Using participants who were well-versed in international education garnered more information as participants had more relevant lived experiences to share. The researcher, having a considerable amount of connections within the international education domain, contemplated the utilization of colleagues

in which she was previously acquainted with as participants for the study, but chose contributors without prior relationship with the researcher as to further ensure the authenticity of the study results. Table two, provides demographic data for each participant as well as his or her current content area or assignment.

Table 1

Participant Summary

Pseudonym	Region Employed	Nationality	Current Role
Jane	Asia	British	Literature Teacher
Melissa	Middle East	American	Psychology Teacher
Karen	Central America	Canadian	US History Teacher
Louise	Africa	Canadian	Biology Teacher
James	Asia	American	English teacher
Gary	South America	American	Chemistry Teacher
Mark	Africa	American	Principal
David	Middle East	American	Head of School
Adam	Europe	American	Principal
Charles	Europe	American	Principal
Stephan	Central America	American	Head of School
Mike	Europe	American	Head of School

Research Methodology and Analysis

Determining the lived experiences of teachers and leaders of international schools pertaining to teacher retention and school culture was the purpose of this research. The study was performed applying a phenomenological methodology which provided a profound understanding of issues in international schools. The researcher sought to authenticate the existence of challenges in retaining qualified educators for long periods of time and to determine if school leaders had greater difficulty in establishing consistent, effective learning environments suitable for student success in the international setting. As stated by Moustakas (1994) when discussing phenomenological research, “the aim is to determine what an experience means for the persons who have had the experience and are able to provide a comprehensive description of it” (p. 13).

The researcher utilized a framework of the interrelated theories of servant leadership, transformational leadership, and Maslow’s hierarchy of needs theory as a conduit to support an understanding of the ways in which effective school leaders have the potential to create trust-filled atmospheres based on care and collaboration, resulting in teachers remaining for longer periods of time in international schools as their basic needs are met. Humans are motivated and driven to meet basic human needs, as proposed by Maslow (1954) in his hierarchy of needs theory. Maslow believed humans are inherently good, with largely untapped abilities, capacities, and through an individual’s perpetual struggle to maintain excellence, he proposed all mentally healthy people share the same motivations (Maslow, 1954).

The servant leader “begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve” and extends beyond the traditional boss/employee design to build caring relationships and nurture the individual (Greenleaf, 1970, p. 7). Transformational leaders are natural servant leaders and

expound upon the theory by adding “idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration to forge the strategy-culture alloy for their organizations” (Bass & Avolio, 1993, p. 112). These theories concurrently meld with positive organizational outcomes because they respond to individual needs as explained by Maslow (1954).

Participants were encouraged to choose a time and setting for the interview which best suited their schedule. With each of the participants an interview was conducted via online video conferencing technology and they responded to 22 semi-structured, open-ended, probing questions about their experiences while working in international schools. The interviews were recorded after receiving permission from each participant to do so and the duration of the interviews ranged from two to three hours with an average time of two and a half hours. Audio recordings were saved on a password protected file on a password protected computer. One copy of the file was placed on a password protected hard drive and stored in a locked safe.

As the researcher has spent considerable time in the same field as the participants, special emphasis was placed on the epoché process common to transcendental phenomenology, as to understand each individual participant’s experience and not to unwittingly intermingle the researcher’s own experiences (Kafle, 2013). Moustakas (1994) explained the epoché process,

As I reflect on the nature and meaning of the Epoche, I see it as a preparation for deriving new knowledge, but also as an experience in itself, a process of setting aside predilections, prejudices, predispositions, and allowing things, events, and people to enter anew into consciousness, and to look and see them again, as if for the first time. (p. 2)

After data were collected and the epoché process completed, the recordings of the interviews were transcribed by the researcher as a means to “become intimately familiar with

literally every word that was exchanged” and to ensure accuracy in documenting the interviews (Saldaña, 2011, p. 44). The process of pre-coding, coding, and codifying began, providing for categories and common themes to emerge and was done so in a cyclical fashion using notes and analytic memo writing throughout the process (Moustakas, 1994). Analytical memos detailed the researcher’s thoughts about the data allowing for synthesis and further analysis of meaning. Transcriptions of interviews were sent via email to participants for verification or member checking, further safeguarding the accuracy of the data (Flick, 2013). The technique of member checking was utilized, and all participants verified the accuracy of the transcriptions (Saghafian & O’Neill, 2018). Upon the emergence and recording of common themes and patterns, bracketing and grouping took place and codifying continued, denoting the components of the qualitative study (Moustakas, 1994).

What developed from the analysis process were six emergent and recurring themes (see Table 3). The following themes were distinguished: the importance of geographical location to the individual educator, tangible salary and benefits packages, school environment or climate, effective leadership, autonomy and trust, and professional/personal growth.

Table 2

Emergent Themes

Theme	Occurrence
Salary and Benefits Packages	11
School Environment	11
Geographical Location	10
Effective Leadership	10
Autonomy and Trust	10
Professional/ Personal Growth	9

Summary of the Findings

Six major themes emerged from this study which were identified as major considerations in decisions for international educators as to whether to continue with a school or search for new employment; the themes included: location, salary and benefits, school environment, effective leadership, autonomy and trust, and professional/personal growth. The six major themes were almost equally represented by all of the participants and were discussed comprehensively with participants articulating the importance of the themes.

Nine additional subthemes emerged from the data and were categorized beneath four of the six over-arching themes listed in the previous paragraph; effective leadership, autonomy and trust, school environment, and personal and professional growth. Sub-themes in these categories enhanced the meaning and provided a more comprehensive view of the original overarching theme.

For the purpose of this study, the researcher framed the participant responses by indicating the over-arching theme and the sub-theme contained within. Effective leadership emerged as an overarching theme. Sub-themes of this category included; relationships, ability to build school community, and a caring and supportive nature. The sub-themes for autonomy and trust were structure and clear expectations. For school environment, sub-themes which emerged were the importance of collaboration and sense of community. Sub-themes for professional growth highlighted the significance in mentorship and pertinent and quality professional development opportunities. Each of the themes and subsequent sub-themes are detailed in the next section and the graph below depicts the overarching themes and subsequent subthemes. These are further explained in the next section.

Table 3

Overarching Themes and Sub-Themes

Effective Leadership Relationships Builds community Care and Support	Autonomy and Trust Structure Clear expectations	School Environment Collaboration Sense of community	Professional Growth Mentorship Professional development
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Location

The location of international schools plays an important role for participants in their selection process and decisions about where they wanted to work (Buchanan et al., 2013). The majority of participants dictated the location of the school made a difference in applying for employment and most had particular destinations in which they actively sought contracts. While participants had certain locations in mind as most desirable, many did not end up in their location of first choice. Europe is often considered the most highly desirable location and Adam, a principal in Europe, explained his experiences surrounding location:

I made many moves before I finally made it to the European destination I had always dreamed of here in [my country]. I worked my way through Asia and the Middle East but applied to many schools in Europe along the way. I never received a response from any European schools until I had almost 10 years of experience as an international educator. It was like the European door finally gave way. Now that I am here and I have

“made it” so to speak, I feel a sense of accomplishment and I am where I wanted to be from the beginning.

Other highly sought-after locations are Dubai and Abu Dhabi, these countries often pay attractive salaries and offer significant signing bonuses. Melissa, currently teaching in the Middle East, discussed her current location and perceptions of Dubai by stating:

When I started out everyone was abuzz about wanting to be in Dubai. This was where the salaries were the highest and bonuses were a big draw as well. I scoffed at Dubai and didn't want anything to do with the Middle East in the first place. I wanted to be in Hong Kong or Europe and those locations were where I set my sights. I viewed the Middle East as a bit scary for Westerners and lacking in culture. I interviewed with three schools in Hong Kong, but none of them actually felt right. The pay was good and there were very large incentive bonuses for contract renewals. I had also interviewed with other schools as well, but I seemed to be drawn to the school in [country in the Middle East]. I have been in the region for the past four years and I love it. Two different countries and I love my life here [in the Middle East].

Other times teachers had significant reasons for choosing precise locations in which they sought employment, such as becoming fluent in a second language. Gary, a teacher in South America, explains this rationale and stated:

It was always about location for me, at least I intended to work in a Spanish speaking country anyhow. Didn't matter so much where. I needed to practice my Spanish speaking skills and what better way to do that then in a Spanish speaking country. I did have quite a choice and have worked in three different Spanish speaking countries so far. It was a big chunk of my decisions on where to seek new employment. Currently, I plan

to stay [in my current country] and I really like it here. I feel like I am at home and I have no plans in the foreseeable future to leave.

Location can play a part in where international educators plan to work or to remain working. Ten out of 12 participants stated it was a part of their decision-making process in considering where to search for employment and in the final outcome in whether or not to remain in or go to a particular country. While participants depicted the importance of location, it was also clear there were differing opinions as to which location was most desirable and each participant had a very personalized perspective as to his or her preference as to where to seek employment. Ten out of 12 participants viewed Europe and Dubai as top destinations sought by international educators, but the 10 participants though having an interest in those countries as well, stated there were other locations which interested him or her equally. Through interviews and conversations with varying school administrators in varying countries, participants' initial strong interest in Europe or United Arab Emirates abated in lieu new connections and as different possibilities emerged.

Salary and Benefits

Salary and benefits are at the top of the list of important considerations in international educators' decisions in seeking new or continuing current employment at international schools. Eleven out of 12 participants stated this was an important factor. The majority of participants also stated they had left positions to take new ones in different schools for higher salaries on at least one occasion. For some participants, money was a draw in considering employment, but was not enough to hold them in positions where other values were compromised. David, a Head of School currently working in the Middle East confirmed:

Oh man, I was drawn to the money at one point or another in my long career, sure I was, and it still is a reason. I don't plan to work for peanuts anytime soon. I left a position I loved, in a school I loved, in a location I loved, for a \$3,000 a month pay raise and \$5,000 bi-annual bonuses. I couldn't resist it. It turned out it wasn't the smartest of decisions. I ended up in one of the coldest places in the world in the most unfulfilling, categorically torturous jobs I've ever had. I called in sick all the time and many times I actually was sick. Not proud of it now but, I was never sick like that before. I utterly despised working in that place. Not only was the location horrible, but the values of the school or company which owned it were questionable at best. I've never been a part of something that felt so dishonest before. The school climate was in a shambles if you could even call it a climate; just depressing. Everyone thought the next person was out to get them, there was not a drop of trust there. I couldn't take it for long but stuck it out for my two-year contract and probably only stayed because of the money. Yeah, it was pretty clear they had to pay people big bucks to be there. Looking back, it was such a shame. I wish I would have been able to change the environment there, even a little.

Karen, a teacher currently employed in Central America, further explained the financial role in choosing a school and/or location by adding:

I knew coming to this part of the world I would not make as much money as I had before in [Asia] and [the Middle East], but I was drawn at first to the location. Once I decided on a country in Central America, my next endeavor was to find schools paying the most competitive salaries. I settled on [my school] and the wages were comparable to other schools here, but a bit higher and I was able to negotiate a larger sum for my housing allowance. [My school] also provided very good health insurance and I also have a

retirement type of account where [my school] contributes 10% of my monthly salary once a month to the account. I made more money before, sure, but I am happy here for the time being and I feel very connected to [my school]. We are like a family and I am allowed to teach the way I see fit depending on the lesson. I don't regret making a bit less at all.

Adam, Head of School, currently employed in Europe, provided additional insight into the motivating role salary plays in his decisions surrounding employment by adding:

Yes, I do have rather grand expectations in my salary and benefits requirements. I am not ashamed to say so. I have earned the right to partake of a good salary with my credentials and experience. I can demand a larger sum because I also deliver the goods, so to speak. My schools have been very successful, and I like to think there is a bit of good left in my wake when I depart. Yes, the salary details of the contract are the first thing I investigate when selecting a new school. It sounds sordid to speak of the money part so plainly, but it is a motivator for most I am afraid.

While participants described salary as playing a large part in determining future or current employment, it is not the only factor. The majority of participants described salary as a very important factor and one in which to be considered primarily, but the type of working environment and attributes of school leaders were also paramount when considering contracts from potential international schools offering employment.

Effective Leadership

Ten out of 12 participants stressed the importance of relationship between themselves and their colleagues or leadership team, as an important factor of effective leadership. Nine out of the 12 participants determined an effective leader to be involved in every aspect of the school

community and in supporting a collaborative environment. Ten out of 12 participants deemed care and support important characteristics of an effective leader. Sub-themes emerging from this category were relationships, the ability to build school community, and a caring and supportive nature. Participants were asked to describe effective leadership and its influence on teacher retention. This was delineated by James who described his principal as:

The man behind the success of the well-oiled machine I call my school. There is not a time when I can recall him not being directly involved in school activities. I have seen him do everything from picking up trash from the floors when he thought no one was looking, to jumping in to teach in classrooms when we needed a sub, just so it would not fall on other teachers to pick up the classes in addition to their own. I respect him so much for that and I would follow him anywhere.

Being cared for and supported both personally and professionally was especially important to all participants and was stressed as an important factor in considering extending contracts, many indicated, while living in a foreign country, international educators rely heavily on their schools for support and care. As stated by Mark, a principal currently working in Africa:

I am in a place where there is an overwhelming sense of community, we all have the sense that we are in this thing together. When I needed support with a project concerning curriculum, my head of school jumped in to assist me and when I had trouble with a maintenance issue in my flat, my head of school was also there to make sure I got it fixed. There was never a time that she left me hanging and that is what I call an effective leader. I hope to emulate her example with my teachers and students. That kind of support is a reason to stay with the school.

Karen, a teacher currently employed in Central America further emphasized the positive effects leadership has played in her life and added:

I need to have a connection with at least one person on the leadership team. In theory, having a good relationship in my direct supervisor either my principal or vice-principal is what I look for as I work closely with them on a daily basis. I appreciate positive leadership from my Headmaster as well, but I guess I value it more from my principals. [My direct supervisor-principal] and I have a good relationship, I can turn to her for anything whether it is a school or outside issue. I feel a strong connection with her, and it makes all the difference. She is a good part of the reason I chose [my current school] we meshed in the initial interview process and I felt strongly she and the school was a good fit for me as a professional. Both the school and leadership felt like a fit. I definitely consider staying here at [my school] for a while and my relationship with [my principal is key in that decision. I have had my share of negative bosses before and I'm grateful for [my principal]. She has created a collaborative environment where we all feel we share the responsibilities and we take pride in ownership of those responsibilities as well.

David, Head of School, currently in the Middle East defined the importance of his leadership position and discussed how he shaped himself to become an effective leader by stating:

I think it is such grave importance to me to always be the best I can be in my leadership roles because I have witnessed some very bad leaders in my time. It is of paramount importance that I treat my colleagues with respect and care at all times. I have learned from those whom I did not want in any uncertain terms to mimic the really terrible types of "bosses" I have been exposed to. I've failed if teachers think of me as their boss.

Bosses don't care about the staff they do as their label suggests and order others around with little regard to the human factor. I knew I never, ever wanted to be that person that leaves others scarred and damaged, because that's just how destructive bad leadership can be, it can leave you scarred and damaged. Just think of how bad it is for the students in the environment if the adults can't handle it. No, I care for my school and all the members in it. I care for them like family and I am here to serve them in any way I can. I plan to leave an impression of love and respect on those I interact with.

Supplementary discussion surrounding the importance of leadership support for the person as well as the professional comes from Louise, a teacher currently under contract in Africa, as she articulated:

In [a former school] I had a genuinely good boss, a really good boss. He respected us all as a staff in a way I had not experienced before. The environment was extremely collaborative and there was such a sense of community in that school which just harmonized with me and everyone. Faculty was involved in most of the decision making and there was just a connection between each other and with leadership too. He knew each of us very well and took time to build relationships with us. We had a bond and because of that bond with him, we seemed to bond with each other as well. There was an environmental level of care which was discernable, essentially. He was the kind of leader who would remember personal things about you, and I would hear him asking about sick family members or new nieces or nephews etc. Not just the faculty but all staff including janitorial staff and others we may tend to forget about. We all had high regard for him. I was not feeling well one day, and he drove me to his doctor to be examined, took me home, and on the way picked up food so I would have something for dinner so I wouldn't

have to cook. I'm sure he had far more pressing matters than my illness and likely cleared his schedule to care for me. It's hard to explain that level of care, but once you've experienced it, it's hard to settle for less. As it turns out, [my former principal] got really sick with cancer and had to return back to the United States to receive treatment. He recovered but was unable to return to school. Even though he had established a very warm and collaborative school community, it wasn't the same without him. I decided to leave the school as I felt the school was headed in a direction I didn't want to be a part of. If he was still with the school, I would likely still be there as well.

The majority of participants concurred that effective and supportive leadership are important conditions to attract and retain qualified educators and contributes as well towards an efficacious learning environment. Participants depicted the importance of caring and supportive leadership and sense of community which is brought forth in collaborative learning environments through their rich narratives of experiences.

Autonomy and Trust

Concerning autonomy and trust, both teachers and administrators shared their desire to be trusted as a professional to work in an autonomous fashion. Ten out of 12 participants regarded trust to be a critical part of an effective school environment. Nine out of 12 participants described autonomy as a professional expectation. The lack of faith in the individual created a strain in the work of those participants who had this experience. The sub-themes which emerged from the overarching category of autonomy and trust were structure and clear expectations. Participants stated there were fewer successful outcomes for students and schools and they had plans to leave or had already vacated the schools in which they experienced the lack in trust and inability to function autonomously. Conversely, those who expressed they received trust and

autonomy reported having much greater success in the classroom as well school-wide success from the administrator's outlook. Those reporting having trust and autonomy affirmed this was part of the reason for remaining at the schools either currently or beyond the initial contract period. Jane, a teacher currently working in Asia explained:

I was not allowed to hand out so much as a worksheet from a textbook without approval from my department head and then he needed approval from the assistant principal. A simple task associated with teaching took two weeks to complete. It was maddening not being allowed to do the job that I was trained for. Students felt the impact of this as well and I received no respect because they were aware I needed approval for everything, they thought I wasn't qualified to do the job. So, not only was I not happy to be there, but the students weren't either and there were constant complaints from parents who felt their kids weren't getting the strong academics that were advertised, Programme for International Student Assessment scores were quite low for our country and there was just a general sense of melancholy that you could almost feel in the air. I'm happy to no longer work there.

Louise, a Canadian teacher under contract in Africa emphasized the importance of professionalism and she discussed the significance in hiring qualified educators, as she felt they brought with them the skills and abilities to teach students effectively, without needing further training to do so. She added:

I feel trusted to do my job every day and I make decisions on how to present material to my students. This is how it is supposed to be in teaching. Yes, you need to follow the curriculum and adhere to school standards, but a qualified teacher can do that and provide

the outcomes the students require for achievement. No qualified teacher would need to be told what to do every step of the way.

James, a teacher under contract in Asia, highlighted the necessity in clear expectations and with clear expectations he is able to do his job in an autonomous fashion. James discussed his current school, in which he found an environment he interconnected well with and stated:

I seriously never knew such an incredible workplace existed. I am anxious to get to work each day and I find my job very rewarding. Leadership has implemented a highly structured and collaborative environment. I know exactly what is expected from me both in the classroom and out. I have worked in schools and in other jobs also where I walked in not being very clear about what I was supposed to do. In fact, in teaching there is a certain level of comfort in knowing pretty much what to do, but there are teaching styles, methodologies, differing curriculum, variety in texts, means of assessment, really, I could go on and on about the unlimited nuances that vary school to school. So, expectations are fundamental. Should be a no brainer, but it isn't always so.

Mark, a principal in Africa, denoted the meaning as well in clear expectations and reflected on his own leadership methods in saying:

I give my teachers clear expectations and support them in the things they need to teach our students. My school is highly structured and organized for efficiency. I give them what they need to do the job and spell it out for them and then I step back trusting in the professionals I hired.

Stephan, Head of School currently working in Central America, agreed setting clear expectations is paramount in allowing teachers to work autonomously and shared:

I am nothing if not clear with my goals for the school, for students, and for faculty. I make sure they understand what it is we want to accomplish as a school and how we intend to do it. Generally, I involve staff in the decision-making process so they are abreast of initiative from the get-go since it may have begun as their idea in the first place. I don't typically interfere with my teachers and just support them throughout the year, as I know they don't need me breathing down their necks to be good teachers.

There is a level of trust between us and I rely on them as much as they may rely on me.

Gary, a teacher presently working in South America, explained his need to work in an autonomous manner in his schools and found being trusted as a professional to be a key factor in choosing a work environment included:

I expect autonomy, but I haven't always gotten it. In my field of the sciences, I have accomplished a good deal and have acquired skills which have granted me some recognition for my teaching abilities. I know what I am doing in the classroom and oftentimes administration doesn't understand chemistry well enough to interfere anyway; might be lucky that way. If I wasn't allowed to teach, as I have been trained to do, in the subject matter in which I trained for as well, I wouldn't be working at that school. I believe if you've hired qualified people, they should be qualified to be trusted to do their jobs. Anytime I have run into a lot of micromanagement I have also run into poor leadership and/or disorganization. Never has any supervisor worth their salt anyway, micromanaged and domineered teachers. It never works with professionals.

Karen, a teacher working in Central America, explained the frustration in not understanding what is expected of her in the workplace and shared her lived experience of a time in which she did not know what or how to teach. She shared:

I should never enter a workplace where I should have to guess what I am supposed to do. I was at a school once which had no curriculum and not even a textbook. I had no reference for what was taught in previous years and had to basically research other curriculums and base my teaching on what other students from a different country were learning for that particular grade. I had more direction working at McDonalds in high school. School guidelines and expectations should be clear. Interestingly enough that same school spent an enormous amount of time making sure teachers were doing extra duties or making sure we stayed the full hour after students left for the day. Those expectations were clear through reprimand, but as far as what and how to teach the kids; nothing. There was no trust and no structure, and it was a disaster for everyone; teachers and students.

Trust and autonomy were reported by participants to be significant elements in teacher and administrator satisfaction in their school environments. Trust and autonomy were also determined by the majority to be common strengths necessary as a part of an effective work environment which is a critical organizational characteristic.

School Environment

Delving into school environment revealed strong feelings and emotions from all of the participants and 12 out of 12 participants described their school environment to be of great importance when it comes to considering schools. Stephan, a Head of School in Central America stated:

The number one focus for me, as admin, is to pay attention to the school environment. Developing a sense of community, if there is not already one in place, is a difficult task, but it can be done. I generally move to establish a collaborative culture and I wouldn't be

who I am today if it wasn't for what I have learned from my teammates, students, parents, the whole ball of wax really. I am grateful for those learning experiences. We all have so much to share and each of us contributes something genuinely valuable to others and my goal is to make sure that everybody plays a part, we all get to shine.

Mike, also a Head of School in Europe, discussed his views of school climate and its importance in uniting the school community in a safe and motivating fashion, which successively lays the foundation for students' positive outcomes. He stated:

The highest praise I can receive as an administrator is that my school climate is a pleasant one to be in. Yes, test scores are important and we very much want to see our students and school to be the best on paper as well, but if school is a happy, safe, and interesting place to be, then we have the right foundation for those kids to grow scholastically and they will do so naturally, just by being in the right environment. Sharing new ideas with the staff is critical and it is the reciprocal and collaborative stance, not just me telling others what I know. The sharing, the back and forth, I learn from you, and you learn from me. I truly value what my team has to say. We are at our best, as a school, when we work together in a collaborative sense.

Participants described the impact a negative working environment had on them as professionals both with physical ramifications as well as emotional issues. Karen, a teacher in Central America, described her experience in a school environment which she depicted as unhealthy and one she could not stay involved in, listing the reasons why and disclosed:

Well, I am not proud of it but, I left a school after only one year of my two-year contract. The entire school atmosphere was toxic. Teachers that had been there from the year before talked of nothing more than how much they hated it at the school. Students were

visibly and vocally unhappy as well and most of them disrespected me before they even got to know me. It was apparent that this school had many vacancies each year and many fled before their contract period was over. During the year I was there, three colleagues left before the mid-year break and one left within the first month. There was no clear direction in which the school was going or supposed to be going and I didn't even get a straight answer as to what I was supposed to be teaching. No one seemed to know anything other than their disappointment in school leadership. I witnessed the school director shouting at teachers and students, even parents, and she did so very publicly and regularly, she was one of the most toxic of individuals I have ever worked with. I stayed as long as I could for sake of the students to see them through the year, but I could not finish my contract and began interviewing at other schools by January of that year.

Melissa, teaching in the Middle East, discussed her opinion that it is not always a matter of leadership going through the motions of what is known to create positive work environments and argued that without relationships, leadership cannot effectively implement an effectual and authentic school environment. Melissa shared:

I have had many interesting experiences concerning school environments and I feel it is a delicate balance to create the kind of chemistry that makes for good school climate. At a previous school there were all of the usual kinds of things which ticked the boxes of a solid school environment. We had weekly meetings, open lines of communication between faculty and admin, we were sent lots of surveys so we could contribute our thoughts, there were special functions and outings planned, we even did team building activities regularly and throughout the school year, but something was just lacking. It felt sterile and I wasn't able to figure out just what was wrong until a couple of years later at

a new school. I really felt cared for by my colleagues and also administration. I felt valued. I think what it lacked at the previous school was, even though they were doing all the things you are supposed to do in a school to ensure it functions properly, it came off as insincere or something. I never had the sense that I was cared for there, not like I did at the new school. You just know when it's real, I guess. Choosing to return to an environment like that one is not something I would do. I search now for environments that are healthy in all ways. True collaboration and sense of belonging through the school community is very, very important to me.

Lack of trust in colleagues was depicted as a negative factor in school environments for participants and was labeled as an aspect which drove them to search for employment elsewhere. Gary, a teacher currently working in South America, shared his lived perception of what it is like to work in an environment which lacked trust and autonomy and stated:

I've been in the situation where I just keep my head down and head to my classroom and stay there as much as I can throughout the day. I keep my distance from admin and others just so I don't get involved in any drama by accident or otherwise. I did my work as I was supposed to and always was on time with grades and the like; I never avoided or failed in my duties at all. I wasn't into the school though and it was an uncomfortable couple of years of my life I can never get back. In some ways I regret not breaking contract. An environment like this is very unhealthy for everyone. I guess I might not have realized how bad it was until I got out of it. I look back and think, wow, why did I stay. I think there are many, many international schools out there with crappy leadership and organization; I think it's more common than the good ones, unfortunately. Now, I do

everything I can to make sure the environment is a stable one before I consider any new school. It's often hard to figure that out but, I do my homework though.

James, a teacher currently in Asia, also explained the importance of working in an environment in which he can feel he is a part of a family-like community and the environmental factor plays a big role in choosing a new school or in decisions to remain in one. James stated:

Collaborative schools where teachers and students contribute, where their voices count for something, is the big prize. I have a real sense of community in my school; we are like a big, sometimes crazy family. We work together and we really work together you know? Nobody is trying to outdo anyone else; we bring on the best we have and the best we are every day in service to those kids and for their benefit. When we collaborate, we inspire each other, and we just do better when it's like that. I love to share what I know, probably why I love teaching, but if I pick up a worthwhile technique along the way, why not share it with my colleagues? I consider my working environment a big-ticket item and it is just as important as salary to me. I planned on staying in [my current country] for just my contract period, but I am thinking about putting down roots here and my school is a big reason why.

The school environment as a whole, was reported by the majority of participants, as instrumental in their decision-making process in considering schools and leadership is directly responsible for the status of said environment. Participants reported in schools paying higher salaries, the salaries were not worth a negative work environment.

Professional Growth

Emergent sub-themes for professional and personal growth indicated the value of professional development and a mentor program. Nine out of 12 participants who determined

opportunities for professional growth to be a factor in renewing contracts stated that relevant, quality professional development prospects were critical to their decision-making process. Eight out of the 12 participants also specified mentorship programs to be important as well. Jane a teacher in Asia contributed her perceptions and shared:

When I was considering a contract with my current school one of the deciding factors that drew me in was the wide range of professional development opportunities. My school makes it possible for each teacher to decide for themselves what direction they would like to go with their continuation or learning. I thought there was great value in becoming an IB [International Baccalaureate] certified trainer, not only for myself but for the school as well, so they sent me to become certified and I know can add this to my CV [Curriculum Vitae] and I provide workshops for my colleagues.

Jane also expressed her distaste when schools require professional development sessions which have no relevance to her needs as a professional. She shared her lived experiences where she had negative encounters in previous schools by stating:

In previous schools, professional development was possibly copious in the best of situations, but not at all relevant to the school or the individual teacher. In one school I had to sit through training after training on how to properly use my school laptop. This really happened. Everyone there seemed to be aware how to operate their computers and very confused as to why we would need training on this, but we did this training every week for six weeks. An utter waste of time and money, no one understood why we were doing it. In another school, we were all forced to learn a mathematics methodology even though I was in the English department. I did what I could to try and find any little tidbit to take away from the course, but it was generally a waste of time and money once again.

With so many new and exciting techniques in teaching and learning, it makes no sense not to bring in something new and inspiring and most of all relevant. Conversely, James, a teacher working in Asia, shared praise for his current school's role in his personal and professional development and discussed the positive impact his school's mentor program had on him by saying:

[My current school] has an incredible mentorship program. I have seen these before and most were OK, some just outright failed, but my school really takes this concept to a higher level. I was working and communicating with my assigned mentor before I even came to the school, so that was around six months prior and I had interviewed and signed my contract in January of that year. I was able to connect with my mentor, who was there for me for every and all questions I had. About moving to [my country] where to live and he even went and physically looked at housing for me and ultimately picked me out the perfect place which was ready for me when I got there. I had curricular questions and school policy questions; he helped me with everything. I felt well informed about the school and it didn't feel like I was walking into a new job or school. There was already a level of comfortability. Talk about a smooth transition when I got there. It was incredible, such a difference. Now I have a mentee and as I saw the benefit firsthand for myself, from the other view, it's still an awesome program. In other cases, I felt like I was badgering the overworked and probably underpaid human resources person and in other cases there wasn't even a human resources person to badger. In those instances, I went into a new job and new country blind and nervous and had to work through things as they came along on my own mostly. Huge difference.

Schools are sometimes well known and desirable to applicants for specific attributes such as applicable, current, and extensive proffering of professional development opportunities.

Mike, a Head of School located in Europe, described his current school as such by emphasizing:

We offer excellent professional development opportunities for our staff members. We are always working as team to bring in the best and most constructive professional development we can. [My school] spares little expense when it comes to professional development as well. I have even had teachers seek us out just because we are well known for our professional development opportunities. We took the entire English department last year for a training in Hong Kong on [English Language Learners based professional development training]. We spent a week at the conference and teachers came back with new techniques, strengthened relationships, and inspired with a change of scenery to boot. In other situations, teachers choose what they want to learn about. I try to approve all requests I receive. I have been with other schools which did not find this important at all, which was a great disservice to the students, parents, and teachers. The field of education is constantly changing and in today's world, faster than ever. Teachers need to stay on top of what is current in best practice. Sometimes just getting the opportunity to interact with other educators gives the teachers learning opportunities and opens them up for continued professional growth.

The preponderance of contributors to the study found focus on care for the needs of the members of the school community both professionally and personally to the contribution to the collective efficacy of the faculty and in turn the efficacy of the school community at large.

Presentation of the Data and Results

Through the presentation of the research data and further explained below, research questions one, two, three, and four were answered. Interviews were performed with the participants of the study; their responses provided answers to each research question. Eight interview questions directly addressed the research questions and four others addressed the research questions indirectly through participant responses (see Appendix A). An example of selected responses for each question is provided below.

What lived experiences do international educators identify as contributing to a decision to remain or leave a position in an international school?

Eleven of the 12 participants stated salary and benefits have a significant impact upon decisions in continuing at a school or to seek new contracts elsewhere and while it was admitted to be a crucial piece in the decision-making process it was also stated there were other significant factors to be considered as well. Mark, a principal located in Africa stated:

In fact, it often does boil down to salary and benefits packages and I have definitely looked to the numbers first before delving into what kind of situation the school is in environmentally. I have also come to find, in my own experience, that schools paying higher salaries and ones which take care of their faculty with proper insurance and retirement accounts, etc., generally have a more favorable school atmosphere.

Salary is often the first item international educators examined in considering positions and most participants described it as being an important factor in the decision-making process concerning school choice. James, a teacher based in Asia, shared his lived perception of the value in securing a reasonable salary and described:

For me, I want to earn as much as I should for my position and money is very important, but I would rather work in a school where I am treated with respect and valued for my contributions. I have recently accepted a slightly smaller salary and now work in a more collaborative environment than my previous school and though I miss some of the monetary bonuses I received from my old school, I feel great not being there and have a greater appreciation for being an integral part of my new school community.

Charles, a principal currently based in Europe, felt that care for his colleagues is the first step in building school community and advanced the discussion by sharing his lived perception of how leadership can encourage teachers to stay and stated:

My students and teachers are my first priority and I care a great deal about them including outside of the school scene. They matter to me and I do my best to take care of them. I would never want anyone to say I am their boss and I believe I have the respect of my colleagues. I have had teachers report to me that I was the reason they decided to continue their contracts with the school and I have to tell you it was humbling. As long as my teachers feel they are cared for and supported, I know I have done my part. In the same regard, I also feel cared for by my Head of School and likewise from our board of directors, so it is easy to reciprocate.

Salary affects decisions in considering new schools or remaining with current ones and it appears to be the initial draw to a school or location. Mike, a Head of School in Europe shared his experience in being enticed by monetary offerings:

It begins with money, that's true in most cases I would presume. Even though I am the director of the school one would imagine I have no one to answer to but myself and my student body perhaps, but the owners of the school or board of directors or both

sometimes can be a very tricky. Interactions I should say can be tricky. You have a job to do as Head of School, but often there are those in power who want to make all the decisions and also stay behind the scenes and if something goes awry, they have an easy scapegoat. It's happened to me in the past. I was hired to re-frame the organization and was hired not to actually do that the way I saw fit, but to implement plans already designated by others even before I was hired. I was offered a very attractive salary and accommodations and other fringe benefits; it was an offer I wasn't able to refuse. They wanted a pawn to move around at their discretion. I had no authority really. So, yes money brought me to that job, but the environment was most certainly a contributing factor in my decision to leave the school to pursue other options.

Continuing the discussion about the importance of salary, but also alluding to the theory in which salary is not the sole concern for international educators, Louise, a teacher currently in Africa, offered:

I look for the whole package, the whole enchilada. If I am not happy with a school situation, plus my living situation, or money situation, I will look for positions elsewhere. Yes, I want a fair wage and I expect certain benefits in housing and bonuses, but I also need to feel out the school and I spend a good time researching schools before I even consider applying. I network with other international educators and ex-pats in the area of the school and of course read reviews online. I typically have some knowledge of a school before applying. I should say I have interest in the school before applying. I like to see schools working with and in the community. I love seeing students actively involved in helping others. Many of the kids who attend these schools are from

extremely affluent households and families. They have little idea of what life is like for regular folk. It's good for them.

Gary, a teacher in South America affirmed the desire for both a good salary and a positive working environment by reporting:

I usually leave a school for a combination of reasons. There may be a better salary in a new location or better working environment or maybe, I guess preferably both. I have definitely hung around with a school in the past that didn't pay as well as some others, but had a great family feeling to it, longer than I planned and I have also stayed with a school that paid very well, but had a crummy atmosphere. Now, I look for multitude of factors; salary, of course, professional development opportunities, connection with leadership and location. I also want to make sure I work for an ethical organization and one where I can feel like I am a part of the school, not just passerby who happens to teach chemistry.

Largely, participants identified the importance of compensation monetarily and through the less tangible items as in being valued as a part of the team and feeling a sense of community and care as contributing factors regarding retention.

According to the lived perceptions of international educators, how do international school administrators build and promote a positive school climate and how is this impacted by frequent teacher turnover?

All 12 participants spoke of the significant negative impact teacher and administrator turnover had on the school environment or culture and in regards to student achievement in international schools. James, a teacher in Asia stated:

When I went to school in the States back in the day, I knew all of the teachers as I came up through the grades. It was like a rite of passage to have Mr. So and So for 8th grade science. We knew what to expect from him from years before, due to his reputation. I think there is something to be said for having a bit of consistency in faculty. I worry about the futures of my international students as schools shift so with the changes in leadership and teachers every couple of years.

Charles, a principal working in Europe, described less turnover in his experience in Europe, but had witnessed the issue of teacher rotation several times before in previous schools and in previous locations. Charles asserted:

I have observed slightly less turnover in teaching staff here in Europe and I believe it to be the location, as Europe is, in my humble opinion, perceived as the “holy grail” in international education. Many, work for years in hopes of landing a position in Europe. This is not to say we do not see our share of turnover; we do. Our leadership team works very closely with our local staff members and we have built a fairly sturdy foundation for our school climate. We know our local teaching staff is here to stay for the most part and we make sure to include them in school initiatives; it helps facilitate a more consistent environment.

Stephan, Head of School in Central America, also stated he utilizes his local staff members to create a more stable and consistent learning environment calling them, “the means to create a bit of stability in an ever-changing environment”. Jane, a British teacher working in Asia, depicted her perception of school climate and the impact of teacher turnover by saying:

I have seen my fair piece of terrible school environments and it seems to be in schools with leaders who just don't seem to care and just need a warm body to stand in the

classroom. I guess I use the term leader in this sense rather loosely as they were more like managers at a fast food restaurant. Each time I have experienced this negative work environment it has always been in schools with out-of-touch management, management that did not appear to care. You could actually feel it in the air, and I think climate is just the means to describe it, you could feel the lack of care and support.

Jane went on to explain the impact being in a positive school environment has had on her career and shared:

My current school, however, is exactly the opposite, I feel cared for each and every day and I know my students feel cared for too. We meet as a faculty often and teacher voices are heard and respected and when it comes to changes to be made at school, we talk about it and create direction together. It is a warm place to be and as far as I know it has always been like this. Professional development is constructive, and we collaborate as a team regularly, we also have a fabulous mentor program. There is turnover here, but from what I can interpret, it is less frequent and most of my colleagues have been with the school for four years or more, which is a good length of time in the international school arena.

International educators often feel concern over the impact turnover has on student outcomes, but they do not know what to do about it. Louise, a teacher currently employed in Africa added:

I have always worried about the impact of teacher turnover on these kids and in international schools. It's like it's just expected. Many of us international educators do in fact want to see as much of the world we can, and you get the best view when you can live in a locale for a couple of years and digest the atmosphere. The comings and goings

of teachers constantly must put a very big strain on the schools and especially the students. We want to ensure our students receive a topnotch education, but don't know how to improve things. I don't know how to help.

Financial incentives and opportunities for professional advancement are factors which may assist in retaining qualified educators for longer periods of time. Melissa, a teacher currently working in the Middle East reported:

There has to be an impact on learning when teachers are consistently changing. It seems like each school I have been with, each new class I teach has some large gap in learning left over from the year before. I appreciate the schools which make an effort to retain their teachers with differing incentives.

Adam, a principal in Europe further explained how tangible incentives may encourage longevity in international schools by stating:

[My school] has done a great deal to hang on to our teachers and administration. We offer a pay scale with yearly increases and we promote as much as possible from within. We have a great location, so that is a benefit. In the States, right now, I think they are seeing more and more teacher attrition, but we do face unique challenges in the international school as we still find that educators so want to explore the world. We try and consider this as we hire and as we set up our environment. We try and embrace this anomaly, maybe anomaly is too harsh a word, let's say we embrace the fact that not everyone will settle down here and stay on with us for years. We work with that and around it.

Through participant contributions it was determined teacher turnover is a concern in the international school, as well as it was correspondingly determined there to be exclusive

challenges exclusive to international schools due to the transient nature of many international educators.

How do international school educators perceive the measures taken to ensure school improvement initiatives are continued with fidelity, while balancing the need to train new teachers on a much more frequent basis, based on their lived experiences?

Only four of the 12 participants were able to speak toward answering this research question and these four were all administrators. While all six administrator participants were able to discuss various school initiatives in which they had taken part in, there was little feedback as to how implementing initiatives could be done with greater success in consideration of the changes in staff. Four of six administrators specified that there was an additional challenge in maintaining the initiatives when bringing in new faculty regularly and the other two administrator participants did not find there to be any noticeable difficulties in preserving the integrity of their programs or initiatives. David, Head of School in the Middle East stated when asked about his role and observations in maintaining schoolwide initiatives:

We have regarded this as a challenge in the past here at [my current school]. I believe the initiatives and programs put in place by the former administration were not held to any standard. It was simply stated that we intended to increase student engagement through community service activities. There was no follow through and no direction to teachers as to how to implement the initiative. In fact, teachers reported that they were unable to provide any community service opportunities as the former administration turned down their requests for off-campus pursuits. It is up to leadership to follow through and provide the training faculty needs to prepare, supply the access to what is needed, and to gather data accurately throughout to demonstrate achievement or lack thereof of said

goal. Effective leadership will properly assume responsibility and see it through; full stop.

Promoting teachers who are committed to the school to positions with more responsibility may have an impact in strengthening initiatives and keeping them consistent while still experiencing turnover. Adam, a principal in Europe, shared his philosophy of reliance on lead faculty and shared:

I rely heavily on my lead teachers and department heads to follow up on school improvement plans and goals. These goals are our focus and keeping them at the forefront of daily plans is a top priority. It is a part of the curriculum in my opinion and it is treated as so in my school. The standards for student achievement are clear and the standards for schoolwide achievement can be no less clear.

Leadership plays a major role in shaping and securing a positive school climate and Mike, Head of School working in Europe added:

I have landed in a school or two in disarray upon my advent and improvement plans had fallen to bits. In my experience it has been due to faulty leadership. It doesn't mean that every plan you put in place has to be a smashing success, but it does mean you see it through even if it didn't work. Fix it, revise it, revamp it, drop it, whatever, but you see it through.

Given only four participants were able to address this question, further research is warranted to better determine how school leaders are able to sustain important initiatives in the face of high teacher turnover.

Centered on the lived experiences of international educators, how is it perceived international school leaders are able to attract and retain qualified instructors who seek longevity in their role?

All six administrator participants stated they routinely sought highly qualified faculty who had the intentions in continuing with their schools. All six administrators also described the frustration in searching for staff members on a regular basis. They explained the challenges in finding teachers highly qualified and highly suited for specific positions and in the particular schools in question and in potentially losing them after a couple of years. Mike, currently working in Europe responded to this question with the following reflections:

Even when the appropriate questions are asked in interviews and throughout the vetting process, there is only so much I can do to certify a new hire will want to stay with my school past the contract period. The fact is we want them to stay and we have had some success in keeping our highly qualified teachers, but some of that success has to be reflected in our highly prized [European] location. There are so many reasons we want to keep our faculty and the cost is significant when we lose them in more ways than just monetarily. What [my school] offers are; a prestigious location, very good salaries, solid benefits-including retirement plans, a wide assortment of professional development opportunities-in house and abroad, and a positive school community. I believe these to be excellent offerings and reasons to consider continuing employment with [my school].

The European administrators found more consistency in teachers and shared lived perceptions in Europe being a destination of choice for many international teachers. Other administrators discussed schools having a reputation for being a “top school” and rated highly for offering strong salaries and benefits also with well-developed environmental factors, making

certain schools more attractive to highly qualified teachers. David, Head of School in the Middle East asserted:

We have an excellent reputation in the region and beyond. I rarely have to post a position vacancy as we have a list of potential candidates on a kind of waiting list. We pay very well and take exceptional care of our faculty; it is well known that we do so. People want to work with us. They wait in line to work with us. However, we do understand there is a certain impermanence with some staff as there is the desire to explore new countries and cultures, many are forthcoming about this and others are not. We seek to employ the best and brightest, but because they are the best and brightest, we do plan for them to remain with us.

Melissa, a teacher, working in the Middle East offered a teacher's lived perspective as to how choices are made in seeking employment by stating:

I do enjoy seeing other countries and experiencing life there as a local, but finding the right school that has the right combination I'm looking for in salary and benefits, along with solid leadership and a supportive work environment, count me in. I'd stay in a minute for the right school.

Also conveyed was the perceived transience in international educators and the aspiration to see the world and Louise, a teacher working in Africa contributed to this idea by saying:

I thought I would just move every couple of years until I have seen what the good old planet Earth has to offer, but frankly [my school] is such an influence in my decision whether or not to continue my journey. I'm so happy here. The money is good, cost of living is low, I adore my principal and I'm not sure they get any better than her, my school is collaborative based, I feel like a respected member of a marvelous and highly

effective family. I'm not sure I will leave after my contract is over next year. There is even room for advancement for me here. This is a unique experience for me in international education.

In areas where salaries are considered lower than the norm in international education, school administrators look to attract and retain qualified educators by using alternate means. Stephan, Head of School in Central America, offered a unique perspective and communicated the possibility in creating qualified staff, instead of searching for the perfect professional for the job. Stephan described his philosophy in stating:

It's not easy keeping good teachers, especially here in [Central America]. The wages are some of the lowest in the world and sometimes we get a bad rap about being in a dangerous country. So, we don't always draw the best of the best. In my opinion you have an obligation to create the best of the best. I do offer salaries higher than that of other schools in the vicinity and we have a very solid program here at [my school]. We have earned a very reputable place amongst the top schools in the world and we have done so because we operate as a unit here. I can't always keep every teacher, but we do the right thing here at [my school] and we do right by our students, teachers and parents. We have had excellent teachers stay on with us years beyond their initial contract periods and they have stated it was because they found a home at [my school]. We can't keep them all, but we do everything we can to make sure folks want to stay with us.

These responses demonstrated the varying reasons international education faces unique challenges in recruiting and retaining native English-speaking foreign hire staff. While identifying that distinctive challenges exist, participants also contributed a variety of responses which lend themselves to possible solutions in improving the international school environment.

Participant responses also depicted that improving the environment can also encourage staff to remain longer in their positions, therefore interposing a positive impact on teacher retention.

Summary

Six key themes emerged from the research and nine applicable sub-themes were also assembled. These themes and sub-themes presented comprehensive insight into the challenges faced in international schools as observed by international school administrators and teachers. The 12 participants acknowledged teacher turnover in international schools presented a challenge that is unique to the faction. It was also recognized by the participants that schools experiencing frequent turnover had issues with low student achievement and success rates, but the researcher discovered no data to defend these occurrences. School leaders acknowledged the need for providing the circumstances known for attracting and retaining qualified teachers; adequate salaries and a caring and supportive environment. Administrators reported, providing a collaborative school setting, with effective communication, demonstrating consistent professional and personal support, and providing relevant professional development opportunities were all elements in creating an environment in which teachers were more likely to remain.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion

Introduction

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore challenges faced in international schools regarding teacher retention, the impact of school environment on educators' decisions surrounding remaining or leaving a school, and to seek effectual approaches to contribute in facilitating improvement in international schools. The researcher also sought to determine the conditions which educators found favorable or unfavorable and what factored into decisions to remain or pursue employment elsewhere. Data was obtained through in-depth, probing questions and extensive understanding was pursued in identification of challenges faced by teachers and administrators working in international schools, factors influencing educators' decisions to stay or leave a school, and an examination of how environmental factors played a part in teacher retention. The researcher pursued understanding of how leadership influences the school environment and how this may factor into international schools' teacher retention.

In this chapter the researcher provides analysis and attributes meaning to the findings of the study, followed by a summary of insights and understandings of the outcomes. A discussion of how the results relate to the literature is also be applied. Succeeding the discussions an explanation is presented regarding the limitations of the study. Chapter 5 also presents a discussion about the data collected in relation to the research questions and provides recommendations for how the research could be further developed to contribute to the dialogue surrounding challenges in international schools' teacher retention and environmental influences on retention.

Summary of the Results

The 12 expatriate participants engaged in this study were comprised of six international school teachers and six international school administrators. All were native English speakers, and originated from the United States, Canada, and England. The participants were seasoned international educators, meaning they had spent a minimum of eight years working abroad, and were currently based in regions globally found to be popular among international schools. These schools feature English as the standard language of instruction, which typically contract foreign English-speaking faculty from abroad. The regions of the study were chosen to provide a global perspective of the issues and included: Asia, the Middle East, Africa, Europe, and Central America. Participant responses throughout the interview process contributed understanding about the challenges faced in international schools regarding teacher retention and the influence school climate has concerning an educator's choice in where to work. Participants also reviewed their own philosophies for improving teacher turnover in international schools and how to create and maintain effective work environments which impact teacher turnover. This phenomenological study addressed the following research questions:

- What lived experiences do international educators identify as contributing to a decision to remain or leave a position in an international school?
- According to the lived perceptions of international educators, how do international school administrators build and promote a positive school climate and how is this impacted by frequent teacher turnover?
- How do international school educators describe measures taken to ensure school improvement initiatives are continued with fidelity, while balancing the need to train new teachers on a much more frequent basis?

- Based on the lived experiences of international educators, how can international school leaders attract and retain qualified instructors who seek longevity in their role?

There is a large gap in phenomenological studies concerning teacher retention in international schools located outside the United States and with English as the standard language of instruction (Chandler, 2010). Hauerwas, Skawinski, and Ryan (2017) conducted a qualitative study regarding the impact teaching abroad has on cultural awareness and intercultural development, but this study does not expound upon teacher turnover in international schools. Kabilan (2013) performed a phenomenological study focused on pre-service international educators located in Maldives with an emphasis on professional development and institutional collaboration and factors leading to school improvement; what is not discussed is the impact school improvement has upon teacher retention. Saghafian and O'Neill's (2017) phenomenological study offered insights into international education but centered on lived experiences of Master of Business Administration online and in-person students in Iran and does not directly contribute to issues surrounding teacher turnover in international schools. While these aforementioned studies do not directly correspond to international school teacher retention and have alternative foci they do lend themselves obliquely to the concept in which environmental factors impact school climate and teacher feelings of satisfaction. Therefore, this phenomenological study is distinctive as it examines international teacher retention and the effects of school environment on retention, utilizing a wide geographical lens to include the areas of the globe in which international schools are common.

From analysis of interview and artifact data, six key themes emerged, depicting the factors considered by international educators around employment within a particular school. The six themes were: geographical location, salary and benefits, school environment/climate,

effective leadership, autonomy and trust, and professional growth. These key themes provided insight into the experiences of international school teachers and leaders, the associated decision-making factors in decisions influencing school choice, and further clarity of the challenges found in international school environments. Helping to further refine and illustrate the connotation for four of the overarching themes in effective leadership, autonomy and trust, school environment, and professional growth, nine sub-themes emerged. The emergent sub-themes included: relationships, school community, care and support, structure, clear expectations, collaboration, sense of community, mentorship, and professional development.

For the participants, salary and a positive school atmosphere often were determining factors which led them to stay with a school, thus providing conformation; working conditions are closely related to teacher retention (Gulosino, Franceschini, & Hardman, 2016). Positive school climate was further described by participants as effective leadership providing professional supports in mentoring, collaborative, and autonomous environments. This coupled with fair salaries and agreeable locations, led to higher teacher retention.

Discussion of the Results

The study originated with the intent of seeking insight into the following problem statement: Given the transient nature of international teaching staff, it is important for school leaders to develop a positive school culture in order to maintain traction in retaining qualified educators. Participants concurred there was an unmistakable disadvantage found in the international school setting concerning high teacher turnover, leading to concerns for the future outcomes for students in these mercurial environments. Contributors to the study believed there should be emphasis placed to highlight the issue of international teacher turnover as well as considerable focus to try and improve the problem.

Eleven out of 12 study participants expressed their initial desire to see the world and to fully experience and understand new cultures by immersing themselves in new locations abroad, as the primary factor for first choosing to work abroad. These factors contributed to the premise that international teachers are associated with transience in employment locations abroad (Chandler, 2010). Participants were seasoned international educators and had served in more than two locations while abroad; while 11 out of 12 expressed the initial desire to see the world did not abate, they also wanted to put down roots and were searching for a kind of international *home base*. With geographical location also playing a significant role in teacher decisions concerning retention, the ideal location for each participant varied as well as his or her rationale in being interested in a particular locale. Finding connections within local culture along with a comfortable working environment allowed participants to consider settling down in certain locations. While understanding the importance of location to the process of settling in for international educators, it should be equally understood that the reasons for finding a location suitable to settle down were varied and each individual participant had different reasons for why he or she felt a connection with a location. International school administrators should ensure faculty are provided ample opportunities to explore and become involved in local culture and community activities and in doing so allows for the possibility for educators to create connections and feel at home in his or her new home country. What may begin as a desire to see the world can transform into a desire to put down roots where one feels a sense of belonging.

The results of this study suggested international educators were more likely to remain in a school and position if the salary was satisfactory, and there were sufficient opportunities for collaboration and professional growth. Participants agreed, being paid a fair and competitive salary with appropriate benefits was important, but many also felt salary alone, without a positive

school climate, was not enough incentive to remain at a school. School environment continued to be a salient factor in considering remaining or leaving a position. Ten out of 12 of the participants held positions in schools either presently or in the past, which lacked extrinsic rewards in salary and benefits, but were rife with intrinsic motivators stemming from satisfaction with leadership and the working environment.

Effective leadership was deemed an important factor in the establishment of a positive school culture or climate. Participants described a feeling of security and job satisfaction during the times they felt cared for by administrators or colleagues while working abroad. They appreciated being cared for and indicated residing in a foreign country with few connections led to placing a higher value on feeling cared for in the unfamiliar location. Research Question 1 was: What lived experiences do international educators identify as contributing to a decision to remain or leave a position in an international school? The responses indicated study members considered both salary and environmental factors to be key influences in decisions determining longevity in international school positions or for pursuit of new contracts elsewhere. Salary was determined to be an important initial concern when participants considered positions in different schools. However, 11 out of 12 participants agreed a particularly sizeable salary, even well above the average, was not enough to maintain longevity in employment in a school where the atmosphere was felt to be inhospitable to the individual. Participants generally were searching for a comfortable salary and benefit package, which suited his or her individual needs, along with a satisfactory and engaging work environment. This combination was also just cause for participants to remain in a school past the contract term.

The second research question was: According to the lived perceptions of international educators, how do international school administrators build and promote a positive school

climate and how is this impacted by frequent teacher turnover? The third research question was: How do international school educators perceive the measures taken to ensure school improvement initiatives are continued with fidelity, while balancing the need to train new teachers on a much more frequent basis, based on their lived experiences? Both of the research questions yielded similar results in responses from the lived experiences of the participants and have been combined in this segment because of the way in which the questions somewhat intersected. Both the teacher participants and the administrator participants contributed meaningful insight and provided a dual perspective concerning the questions. Teacher participants agreed bearing witness to the impact of teacher turnover and recognized its impact on their own responsibilities as teachers. Five out of six of the teacher participants explained they spent extra time in the school year, with particular emphasis on the first half of the year, training new, incoming teachers. This training of new teachers was often unofficial and uncompensated time and included helping new staff members understand school directives and protocol. Veteran teachers were expected to work with co-teachers or grade or subject level teachers until they adjusted to the school and the school's conventions. These additional duties contributed to feelings of frustration and overall workplace dissatisfaction as reported by teacher participants.

Administrator participants confirmed it was often difficult to establish and maintain a positive school climate with higher rates of turnover and most denoted it was remarkably more difficult to institute climate initiatives or repair a murky school climate in international schools as opposed to in schools in their countries of origin. Administrators attributed the difficulty to a higher number of teacher turnover and at more frequent rates, as opposed to their previous schools in their home countries. Most international teaching contracts are for two years, leading

to an ongoing cycle of new hiring and re-establishing of school culture and climate as new staff relationships are negotiated and developed.

Almost all leadership participants affirmed they relied heavily on their experienced staff members to play larger roles in the organizational structure. It was also asserted developing local faculty in key roles throughout school climate initiatives and schoolwide goals had demonstrated some success in preserving consistency within the school composition. Local faculty members were often able to smooth transitions for incoming faculty, ensure schoolwide goals and initiatives remained present, and maintained stability for the school community. Finding inroads to utilize veteran staff and local faculty members while acknowledging their contributions through compensation and appropriate titles and promotions, could assist other international school administrators in stabilizing school culture and environments.

Administrator participants were also forthcoming about circumstances surrounding changes in leadership. Their lived experiences indicated administrators were just as likely to leave positions for new schools often for the same reasons as those indicated by teacher participants. Five out of six administrator participants agreed changes in leadership meant changes to school climate initiatives and other schoolwide goals and they concurred change was a disruptive factor for the school.

The results of the study indicated remaining faculty in international schools were compensating for a lack of consistency in international school faculty and that they were expected to assume responsibility for revolving staff members by providing guidance and training for new teachers; administrators agreed their requirements were similar with regard to new leadership hires. Teacher participants revealed while he or she was designated to train incoming teachers, it was not always clear as to how to correctly guide new teachers as there

were often administrative changes which brought forth new initiatives and directives.

Administrator participants described challenges in upholding initiatives or guidelines instituted by former administrators and depicted revising previous standards and often replacing them with new ones. So, while teacher and administrator participants were often required to train incoming faculty and administrators it was not always done so with fidelity and in a manner which smoothed transitions in staffing; contributing to unstable school environments.

All participants concurred turnover in schools causes disruption and has a ripple effect on members of the school community. Eleven out of 12 participants agreed relying on longstanding and local staff could potentially contribute to success in sustaining school climate initiatives that function successfully and with longevity.

Research Question 4 was: Centered on the lived experiences of international educators, how is it perceived international school leaders are able to attract and retain qualified instructors who seek longevity in their role? Participants in this phenomenological study overwhelmingly agreed a fair salary and benefit package along with a positive and supportive working environment were key elements in their decision-making process to renew a contract or search for new employment. School leaders working in international schools which offered generous salaries and benefits packages, reported a lesser amount of teacher turnover than those in other international schools. Additionally, administrators working in European schools indicated there was a reduced amount of turnover in which they contended to be directly related to the highly sought-after European posts in the international educator field. Three out of six international school leader participants described seeking out candidates who were looking for long-term assignments by asking for candor when interviewing potential candidates for available positions.

Those administrator participants also denoted reviewing potential candidate's background as to determine longevity in past employment.

Teacher participants established a suitable salary was a top priority in consideration of employment, but not enough in itself to compensate for an unsatisfactory school climate. Six out of six teacher participants reported having abandoned positions in the past with higher salaries for new positions at different schools with less pay and more satisfactory work environments. Teacher participants also expressed their sincerity in interviewing for new posts as to whether or not they intended to remain with a school beyond the contract period. Eleven out of 12 participants described the desire to travel the world as an initial factor when choosing to work abroad, but correspondingly stated they recognized a point where they sought to remain in a school and permanently remain in that location.

The results of this study indicated by offering competitive salaries and benefits, standard to the region the school is located, can attract qualified international educators and creates a viable means to retain them. The researcher also determined through the data analysis, effective leadership with the ability to generate collaborative and professionally progressive climates and supportive school atmospheres where individuals feel cared for, contributes positively to the retention of qualified international teachers. Support for teachers in international settings goes beyond focusing on success in the classroom; often international faculty members rely heavily on their colleagues and administration for many personal needs while living and working in a foreign country. International administrators can help to create stable and cohesive work environment which allows for a sense of belonging in a place where otherwise individuals may feel they do not fit in. Participants described the necessity to feel cared for and the significance in receiving meaningful personal and professional support from school leaders and colleagues.

Discussion of the Results in Relation to the Literature

Current literature regarding international school's teacher retention is scarce and there is even less literature available concerning international schools' issues from a global perspective; what does exist is concentrated on particular countries or regions (Allen, 2016; Mancuso, Roberts, & White, 2010). There are many studies focused on countries recognized for innovative and successful education systems such as Finland and Singapore (Craig, 2017; Falk, 2015). There is also an abundance of literature surveying teacher retention and attrition in the United States, including the effects of leadership and school climate on retention and attrition (Ingersoll, 2001).

Through this study the researcher offers a unique perspective by focusing on international schools which utilize English for their standard language of instruction and those which hire foreign teachers and administrators from native English-speaking nations. The international schools which pertain to this study are privately-owned institutions which adhere to its country's standards for instruction as well as other recognized curriculums. Previous research concerning teacher retention and the effects of school climate on retention is abundant, but applies largely to the United States, and Canadian public-school systems (Mancuso, Roberts, & White, 2010). The absence of current and applicable data specific to teacher retention in the international education setting from a global standpoint prompted this study. The results of this study produced an alignment with existing findings concerning teacher retention and shortages in qualified teachers in the United States and the results support the importance of effective leadership and a positive school atmosphere in attracting and retaining qualified staff (Ingersoll, 2001).

School Environment

The preponderance of participants, 11 out of 12, illustrated the importance of the school environment in their decisions to remain with a school or search for new employment. Similarly, 10 out of 12 participants who described the influence of school environment on their decision-making process, also expressed they were unwilling to remain in their positions in schools which they had deemed inhospitable. In description of a positive school climate, 11 out of 12 study participants were clear about their perceptions of the characteristics of a satisfactory work environment. The emergent themes from the data depicted study participants' perception of a positive and sought-after school environment as a collaborative one where participants felt a sense of community. The ability to collaborate with other professionals in the workplace, allows faculty members to build positive relationships with colleagues and have a voice in matters concerning the school; which leads to individual and collective satisfaction and benefits (Larkin, Brantley-Dias, & Lokey-Vega, 2016). Consistent collaborative opportunities enable educators to remain enthusiastic about their work and to grow and develop professionally (Darling-Hammond, 2017). A sense of community in schools constructs strong relationships and allows school community members to work collectively toward positive outcomes (Bradley-Levine, 2016). This type of collaborative and community-based atmosphere was described by participants as desirable and necessary.

Effective Leadership

Participants in this study shared their perceptions of the important role leadership played when deciding whether to stay with a school or seek employment elsewhere. In conjunction with teacher participants discussing the importance of effective leadership, international school administrator participants conveyed the value they place on effective leadership. Ten out of 12

participants described effective leaders as caring and supportive, and possessing the ability to build and maintain a positive school community, who foster trusting and positive relationships with staff. The literature indicated these are necessary characteristics for effective leaders and according to Lehman, Boyland, and Sriver (2014), synthesizing required qualities in an effective leader “typically includes: creating a vision, developing leadership in others, utilizing effective problem-solving strategies, promoting a climate for learning, evaluating and improving instruction, making data-based decisions, and forging strong community relationships” (p. 102). By developing and maintaining supportive relationships in the school community, leaders enrich school culture (Prelli, 2016). Servant leaders holistically interpret their duties as leaders and see people as human beings and care for and support them in their journeys both professionally and personally (Wheeler, 2011). Effective leadership is a fundamental component in building a caring and supportive school climate, which facilitates the development of united and highly efficient school community, resulting in greater teacher retention (Larkin et al., 2016).

Leaders demonstrating characteristics associated with servant leadership such as care for faculty, both professionally and personally were remarked upon with emphasis and in a positive light, by both teacher participants and administrator participants. Greenleaf (1970) described the servant leader as one who has an inner calling to serve others and ensure the needs of the members of his community are taken care of even before his own needs. With the natural desire to care for others in servant leadership, the foundation is laid for transformational leadership strategies to arise holistically. “Transformational leaders integrate creative insight, persistence and energy, intuition and sensitivity to the needs of others to forge the strategy-culture alloy for their organizations” (Bass & Avolio, 1993, p. 112). In building a caring rapport and sense of security through the servant leadership approach, transformational methods merge with servant

leadership methods when leaders recognize the unique strengths and needs of each member of the community and finds ways to develop the individual for the good of the group (Lamm, Sapp, & Lamm, 2016).

Within the interconnected theories of servant leadership theory and transformational leadership theory, the overarching premise of Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory depicting human needs, helps international school administrators understand how to create school environments which support and care for school community members. Maslow's (1954) classification included physiological needs, safety and security needs, a sense of belonging and care, esteem needs in feeling a sense of accomplishment, and achieving self-actualization as the final pinnacle of the pyramid. These needs explain what most individuals seek naturally in life and in work and allow school administrators to be aware of what qualified teachers are looking for in a school environment abroad (Maslow, 1954). Utilizing Maslow's structure while applying servant leadership and transformational leadership approaches permit leadership to focus attention in these areas creating a space which the educational populace is attracted to and want to remain.

Autonomy and Trust

Both teacher and administrator study participants discussed the importance of having autonomy and trust and how these elements factored into their decision-making regarding employment in the international setting. Ten out of 12 participants discussed their lived experiences and their perceptions of autonomy and trust in the workplace and the critical roles these have in an effective school environment. Studies suggested educators whom are granted autonomy in the classroom reported positive feelings for their schools and greater job satisfaction; leading to lower turnover rates (Glennie, Mason, & Edmunds, 2016). Administrator

participants also depicted the necessity for autonomy from the school board or owners of the school. Autonomy in the school environment bolsters feelings of professionalism and trust and dissuades negative feelings of powerlessness (Gray & Summers, 2016). An underpinning of trust lays the groundwork for an autonomous and collegial school environment (Sebastian, Allensworth, & Huang, 2016). According to Glennie, Mason, and Edmunds (2016), “where there is an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect, teachers feel comfortable raising issues and concerns, and teachers are effective leaders at this school” (p. 254).

Subthemes surfacing from the overarching theme of trust and autonomy were structure and clear expectations. Study participants expressed their lived experiences as being allowed autonomy on the job, leading to feeling trusted as professionals. They valued being trusted to do their jobs effectively. Participants described the need for structure and clear expectations as foundational details in creating a trust filled atmosphere. Participants also discussed the importance of the relationships between administrators and teachers and amongst faculty members and described the significant impact those relationships had in their career decisions. School administrators who take the time to build and cultivate professional relationships, clarifying expectations and roles for faculty and community members can motivate, set guidelines, and develop a strong sense of collaborative vision (Schenck, 2016). “Leaders high in initiating structure focus on clarifying roles and task requirements, setting performance standards, and providing structure through policies and procedures” (Lippstreu, 2010, p. 130). International school administrators can construct trust filled environments by ensuring individuals have clarity in their roles and specific job descriptions while proffering autonomy in the classroom. Taking time to build professional relationships by getting to know each member

of the school community assists in encouraging a trusting atmosphere and international school leaders can utilize this as an additional means to lessen teacher turnover.

Professional Growth

According to Gray and Summers (2016), what teachers do formally or informally through professional development opportunities outside the classroom leads to the collective efficacy of the school organization. Ring and West (2015) added, ongoing professional development opportunities promote the retention and development of effective teachers. Nine out of 12 study participants determined their need to grow as professionals, important considerations when contemplating future professional pursuits. Participants also asserted concern for the importance of realistic and applicable professional development options to be available to strengthen their skills as teachers and administrators.

Ingersoll and Smith (2004) asserted, new teachers were more likely to remain in their original schools when they are mentored by teachers in their subject areas. Study participants felt mentorship programs were important and they felt supported in schools with established professional and personal mentorship programs. Educators are more inclined to be participative and feel supportive and supported through facilitated interaction through mentor programs (Gulosino, Franceschini, & Hardman, 2016). Mentor programs in international schools also help ease the transitions for incoming teachers and administrators and 10 out of 12 of the study participants discussed being connected with a mentor in the months prior to arriving to the school and country. Both applicable professional development opportunities and mentorship programs were advantages for the majority of participants considered in making career driven decisions.

Location

Eleven out of 12 participants in this study identified location to be an important factor in choosing where to seek employment in international school outside their home countries.

Chacko and Lin (2015) described the cultural literacy process for potential international teachers choosing student teaching opportunities abroad and indicated choosing a location as the first step in the process. There are curiously similar issues in attracting and retaining qualified faculty internationally, as there are in rural and urban areas of the United States (Boggan, Jayroe, & Alexander, 2016). Geographic isolation can occur in urban and rural areas in the United States, and teachers and administrators in international settings can feel geographic isolation as well with fewer opportunities for collegial interaction outside of school and feelings of displacement from home (Buchanan et al., 2013). Considering the effects of geographic isolation and allowing for the understanding of the importance of one of Maslow's specified foundational needs, administrators can create a school culture which ensures members experience a sense of belonging (Maslow, 1954).

The description of an ideal setting or location varied from participant to participant and motivators for decisions on where to search for employment was just as heterogeneous. One participant aspired to improve his Spanish, so he sought work in Spanish speaking countries only. Another sought Vietnam at first because she had an affinity for Vietnamese food. The variance in the individual participant's lived experiences in choosing locations was similar to the above examples. All of the participants were seasoned international educators at the time of interviews and while the majority began their international careers in hopes of working in a particular location, their feelings changed as time went on and they spent time in their locations of choice as well as other settings. All participants did agree there was a draw to Europe and

while most had attempted to obtain jobs in European countries, most had failed. As stated by Chandler (2010) “There is no explicit recognition that international schools can be in very different locations, making for very different living and working experiences, and that this might have an influence on retention” (p. 215). While almost all of the study participants determined location to be a priority in decisions concerning employment, there were no connections as to a specific criterion for a location, which varied from participant to participant.

Salary and Benefits

This study also revealed salary and benefits as having a significant bearing on job satisfaction and longevity in employment for international teachers and leaders, aligning with domestic conclusions in salary’s positive association with teacher retention (Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018). Eleven out of 12 participants stated that wages were a significant consideration in decisions about employment. Most participants specified salary was one of the first criteria examined in exploring new jobs. Inadequate salaries lead to dissatisfaction on the job and factored into higher teacher turnover (Larkin et al., 2016). Although salary was a key concern for study participants, a higher than average salary was not necessarily enough to keep them in positions where environmental satisfaction was low. Eleven out of 12 participants declared salary a fundamental concern for employment considerations identified the draw of higher wages, but also indicated wages alone could not compensate for added stress on the job. Competitive salaries combined with attractive professional development opportunities and mentor programs could be incentives to attract and retain qualified teachers and administrators (Lochmiller et al., 2016).

Limitations

The sample size of 12 participants, six teachers and six administrators, produced data which provided significant insight into the challenges faced in international schools with frequent changes in staffing due to the reported transient nature of international educators (Chandler, 2010; Gray & Summers, 2016). The number of participants was within Creswell's (1998) recommended range of 5–25 participants and Morse's (1994) interpretation in the necessity of at least six participants for phenomenological research and was a sufficient amount, enough to describe the lived experiences of international educators while amply addressing the research questions. Data saturation was achieved within the study as the researcher received rich “concurring and confirming data” (Morse, 1994, p. 230).

The participants were all expatriate, veteran educators, and served this study well as they provided a wide and knowledgeable span of experiences which addressed the research questions. At the time of the data collection period, two participants had held at least two education positions in two different countries while working abroad and the remaining 10 held four or more positions in four or more countries. Participants were well seasoned and “information rich” international educators (Morse, 1994, p. 229). The researcher considered the experience of the participants would only add greater depth to the study. However, it could be construed as a limitation to the study given the absence of views from educators new to international education and it is possible the inclusion of novice participants may have affected a more nuanced point of view to the data.

The sample's strategic combination of teachers and administrators conveyed robust insight into the issues surrounding teacher retention in international schools and in providing solutions for addressing said issues. To further broaden the perspective, it would be

advantageous to collect data from international recruiting agencies, students, parents, and other members of the international school community who may provide additional depth and significance to the study.

By no intentional strategy, all participants were currently working in secondary levels in international schools and there were no participant representatives from primary grades, although eight participants possessed previous experience in primary schools. All teacher participants at the time of the data collection period held positions in secondary sections of their schools and taught a variety of subjects with no two teachers teaching the same subjects. Three of the administrator participants were principals also at the secondary level, with the three other administrator participants working as heads of school, prekindergarten through grade 12. In this study the researcher examined the lived experiences of international school teachers and administrators each working in different schools in different regions across the globe, and the results were generalized toward the secondary level. It is unknown if there would be differences in responses from teachers and administrators working in lower grades in schools internationally but may be beneficial to explore this in future studies.

Additionally, the international school administrators of this study included well-established and highly effective leaders. Administrator participants had extensive backgrounds and credentials in the field of education as well as in the international education arena. They were reputable, well-known, and highly regarded in the international school venue and all had worked in or previously worked in decidedly respectable institutions abroad and in their home countries. After concluding data analysis, it became apparent to the researcher the voices of less experienced administrators had been inadvertently left out of this study. In the researcher's enthusiasm to retrieve data from such valuable and information rich sources, she may have

overlooked the importance of garnishing information from less experienced sources. The insights of new teachers and administrators may have provided similar or opposing views of the challenges faced in international education concerning teacher retention and subsequently, may have offered different suggestions for addressing those issues.

In discussions surrounding teacher turnover in international schools, some participants expressed concern about the effect of teacher turnover on international school students, which they determined to be worrisome. While the purpose of this study was not to understand the effects of teacher turnover on student achievement or the impact on the school community, it does raise natural and related questions which require further investigation. In a similar fashion, while investigating teacher retention in international schools five of the 12 participants suggested there was a corresponding issue in administrator turnover in international schools. Future research endeavors to analyze international administrator retention would also be beneficial.

The center of a phenomenological study relies on the contributions of the participants. The value of a phenomenological study is contingent upon, to some degree, the information the participants impart. The degree to which the participants were amenable and forthcoming in answering the questions in the interviews established the profundity and strength of the data collected. Phenomenology is reliant on the candidness and honesty of the participant to fully articulate his or her lived experience (Creswell, 2013). If a participant is unwilling to wholly and accurately express his or her lived experiences, then the rich, thick description required for analysis is inadequate. The researcher has no reservations about the participants' willingness to contribute to this study in an honest, open, and extensive manner.

Implication of the Results for Practice, Policy, and Theory

Through this study the researcher sought to understand the challenges faced in international schools in regard to teacher retention and to collect data from international school teachers and administrators as to their reasons for staying with a school or leaving to search for employment elsewhere. The researcher also aimed to identify the complexity of the driving forces behind teachers' decisions about where to teach in international settings, for how long, and if there were particular details sought in considering long-term placement or in signing a contract.

The results of this study revealed participants credited a fair salary and benefits package as well as a positive working environment to be key factors in decisions about longevity in employment. The results also depicted leadership to be a crucial determinant in the establishment of a school atmosphere conducive to faculty satisfaction and in improving teacher retention. Participants illustrated the components of a positive school climate and discussed the characteristics of an effective leader.

As previously discussed in this chapter, six themes emerged from the study which helped to isolate and define the characteristics participants looked for in consideration of where they pursued employment. The foremost concerns for participants regarding international career decisions were: location, salary and benefits, effective leadership, autonomy and trust, positive school environment, and professional growth. Sub-themes were categorized under the four overarching themes: effective leadership, autonomy and trust, school environment, and professional growth. The emergent sub-themes included: relationships, school community, care and support, structure, clear expectations, collaboration, sense of community, mentorship, and professional development.

These sub-themes help to further refine and depict the precise characteristics international educators seek in a school. Many of the sought-after elements of a desirable workplace as described by the participants align with the literature posited in this dissertation. While many of the components pertaining to the over-arching themes and sub-themes were discussed in the literature review section of this dissertation, this study differs in that the noted characteristics were not often portrayed in combination in previous studies. Rodgers and Skelton (2014) denoted creating collaborative environments and establishing mentorship programs in schools can expand professional learning and limit feelings of isolation for teachers, which can be especially important for international teachers who are often far away from known support networks such as family and friends. Alsobaie (2016) discussed the importance for school leaders in building relationships and clarifying expectations as a primary means to be effective in their roles. Antinluoma, Ilomäki, Lahti-Nuutila, and Toom (2018) considered distribution of leadership and the importance of autonomy and trust in the environment to aid in the creation of a successful school atmosphere. Ingersoll (2001) considered building a sense of community in a school to be one of the most important aspects of an effective school environment. Cook (2014) viewed structure and care as principle components of positive school culture suggest the presence of such contributes to continuous school improvement. Furthermore, Cook indicated the significance for school leaders to establish a shared sense of community. These noteworthy strategies as just described are well-established methods in forming and maintaining a positive school culture and are also recognized as effective strategies in reducing teacher turnover in some instances (Hanford & Leithwood, 2012). A notable, but not unexpected outcome of this study is the implication that leadership plays an essential role in creating a hospitable and positive school culture in which teachers seek to join and remain; school leaders would benefit in

applying a multi-disciplinary approach and by implementing the characteristics participants deemed important to enhance the ability in retaining teachers in international schools.

Previous studies also conveyed the importance of salary and its effect on teacher satisfaction (Ingersoll, 2001; Larkin et al., 2016; Maforah, 2015). Participants in this study confirmed the importance of salary, notably in their initial search for new schools and contracts. Eleven out of 12 participants stated it was one of the primary considerations in career decisions. Although participants designated salary as one of the most important factors concerning employment, 11 out of 12 participants would not opt for a higher salary if it resulted in working in an inhospitable atmosphere. Gray and Summers (2016) attributed collegial environments based on trust and collaboration along with fair salaries as principle influences among the common precipitants in retaining qualified educators in international schools. Study participants expect fair compensation for their work and unique skills, but also expect a satisfactory working environment and 11 out of 12 participants reported pursuing a combination of both.

International school administrators have an enormous challenge in acquiring methods to curb teacher turnover due to a reported transient nature of the international educator. The results of this study produced conclusions, defined approaches which have proven successful, and identified areas specific to the needs of international educators, which mandate attention from international school administrators. The interconnected theories in servant leadership, transformational leadership, and Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory facilitated in shaping the results and specifying methods for application in international schools. Beginning with a transformational leadership mindset, international school boards and owners should concentrate on hiring administrators with servant leader characteristics. The selection process is a very important aspect in ensuring stability within the school and choosing an administrator most

suiting to promote school welfare through servant leadership practices. Servant leaders innately strive to provide care and support critical to international teachers who live away from his or her home countries. Servant leaders who build stable and trusting relationships with those within the school community, create the foundation for an effective and positive school climate.

While the above theories directly correlate to the findings of this study and are relevant to international school administrators, it is Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory (1954) which provides a blueprint and ties the study and its six overarching themes together. The needs, as described by Maslow, best explain what characteristics international educators are seeking both personally and professionally, and in accommodating these needs, international school administrators can increase the likelihood of longevity in the length of terms for educators at international schools. This section, using Maslow's model and bracketing the needs to basic needs, psychological needs, and self-fulfillment needs, the researcher will present initiatives for international school leaders.

Basic Needs

Basic needs for international educators include salary, benefits, housing, and physical surroundings at work. International school administrators need to work closely with directors and school boards to ensure salaries and benefits are commensurate with salaries and benefits in the region and correlate to the cost of living in the area. Pay scales should be developed and strictly adhered to, ensuring there is some increase over time so longevity with the school is rewarded monetarily as well. These pay scales should be transparently shared with applicants before they are hired. Benefits packages should include what international teachers expect as basics along with additional items to provide comfort in their professional as well as personal lives. Benefit packages could be comprised of school laptops, cash bonuses for renewing

contracts, cell phones, round trip airfare yearly, transportation provided to and from school each day, tuition for school aged children, professional development stipend, student loan reimbursement, medical and dental insurance, life insurance, retirement or pension plans, housing allowance, utility allowance, local language instruction, reimbursement for local taxes, shipping allowance, meals, and a settling in bonus.

Housing is an important factor for international educators as it is where he or she will spend a significant amount of time and it is important to feel comfortable there. Often, international school contracts include housing as a benefit, but new hires are not always given a choice as to where he or she will reside upon arrival in the new country. Administrators can work closely with human resources to ensure new hires are able to select their new home by providing photos and information about potential housing. It is important to share information about neighborhoods and proximity to amenities as well as where future colleagues reside so an informed decision can be made prior to arrival. Taking this concept a step further, new hires can arrive and stay in a hotel to spend a week viewing all options for residences with a school representative, making a decision in person. Selecting appropriate accommodations is crucial in respect to the comfort, safety and security of the international educator and has an effect on future decisions to remain with the school.

Similarly, comfort in work surroundings is just as necessary for international educators as the physical surroundings can have a profound bearing on the individual and correspondingly on the cultural mood of the institution. International school administrators need to ensure teachers have what he or she needs to effectively do their jobs. Providing all necessary teaching supplies, space for creativity and innovation, proper lighting, comfortable indoor temperatures,

technological supports, meals and snacks, and designated workspaces as well as lounge areas for teachers is important in consideration of meeting basic needs.

Physiological Needs

Even for an experienced international educator, every move to a new country brings challenges and unfamiliarity and frequently the new staff person does not know anyone. There is a great deal of uncertainty when moving to a new country and incoming educators often have many questions. Building relationships with new faculty is extremely important and should be initiated after contracts have been signed and before the educator arrives in his or her new environment. Connecting new hires with one another as well as with established local faculty in virtual settings where questions can be asked and knowledge shared through meaningful discussions can ease transitions for incoming and existing staff members alike. Mentor programs can begin in the initial hiring period and extend throughout the contract of the teacher. Connecting new hires with a trained mentor who is able to provide personal and professional support to the incoming educator can ease the anxiety related to an international move. School leaders should have established welcoming rituals which can continue to be carried out year after year even allowing for administrative or teacher turnover. This might be a welcoming dinner that includes new hires, existing staff, some parents, and board members. It could include a "cultural excursion" like a day-long field trip to see some of the main local sites, experience the food, or maybe students demonstrating local customs. Anything to help the newcomer immediately feel a sense of connection and belonging. Similar opportunities in fostering connections to the location and with colleagues should be provided and planned for year-round. Administrators could introduce an "adopt a teacher" program utilizing local families to include them in special cultural celebrations in their homes, making educators feel accepted, bringing

forth and sense of belonging and connection to their new home country and can also be carried on year after year.

Self-Fulfillment Needs

Educators want to do a good job. Most choose teaching because they value education and the impact they can have on young people. That being said, walking into a classroom where there is no curriculum or resources is very unsettling. International school administrators should work with a curriculum coordinator or prioritize hiring if one, to ensure a curriculum map and expectations for what is to be taught at every grade level exists. Examples of lessons, resources, and evaluation tools should be available as a guideline, but also allow room for teachers to adapt lessons to their own style. Developing a curriculum which includes a pacing guide and examples of effective and proven ways to teach each standard can be helpful to new hires and lessen the burden on veteran faculty to train new teachers. Procedures for initial teacher trainings should be well-documented and utilized year after year. These documents along with the trainings themselves are examples of clear expectations and responsibilities for teachers and should be evaluated continuously as a means to measure the meaningfulness and effectiveness to incoming staff.

International educators are searching for opportunities to grow as professionals and expect purposeful professional development offerings within his or her schools. Staying on top of current educational trends is important and trainings surrounding new ideas add value to practice and are sources of inspiration for international educators. Often, international educators have individual pursuits regarding professional development opportunities and school leaders should designate funds so that teachers can explore the areas that appeal to them. Once educators acquire new skills by attending trainings or conferences, he or she is able to return to

school and share new teaching strategies with faculty through in-house professional development sessions. This becomes a cyclical design for consistent sharing of knowledge and collegial, motivating, collaborative school environments comprised of expert educators will emerge. Within this type of professional environment provides a straightforward channel in extending autonomy to teachers as it is ensured they know what to teach, through clear curricular guidelines, and how to teach, through ongoing professional development on methodology and best practices.

The preceding suggestions should be considered by international school leaders and administrators and can be applied each year with fidelity despite teacher and administrator turnover. Utilizing these methods impart continuity and create environments centered on community, generating a sense of belonging and fostering a cohesive school climate.

Recommendations for Further Research

The results of this study provided rich data about the lived experiences of expatriate international educators and the factors contributing to their decisions to remain or leave positions in international schools. Conversely, further and more explicit information might be extrapolated if future studies include less experienced international educators as well as educators employed in primary or lower grades of international schools. Selecting a broader and less uniform population for a phenomenological study may allow for deeper and more nuanced data about teacher retention in international schools to surface. For further research, new studies could be conducted in the same regions as this study utilizing teachers and administrators currently employed at different levels in K – 12 international schools with English as the standard language of instruction and participants could be both veteran and novice educators. Similarly, an extension of this study to include additional participants from similar, neighboring

international schools from each region would be informative to ascertain how the results compare.

More important than just the effects of international teacher turnover on the school environment from a teacher's or administrator's perspective is the effect on the international school student and how the turnover affects his or her learning. Future studies should focus on the quality of education an international school student receives in comparison to what local alternatives exist in the area for other students. Understanding student outcomes and seeking insight from the student perspective can broaden the depth of understanding the implications of teacher retention in international schools.

Studies with an alternative methodology, such as a quantitative approach, could provide further statistical information regarding teacher retention and environmental influences found in international schools. By way of illustration, an ethnographic study could explore how cultural phenomena may pertain to teacher decisions to remain in a school or region. An ethnographic study could also delve into individual location preferences for participants to further define what makes a geographical location desirable for international educators seeking employment.

Conclusion

The data resulting from this study helped to identify challenges surrounding teacher retention in international schools and the role school environment plays in those decisions. Within the phenomenological framework, the study examined the lived experiences of international educators working and living abroad. Through the results of this study, the researcher brought forth iterative data and perceptions of those who have directly experienced working in international schools and whom have faced decisions on whether to search for employment elsewhere or remain with their current school. The direct knowledge of a cross-

section of teachers and administrators residing and working in different locations around the globe provided essential data which addressed the research questions:

- What lived experiences do international educators identify as contributing to a decision to remain or leave a position in an international school?
- According to the lived perceptions of international educators, how do international school administrators build and promote a positive school climate and how is this impacted by frequent teacher turnover?
- How do international school educators describe measures taken to ensure school improvement initiatives are continued with fidelity, while balancing the need to train new teachers on a much more frequent basis?
- Based on the lived experiences of international educators, how can international school leaders attract and retain qualified instructors who seek longevity in their role?

The data revealed teachers look for specific characteristics in leadership and work environment and those characteristics factor into decisions on where and how long to work in particular locations outside of their home countries. Previous research concerning both international schools and schools based in the United States have pointed out the importance of these characteristics, independently or in dual combinations, to create satisfaction in the workplace and in doing so have been found to decrease teacher turnover in their particular settings. The results of this phenomenological study take these ideas a step further and imply a multidisciplinary approach in understanding characteristics of effective leaders, autonomy and trust, a positive school environment, opportunities for professional growth, along with a fair salary and benefit package are the elements which help encourage international teachers to remain with a school.

The results of this study can be used to inform and guide international school leaders who wish to understand the complexities surrounding teacher turnover in international schools. International school leaders can motivate transformational change in international schools through a multidisciplinary approach in creating balance between offering satisfactory salary and benefit packages while developing caring, professionally supportive, collaborative school cultures filled autonomy and trust. This in turn, will help international school leaders attract and retain qualified teachers. This study is also useful to international teachers or those considering teaching abroad in the future as it may allow them to make informed choices in searching for education positions abroad. Additionally, this research is only a small part of the wealth of data which can be garnered from members of international school communities. It is hoped the results of this study has informed and inspired educational researchers to take this increasingly pertinent research further in order to investigate international schools providing additional data where little exists.

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Appendix A: Interview Questions

1. What country are you from originally?
2. What country are you working in now?
3. What is the size of the school? How many students and grade levels?
4. What are the specifics of your current school? (e.g. what other languages are taught, day or boarding school, special subjects, what kind of students attend).
5. How many different countries and schools have you worked/lived?
6. How long have you been an international educator/ administrator?
7. Have you been a teacher/leader in school/s in your country of origin?
8. Have you noticed differences in working for schools outside your home country? If so, could you provide details? (will depend on answer to #5 if asked this question).
9. Can you define specific challenges you encountered in your experiences as an international educator/ administrator?
10. What benefits are there in working internationally?
11. What factors do you consider when offered a contract renewal?
12. Have you considered the international schools you worked for to be stable environments for learning? Why or why not?
13. In what way is leadership responsible for promoting a positive school climate? Or the opposite?
14. Do you believe teacher turnover impacts learning and the school climate? Please explain.
15. What was your purpose for becoming an international educator?
16. What would you change if you were able to make changes in a current or past school environment and why? Were these issues that contributed to decisions on remaining or

seeking new schools?

17. What has been the most productive work environment you have been a part of? Describe what worked well and your thoughts about it. Do you feel this environment functioned in spite of frequent changes in staffing or perhaps quelled the changes?
18. When you considered international teaching or administrating did you plan on choosing a country and staying there or finding a new location after each contract period?
19. What are the key factors as contributors in an effective learning atmosphere?
20. What qualities or characteristics makeup an effective leader?
21. What can international school leaders do to attract and retain qualified instructors who also seek longevity in their roles?
22. What school improvement initiatives have you been a part of? What was your role?
Please share your observations about the success or failure of the initiative/s.
23. How would you describe effective leadership? What qualities do you look for in an effective leader? What effect does effective or ineffective leadership have on teacher retention?

Appendix B: Participant Introduction Letter

Dear Potential Participant,

Hello! I would like to introduce myself. My name is Sarah Thomas and I am a doctoral candidate at Concordia University working on a research project concerning international education. I have been an international educator and administrator for the past 8 years working in 2 countries and 3 schools as both a Vice-Principal and a Classroom Teacher. I am currently a full-time Education Consultant at Academia Interamericana de Panamá, a bilingual school in the Republic of Panamá. The international educator community is a tightly knit one and I have had the opportunity to observe the many benefits in working in schools abroad as well as challenges international schools face in the lack of consistency in the environment due to considerable turnover in faculty and administrators. Turnover might be expected as educators seek cultural experiences gained from living abroad, and therefore may only plan to remain at a particular school for a short period of time. My dissertation seeks to explore factors contributing to retention and attrition in the international education community and to offer solutions in creating a more consistent learning environment, benefitting teachers, school leaders, and international students.

I am sending this initial letter of introduction to current and recent international educators who may have valuable understanding of international education, recruitment, and/or teacher retention. Your insight is important for my research and for future outcomes of international education. My research will consist of a short demographical survey in which I ask your country of origin, countries you have worked in, and your role at each international school. The survey will be followed by an informal phone interview via Skype, WhatsApp or another international phone service. The informal interview will be arranged at a time convenient to the participant. There is no compensation for participating in this study, nor is there any known risk. In order to ensure that all information will remain confidential, pseudonyms will be utilized for your name as well as the name of your institution. Participation is strictly voluntary and you may choose to withdraw at any time.

Thank you for your consideration in assisting me in my educational endeavors. The results of this study will provide useful information regarding international education. If you would like to participate in the study, please contact me through any of the contacts provided below.

Sincerely,

Sarah Thomas

Email: [redacted]

WhatsApp [redacted]

Phone: [redacted]

Appendix C: Consent Form

Research Study Title: Challenges faced in international schools: Solutions for international school leaders
Principal Investigator: Sarah Thomas
Research Institution: Concordia University
Faculty Advisor: Dr. John Mendes

Purpose and what you will be doing:

The purpose of this survey is to identify challenges face by international schools with a focus on teacher retention and to find solutions for international school leaders. We expect approximately 8-12 volunteers. No one will be paid to be in the study. We will begin enrollment on 02/01/2018 and end enrollment on 02/15/2018. To be in the study, you will answer questions based on your role in international education. You will discuss your own experiences and have an opportunity to share insight, determining challenges exclusive to international schools and solutions to benefit the international school community. Doing these things should take less than 4 hours of your time in total.

Risks:

There are no risks to participating in this study other than providing your information. However, we will protect your information. Any personal information you provide will be coded so it cannot be linked to you. Any name or identifying information you give will be kept securely via electronic encryption or locked inside the password protected external hard drive. When we or any of our investigators look at the data, none of the data will have your name or identifying information. We will only use a secret code to analyze the data. We will not identify you in any publication or report. Your information will be kept private at all times and then all study documents will be destroyed 3 years after we conclude this study. Interviews will be audio recorded. Recordings will be deleted immediately following transcription and all other study-related materials will be kept securely for 3 years from the conclusion of the study, and then will be destroyed.

Benefits:

Information you provide will help to create a more effective learning environment for international schools. You could benefit from this study by helping to create and be a part of a more cohesive environment for teaching and learning.

Confidentiality:

This information will not be distributed to any other agency and will be kept private and confidential. The only exception to this is if you tell us abuse or neglect that makes us seriously concerned for your immediate health and safety.

Right to Withdraw:

Your participation is greatly appreciated, but we acknowledge that the questions we are asking are personal in nature. You are free at any point to choose not to engage with or stop the study. You may skip any questions you do not wish to answer. This study is not required and there is no penalty for not participating. If at any time you experience a negative emotion from answering the questions, we will stop asking you questions.

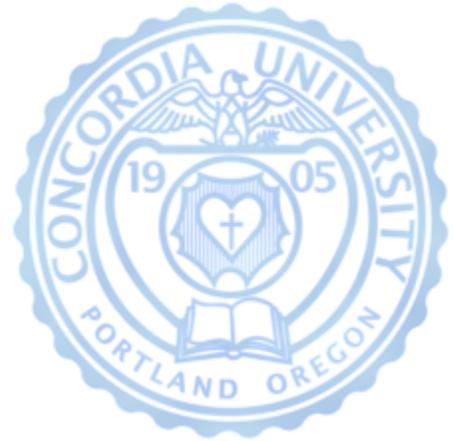
Contact Information:

You will receive a copy of this consent form. If you have questions you can talk to or write the principal investigator, Sarah Thomas at email [redacted]. If you want to talk with a participant advocate other than the investigator, you can write or call the director of our institutional review board, Dr. OraLee Branch (email obran@cu-portland.edu or call 503-493-6390).

Your Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information. I asked questions if I had them, and my questions were answered. I volunteer my consent for this study.

_____	_____
Participant Name	Date
_____	_____
Participant Signature	Date
_____	_____
Investigator Name	Date
_____	_____
Investigator Signature	Date



Appendix D: Participant Questionnaire

What is your country of origin?

In what country are you currently employed?

Are you a teacher or administrator?

Are you licensed in the area in which you work?

What is your current position?

What positions have you held previously?

If you are a teacher, what classes do you currently teach?

How long have you been a teacher or administrator?

How many countries have you worked as a teacher or administrator?

Please list the countries you have previously worked as a teacher or administrator.

How did you come to leave your home country and work abroad?

Appendix E: Statement of Original Work

The Concordia University Doctorate of Education Program is a collaborative community of scholar-practitioners, who seek to transform society by pursuing ethically-informed, rigorously- researched, inquiry-based projects that benefit professional, institutional, and local educational contexts. Each member of the community affirms throughout their program of study, adherence to the principles and standards outlined in the Concordia University Academic Integrity Policy. This policy states the following:

Statement of academic integrity.

As a member of the Concordia University community, I will neither engage in fraudulent or unauthorized behaviors in the presentation and completion of my work, nor will I provide unauthorized assistance to others.

Explanations:

What does “fraudulent” mean?

“Fraudulent” work is any material submitted for evaluation that is falsely or improperly presented as one’s own. This includes, but is not limited to texts, graphics and other multi-media files appropriated from any source, including another individual, that are intentionally presented as all or part of a candidate’s final work without full and complete documentation.

What is “unauthorized” assistance?

“Unauthorized assistance” refers to any support candidates solicit in the completion of their work, that has not been either explicitly specified as appropriate by the instructor, or any assistance that is understood in the class context as inappropriate. This can include, but is not limited to:

- Use of unauthorized notes or another’s work during an online test
- Use of unauthorized notes or personal assistance in an online exam setting
- Inappropriate collaboration in preparation and/or completion of a project
- Unauthorized solicitation of professional resources for the completion of the work.

Statement of Original Work (Continued)

I attest that:

1. I have read, understood, and complied with all aspects of the Concordia University–Portland Academic Integrity Policy during the development and writing of this dissertation.
2. Where information and/or materials from outside sources has been used in the production of this dissertation, all information and/or materials from outside sources has been properly referenced and all permissions required for use of the information and/or materials have been obtained, in accordance with research standards outlined in the *Publication Manual of The American Psychological Association*.

Sarah Catherine Thomas

Digital Signature

Sarah Catherine Thomas

Name (Typed)

October 25, 2019

Date