



Stroud, R., & Evans, R. (2023). Eat those words: Flipping understandings of culture shock failure through self-leadership in overseas international schools. *International Journal for Leadership in Learning*, 23(1), 155–184.
<https://doi.org/10.29173/ijll36>

Eat those Words: Flipping Understandings of Culture Shock Failure through Self-Leadership in Overseas International Schools.

Rebecca Stroud & Rebecca Evans

Abstract

The global demand for teachers outstrips its supply (Brummitt & Keeling, 2013; UNESCO, 2016). This article argues for a re-examination of the concept of failure in the context of educator acculturation overseas, and the self-leadership and school leadership actions that support teachers new to a host country. Oberg (1960, p. 177) first described culture shock as “an occupational disease” that can lead to sudden breakdown and departure. Culture shock with expatriate teachers overseas is inevitable (Roskell, 2013), and teacher turnover has been reported as high as 60% in some international schools (Mancuso et al., 2010). Since the onset of the pandemic, sudden teacher departures have risen sharply in some schools (Stroud Stasel, 2021). To mitigate the issue, strategic planning of K-12 international school leadership includes improving teacher retention. How a leader views failure matters and learning to fail intelligently can promote innovation and improvement in the longer term (Cannon & Edmondson, 2005). This article examines a subset of a qualitative study on educator acculturation involving 17 sojourning (between-culture) educators in 5 regions in Southeast and East Asia. Participants were found to utilize an arsenal of self-leadership strategies (Houghton et al., 2011) to mitigate acculturative challenges. Most of the participants recalled an early career sojourning experience that they described as shocking and stressful. Participants initially viewed their experiences as failures, however, participants described that these experiences led to beneficial outcomes: increased capacity for future overseas teaching experiences, evidenced by reduced acculturative stress (Berry, 2006). This widespread experience leads one to posit that the initial “fail” when coupled with self-leadership strategies, has a beneficial long-term effect. Better understanding of such experiences will help educational organizations harness the power of these failures by turning them into meaningful learning opportunities that guide the new sojourning teaching towards a successful career.

Keywords: acculturation, culture shock, failure, international schools, international teachers, leadership, self-leadership, reflection, sojourners

Introduction

The global demand for teachers outstrips its supply (UNESCO, 2016) and is in part fueled by the profuse growth of international schools (Brummitt & Keeling, 2013; Bunnell, 2015). Educators at all stages of their careers may enjoy a myriad of opportunities for beginning or moving their careers overseas to the arena of international schools. International teachers comprise a variety of demographic groups such as expatriate hires from abroad and local hires from within, as well as more nuanced demographic groups such as expatriate hires from within. Since this article focused on educator acculturation, all of the participants in the study were expatriates. Some international schools offer a variety of capacity-building leadership opportunities (Stroud Stasel, 2021) which may be enticing to ambitious emerging leaders. Ingersoll and colleagues (2018, p. 92) observed that “it is a good time to be a teacher with global intentions” but followed with this warning, “but not such a good time to be the school in those global contexts seeking to find and retain good teachers.” This is a compelling proposition considering the extent of the demand for international educators, heightened by the impending acculturation challenges that educators who move to host countries will need to navigate. Acculturation refers to a composite of embodied processes that international educators must navigate while living and working in a host culture, which includes subjective emotions such as alienation, confusion, and stress (Berry, 2006; Hottola, 2004; Ward et al., 2005), and requires rapid personal and professional adjustment to function and maintain a healthy sense of self-efficacy.

All newly hired educators must also acculturate to the organizational culture of the school. In the case of educators who move overseas to work, organizational acculturation is certain to include leadership and pedagogical divergences from those familiar to the educators’ training and past experiences, which suggests that sojourning educators must doubly acculturate at the same time, while simultaneously learning how to be culturally responsive educators to a student body they know little about. Added to this is the complex duty of care of international educators, to provide support to a transnational student body that includes students who are also acculturating.

While there are few studies conducted on teachers’ experiences with acculturation, Roskell’s study (2013) indicated that culture shock among sojourning teachers is ubiquitous. Culture shock theorizing has included the proposition of a multi-phase process with the more extreme manifestations of acculturative stress—culture shock—giving the theory its name. Turnover rates in international schools are understandably high since most contracts are two years in length

and most teachers who *go international* do so with temporary intentions. Some turnover rates have been reported as high as 60% (Mancuso et al., 2010), with higher rates being reported since the inception of the Covid-19 pandemic. Furthermore, because some teaching contracts are linked with visas, teachers who quit early may face severe legal repercussions. The term *midnight running* has been coined to refer to expatriates who secretly plan an early departure from their work overseas and host country. Midnight running is considered one indication of expatriate failure (Stephenson, 2015; Wang & Varma, 2019). Because work visas may have legal implications at the time of departure from the host country linked with the status of their work duties as reported by the employer (in this case, the international school), some expatriates plan a rapid and secret departure, often flying out of the country unannounced around midnight when many trans-ocean flights take place. This type of sudden departure is potentially devastating to all stakeholders, from the students who have bonded with their teacher, to the school leadership and the school's reputation. We posit that midnight runs are linked with poor leadership supports and a nonviable organizational culture fit between the international school and the teacher.

Despite the likely challenges that sojourning educators will face, this study on the lived experiences of 17 Anglo-Western-certified educators provides insights into both the acculturative challenges of living and working abroad as an educator, but also some of the benefits of navigating culture shock and acculturation processes. We argue for a re-examination of the concept of failure in the context of educator acculturation overseas, and the self-leadership and school leadership actions that support teachers new to a host country. Since the onset of the pandemic, teacher departures have risen in some schools (Stroud Stasel, 2021), further exacerbating already high international teacher turnover rates, which can erode school stability (Blandford & Shaw, 2001). To mitigate the issue, strategic planning of K-12 international school leadership includes improving teacher retention. How a leader views failure matters and learning to *fail intelligently* can promote innovation and improvement in the longer term (Cannon & Edmondson, 2005). We question the effects of one's attachment to the word fail stunt professional and personal growth, and what generative lessons may be embedded within such experiences linked with the moniker of failure.

Literature

Terminology pertaining to the internationalization of education including but not limited to international education, international teacher, and international school, are used inconsistently

in the literature (Heyward, 2002), and thus may refer to many different phenomena under investigation. For the purposes of this paper, we provide the following definitions. An international school is an English-medium privately-run (including both non- and for-profit) school in a country with a primary language other than English and is accredited by a jurisdiction external to the host region. A sojourner is a person who temporarily moves to another culture to live and work. An international teacher is a sojourner who holds teacher certification at an institution in one region and then moves to a host country to live and teach. Acculturation includes processes of tension, stress, and change that occur to an individual from intercultural contact (Berry & Sam, 2016).

The Booming Business of International Education

International education as a workforce sector has dramatically increased in the past few decades and shows no sign of slowing down (Brummitt & Keeling, 2013). International schools broadly cater to a transnational student population including domestic and foreign students, and that use pedagogies and curricular structures that have Anglo-Western origins. As such, international schools often use an all or predominantly English medium of instruction and are also often accredited by foreign bodies (e.g., Canadian international schools). Due to a variety of factors including the rising middle classes in certain parts of the world, the demand for international schools has risen. International schools may be perceived as elite and have the capacity to *open doors* for students from non-Anglo countries, creating opportunities for admission into prestigious Anglo universities around the world. This has been shown to draw parental interest in host countries; an influence that has driven the prevalence of Western curricula delivered in the English medium (Blandford & Shaw, 2001).

For context, in 1969, there were approximately 372 international schools (Leach, 1969). By 2000 there were 2,584 international schools (Brummitt & Keeling, 2013). By mid-2023, there were 13,614 international schools with a staff of almost 650,000 serving 6.7 million students (ISC Research, 2023). Further to this growth is the promise of robust professional development and rich travel and cultural opportunities. It is not surprising that many educators choose to explore this professional option.

The Failure Orientation of Culture Shock Theory

Oberg (1960, p. 177) first described culture shock as “an occupational disease” that can lead to sudden psychological breakdown and require an immediate departure from the host country

to repatriated. The far more common manifestation of culture shock is lower in severity; people experience stresses including alienation, confusion, fatigue, anxiety, and depression, and in many cases, can allow the sojourner to operate at some functional level. We agree with Roskell (2013) that culture shock with expatriate teachers overseas is inevitable. We propose that a better understanding of culture shock among international teachers will help lead to strategies to mitigate and transcend the stresses, and we further propose that the experiences of navigating culture shock may provide significant benefits to these sojourning educators, and this last piece requires scholarship.

Framing culture shock through a deficit lens fails to account for the rich benefits that can accompany such subversive experiences. According to Oberg (1960) if an expatriate fails to adjust and recover, they can experience an acute breakdown that renders them unable to fulfill their teaching contract. The perspective emphasizes the negative elements of the phenomenon and undermines the value these shocks can bring to a teacher in the longer term, as the teacher learns to adjust to the new environment. Thus, it is in the best interest of international school leaders and teachers to move away from deficit and towards an asset-centered lens.

Reconceptualizing Failure

Failure can be a very negative experience - especially for a teacher in a new international context. But with appropriate support, failure can be the beginning of an innovative and confidence-building experience (Miller, 2015) that builds resilience (Rutter, 1990; Hayhurst et al., 2015). How international school leaders and teachers view failure is critical. Learning to fail intelligently can foster innovation and lasting growth (Cannon & Edmondson, 2005). In the creative industries—advertising, architecture, and film, to name a few—risk and failure have always played a pivotal role in fostering creativity and innovation (Howkins, 2013). Failure is recognized for having a critical role in the creative process (e.g., Harford, 2011; Lim, 1996; Matson, 1992). Failure is perceived as a welcome and expected experience. International schools would benefit from taking a similar stance towards failure and normalizing it. Indeed, international school leaders could support early career failures by providing structures that normalize and prepare new teachers for failures. Taking steps to welcome failure as part of the professional culture would harness the benefits of such difficult experiences.

Here, culture shock and resilience theories intersect to provide opportunities for teachers to engage new challenges, even ones that prove particularly difficult to navigate. Teachers who engage with difficulty, rather than avoid it, enhance their resilience and are more likely to show persistence in adverse situations and willingness to adapt and change in the future (Mansfield et al., 2012). Teachers who use purposeful career decision-making, rely on self-insight, and have a sense of agency are more likely to stay in the teaching profession (Sumsion, 2004). When culture shock is considered a welcome aspect of the international school teaching experience, the expectation that the teacher should persist and that they will overcome the adversity is internalized by the new teacher who sees it as a valuable experience.

Flipping understandings of failure and culture shock is part of a broader movement that emphasizes the benefits of facing difficulty with an open mind. Dweck (2006) emphasized the value of adopting a growth mindset to look differently at challenges and adversity and see them as opportunities for growth, rather than setbacks. Her thinking applies well to experiences of culture shock. A teacher who embraces failure and engages in self-reflection can gain experience and momentum in the learning process (Cannon & Edmondson, 2005). Self-reflection contributes to more positive outcomes, such as better innovation, and empowers the teacher to make more intentional decisions about how to manage the shocks (Wang et al., 2018). Lessons learned from managing these early-career challenges are foundational. Teachers who view failure through a positive lens are more likely to succeed when tackling hard problems in the future - in essence, they draw on their resilience and develop a habit of working through challenges (Wang et al., 2018).

Self-Leadership Theory

Studies have linked teacher retention, teacher well-being, and the quality of teaching and learning with effective leadership (Darling-Hammond, 2001; Tschannen-Moran & Tschannen-Moran, 2011). A recent pan-Canadian study on early career teacher (ECT) well-being found that both leadership and self-leadership played a significant role in ECT well-being, self-efficacy, flourishing, and that leadership influenced the decisions ECTs made whether to stay in the teaching profession or to leave (Kutsyruba et al., 2018). Some encouraging findings come from a recent study on teacher well-being in the international context (Higgins & Wigford, 2018), suggesting that school leaders are generally effective in supporting teachers overseas. However, the principal's role is extremely complex and demanding in the international school context (Stroud

Stasel, 2021), and it is not possible for school leaders in international schools to be available to always support teachers, even though teachers may call upon school leaders for personal support as well as professional support (McCliggott, personal communication, Jan. 25, 2020). It follows that developing a strong self-leadership strategy may be effective in sustaining sojourning teachers. In fact, the study conducted by Kutsyuruba and colleagues (2019) found that while self-leadership strategies do not usurp required leadership supports, they nonetheless proved useful in sustaining teachers through difficult periods. Neck and Houghton (2006) defined self-leadership as “a self-influence process through which people achieve the self-direction and self-motivation necessary to perform” (p. 271). Plural self-leadership strategies have already been discovered to help, which Houghton and colleagues (2011) categorised as cognitive or behavioural. Examples include engaging in reflective practices such as self-talk, networking, and self-comforting, including building natural rewards into difficult tasks. Because acculturation is so complex and the experiences unique to those experiencing it, this study had identified self-leadership as an a priori theme and had included an exploration of how teachers engaged in self-leadership processes. Thus, educators were encouraged to share testimonies about strategies that they used in order to both mitigate acculturative stresses and to thrive. Stress is situated in opposition with thriving, and often attempts to understand one have included the opposition of the other, but Seligman (2011) has argued that these are distinctly different phenomena that require different strategies.

Methods

This subset comes from an exploratory qualitative study on educator acculturation involving 17 sojourning (between-culture) educators in five regions in Macau, mainland China, Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand. Site selection was driven by logistical reasons, such as region familiarity to the researcher for ease of navigation when on site. Site selection was facilitated by an overseas teacher recruiting service. Participant selection aimed at sojourning educators who were certified by Anglo-Western universities and who did not identify as belonging to the host culture. Data collection was carried out over three phases. The first phase was conducted in situ, phase two was reflective and individually carried out by participants with the data collected in phase three, and phase three was conducted virtually, due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Data sources included two sets of interviews per participant, photovoice, reflex journals, field notes, and memory box. Data were initially coded using Saldaña (2013), and then thematically analyzed using a phonetic approach (Tracy, 2020). A participant table is provided below in Table 1.

Table 1.*Participant Table (N=17)*

Participant Pseudonym	Years of Prior Teaching Experience	Role
<i>Brian</i>	10-20	Teacher/Leader*
<i>Charlotte</i>	2-5	Teacher
<i>Claire</i>	20+	Teacher
<i>Frédéric</i>	20+	Teacher
<i>Harry</i>	10-20	Leader
<i>Hayley</i>	5-10	Teacher
<i>Jake</i>	10-20	Teacher
<i>Jayna</i>	10-20	Leader/Teacher
<i>Joon-Ho</i>	5-10	Leader
<i>Lily</i>	5-10	Teacher
<i>Mandy</i>	2-5	Teacher
<i>May</i>	10-20	Leader
<i>Pat</i>	5-10	Teacher/Leader
<i>Ron</i>	20+	Teacher
<i>Rowan</i>	10-20	Teacher/Leader
<i>Sean</i>	5-10	Teacher
<i>Victoria</i>	10-20	Teacher/Leader

*Where two roles are listed, the primary duties are listed first. A teacher whose primary duties are school leadership is labelled *Leader/Teacher*; a teacher whose primary duties are teaching, with added leadership roles (e.g., *lead teacher, division head, guidance, etc.*), is labelled *Teacher/Leader*.

Reference to verbatim quotations in the findings is attributed to the respective participant's pseudonym, however, photovoice and memory box artifacts are not attributed to participants by pseudonym or by gender-specific pronouns as an added measure of confidentiality.

Findings

Participants were found to utilize an arsenal of self-leadership strategies to mitigate acculturative challenges. Most of the participants recalled an early career sojourning experience that they described as shocking and stressful. Participants initially viewed their experiences as

failures, however, participants described that these experiences led to beneficial outcomes: increased capacity for future overseas teaching experiences, evidenced by reduced acculturative stress (Berry, 2006). This widespread experience leads one to posit that the initial “fail” when coupled with self-leadership strategies, has a beneficial long-term effect.

Early Career Sojourning Experiences: “It was an absolute nightmare!”

Reports of culture shock varied from participant to participant. In Lily’s case, she was enjoying the *honeymoon phase*, which is theorized to be the first and most pleasant phase of culture shock theory (Oberg, 1960), until two critical incidents occurred one after the other. Lily’s grandfather passed away and soon after, one of her siblings also passed away. This plunged her into what she referred to as “*the stoop down of the stoop down*” (Lily), at which point, everything about the host country became either boring or annoying to her. Lily found herself crying a lot, even while teaching, and said that her students were unsure as to how to respond to her morosity. One principal’s first sojourning experience as a teacher was alienating because of two factors. First, he experienced language barriers that were restricting. He shared, “*because of my lack of [language], I felt that it was always very, very difficult to get outside the sphere of teachers that were the primary English speakers*” (Harry). Second, the school itself was in a remote location, and getting from where he lived and worked to broader social opportunities was usually not accessible, and so while he appreciated the organization’s structure and leadership, he found the overall sojourn to be incompatible with his vision of quality life.

Amid the diversity of experiences and stories shared, one nearly consistent pattern emerged pertaining to experiences of culture shock amongst participants. All but one participant reported that their experiences of culture shock were by far the worst the first time they were sojourning. The only exception to this was with one participant whose first three sojourns took place in Anglo-Western countries other than her own, and thus represented sojourns that included little cultural distance (Wang & Varma, 2019) and no need for learning another language. For the rest of the participants, stories of culture shocks emerged in the early days, weeks, and months of the participants’ first sojourns. One teacher recalled a culture shock experience in another country, summing up that “*it was an absolute nightmare*” (Ron). The traumatizing shocks included reports of feeling lost (both literally and figuratively), alienated, disgusted, afraid, and regretful. For instance, Ron recalled his first sojourning experience to be incompatible with his reality from both accommodations and employment perspectives. Almost immediately upon arriving in the first host

country, he got lost. While he was trying to locate his apartment amid a sea of signs in a foreign language that he did not comprehend, and in an area so densely populated that he experienced a sense of claustrophobia, he recalled that he predicted at that moment that the country would be a poor fit. This indeed turned out to be the case. A few months after arriving, he had become very anxious and had lost over 20kg, he decided to break his contract, and he left his teaching position and the country during the first school holiday break. During the break, he flew to another country, and at the end of the break, he called the principal to inform him that he was not returning. Ron's experience approximates a spontaneous *midnight run*, and even he viewed this experience as an expatriate failure.

Flipping Understandings of Culture Shock Failure: “Oh dear, Dorothy, we're not in Kansas anymore!”

Revisiting Ron's career trajectory over two decades, our analysis paints a different picture than expatriate failure. Ron did return to Canada briefly, but when he decided a few months later to return overseas, while he shifted from country to country for over a decade, he never did return to Canada to work and became a long hauler in his current host country. We understand a long hauler to be an international educator who chooses to remain in the host country beyond the completion of two subsequent contracts and with no plans to leave the host country at the time of data collection. Ron reported enjoying both living in the host culture and working at the international school, where he has been a teacher for over eight years. He recalled numerous culture shocks that he experienced in several countries, including his current host country, yet he observed that the shocks lessened in intensity and effects consistently over time. At the time of data collection, his culture shock experiences had become mere annoyances that he had learned to live with.

Mandy's early culture shock experiences involved revulsion. She shared stories of things she saw while visiting markets with teacher friends on weekends. One story that she found illustrated her culture shock involved watching a man spot a crab that had escaped from a vendor's stall, and while it was running away, the man picked it up off the ground, plopped it in his mouth, and ate it. She added, “*and that crab was alive! A second before it was alive and dirty, and suddenly he's eating it. And you're like, 'Oh dear, Dorothy, we're not in Kansas anymore!'*” (Mandy). While Mandy shared several experiences that initially repelled her or were surreal, these sentiments passed without embodying her overall experience. She used these shocking moments

to develop cultural awareness and humility, because she was able to disconnect her personal attachments to certain ways of living and observe different ways of being as instructive to her acculturation, which would, in turn, help her to be an effective teacher in the host country. Hofstede (1993), likened culture shock to the experiences that Alice had in Wonderland, but proposed that ultimately, one may develop cultural competencies from these experiences.

The other participants who experienced numerous shocks in different countries reported different specific shocks, but similar experiences of the lessening of the shocks and intensity. These reports suggest that culture shocks do not disappear but that they do dissipate and change from being overwhelming and debilitating to aggravating experiences that one is capable of navigating. Even Jayna, who experienced worse shocks later on due to earlier easier sojourns, has not been deterred from her choice to continue being a career international teacher. Jayna's strategic goal-setting may have included the choice for early sojourns to not include navigating language barriers, a known source of culture shock (Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005), yet her shocks with the increased culture distance and language barriers did not stop Jayna from continuing to accept educational positions in international schools that were in countries where she would need to develop a functional usage of the local language. While several participants spoke of language barriers, many acknowledged their privileged positionalities as expatriates, which the photovoice artifacts demonstrate. However, we will discuss expatriate privilege in a subsequent article, which requires both unpacking and addressing in detail beyond the scope of this article.

These findings affirm the call to demystify aversion to failure (Tahirshylaj, 2012) in favour of learning from it and developing applications for success from the initial "failure" experience. An interesting finding that emerged and that is indicative of the demographic makeup of a sizeable proportion of the participants as repeat sojourners, was how they understood their own experiences with culture shock from perspectives of extended time and introspection. The majority of participants had sojourned before as teachers, and a small number of these participants were either long-hauler sojourners in one host country, having spent over eight years in the same host country (e.g., Harry, May, Pat, Ron), or were career international educators (e.g., Frédéric, Jayna), and three participants were potential long-haulers or career international teachers (Jake, Joon-Ho, Mandy), having spent several years in the same host country with no plans to leave at the time of data collection. The long-term tenure of these sojourners exceeds speculations by professionals in the field that pinpoint somewhere between 2-3 years as the most common duration of tenure.

Self-Leadership Strategies: “Don’t be a problem dweller, be a problem solver”

Participants described several strategies that they used to maintain their well-being while sojourning that can be categorized as self-leadership strategies. One participant, who was an energetic and initially improbable sojourning long hauler and had moved overseas with a short-term but open-ended agenda, noted that leaning into an environment rife with change, summed up her formula for acculturative thriving holistically as “don’t be a problem dweller, be a problem solver” (Bria). She and other participants explained the strategies that they relied upon for ongoing management of their acculturation. These strategies straddled both cognitive- and behavior-focused areas. We discuss these below as specific strategies for well-being while sojourning. These strategies are entitled goal-setting, maintaining social connections, seeking support, self-analysis, and self-rewards.

Goal-setting

Participants spoke of setting goals and then monitoring these throughout their sojourns. Pat, who had been hired as a teacher and then had been promoted to a hybrid teacher-leader role and had mentored new teachers and seen teachers come and go during his tenure abroad, believed that several self-leadership strategies augmented sojourning teachers’ desires to stay longer. These strategies included goal-setting to optimise one’s sense of purpose, indulging in certain comforts to mitigate acculturative stress, taking advantage of opportunities to grow personally and professionally, and working to include and be included, all positioned teachers for long-term sojourning success. As for goal-setting, defining and monitoring specific goals affirms one’s sense of purpose and provides a grounding while overseas, proposing that this strategy leads to longer teacher retention. He said:

You need to figure out why do you want to move away. Is it adventure? ... you want to see more cultures and travel? ... you want to get away from the public school system that’s driving you crazy and try the private field? ... those are really important things to figure out before you make this really big decision to shift to a foreign country and to start a different system. I think if you know that before you arrive, you may stay longer or you may know your plan from living here. (Pat)

In support of Pat’s proposition, Hayley, an ECT on her second sojourn, grinned while saying, “*I’ve got goals and I’m crushing them!*” Hayley shared that she was drawn to adventure and marveled at the lifestyle opportunities that sojourning educators were afforded, but she also

wove her passion for adventure into her professional agenda. While in Malaysia, she had entered a part-time graduate program and her focus was on learning more about and augmenting her cultural competencies. To this end, she had committed to reflective practices and had set a number of goals including personal and professional ones, which she monitored and revised throughout her sojourn.

For Sean, taking the time to articulate ones' goals translated to a commitment to being there. He shared that at times, he felt purposeless and in limbo, yet when he set goals for himself, he felt better about himself and had tangible things to focus on, both as an educator, and as a culture traveler. He explained that without that commitment, one might quickly decide to leave at the first sign of stress. This aligned with Pat's views, who said that teachers should do their research and fully understand their motivations for moving overseas.

Articulating one's goals and purpose led Rowan to understand the benefit of sojourning as an international educator. Rowan, a repeat sojourner who had moved to four countries to teach prior to this one, but one of those was hit by a natural disaster and so she was evacuated days after arriving and therefore had actual teaching experience in three of the four countries, was drawn to sojourning for the cultural learning. She shared, "*that's always my goal. When I get to a new place, I try to learn more about the people that live there and how they live and what life is like.*" Rowan added that being able to travel and work within one's profession in a variety of countries is a privilege and it also comes with responsibilities. She added that:

I tried to just make sure that I'm always being quite polite and presenting my best image ... what keeps the spark alive for me professionally is these kinds of engaging multicultural experiences. This is my third teaching overseas experience ... I go on these adventures to help keep the spark alive for me as a professional, I'd like to learn new things. I like to travel.

Jayna, who had been a longtime sojourner who had become a career international teacher and leader in many countries prior to her current sojourn, was methodical about her goal-setting, sharing that being proactive and purposeful about her sojourning helped but did not guarantee strong fits for sojourning. Jayna thoroughly researched schools and their corresponding areas prior to accepting a position, and she kept up her ongoing learning with online courses and attending conferences.

Maintaining Social Connections

Most participants spoke of personal and social alienation as an intermittent staple of the sojourning lifestyle. This can have its benefits, as both Hayley and Harry reflected upon using moments of social seclusion for reflection, and yet these intermittent moments of social seclusion were also reported to have alienating effects. Alienation has been reported in the literature to be correlated with culture shock and acculturative stress. One ECT shared a philosophy that she and her partner committed to that was to say yes to everything. This decision, Charlotte explained, was purposeful, and it was not made to please others, but rather to build both personal and professional networks in anticipation that when things would get rough, they would have a social safety net upon which to buffer their stresses. They also wished to be part of a social safety net for their fellow sojourning colleagues. Reflecting upon the personal side of things, she explained,

One thing that my boyfriend and I did the first year here was anytime anyone asked us to do stuff, we said yes. We said yes to everything ... especially the first six to eight months, we wanted to make friendships and we wanted to gain our social group because we knew that was going to be a big deal and staying and enjoying ourselves here is having that social group. So anytime anyone asked us to do something, we said yes because we wanted to meet new people and we want to have the best time that we could. And we compare that to [two teachers] that started the same time as us and they would say yes once or twice a year ... comparatively we have a much bigger group that we can rely on and go to and talk to. If we don't have something social to do or friends, we're not going to be happy. (Charlotte)

Some participants disclosed introversion/extroversion self-identifications and sufficient evidence emerged that one could not link introversion with sojourning alienation and extroversion with sojourning success.

One participant shared at his first interview how many apps he had on his phone that served to keep him connected with his friends and with ongoing events in his home region in Canada. This highlights how online connectivity may serve to alleviate acculturative stress; yet sentiments of alienation and loneliness emerged broadly in the first set of interviews and so in the follow-up interviews, the topic was explored further. Educators who identified as introverted spoke of the need for social connection and these participants also identified strategies that they used to

maintain and benefit from these. Additionally, participants who were living abroad with a partner, spouse, or close friend, also reported greater social connection and personal well-being. Three participants who identified as being single and living alone also spoke of isolation. One of these participants proposed that it is easier to sojourn with a partner, and when I asked three participants who were sojourning with their partners about this proposition, they agreed. All of them discussed how taking vacations with a partner enhanced the experience, and that having a partner with whom to unpack one's daily joys and stresses helped. One participant also noted that the monotony of daily tasks could be minimized by dividing and distributing tasks between partners, a privilege that single educators living alone could not do.

Three participants—two that were school leaders—spoke of an increased need for professional connections while living abroad. The two leaders spoke of significant professional isolation that was at times hindering their ability to lead to their full capacity. Unlike public school districts in Canada where principals within one board may collaborate with others, international schools organizationally are smaller and cross-organizational collaboration has limitations due to the competitive nature of some international schools in relation to others. For professional learning, these participants sought and found online collaborative opportunities that satisfied their professional needs, and these mitigated the lack of collaborative professional learning opportunities within their organization. One principal shared that of international school leadership, *“it's lonely at the top”* (Harry). One principal had been promoted from a teacher to principal at the same organization and noted some social connections dissipated after the promotion. In addition to purposefully seeking internal and external professional learning, he had developed a personal network of friends that included local residents who were not connected with his work.

Self-Rewards

Participants shared several self-rewards strategies that enhanced their appreciation of their sojourning lifestyle and that motivated them personally and professionally. Self-leadership theorists emphasize the value of using self-rewards and incentives. Here, we discuss the value of self-rewards that are separate from the teaching experience. Manz (1992) deemed self-rewards as the most powerful method to lead a person to their own goals. These rewards can take on many forms: physical objects, such as a luxurious meal; uplifting thoughts, such as reminding oneself that they performed well; or enjoyable experiences, such as taking a vacation. Several participants

discussed the value of self-rewards during their sojourning. Some participants deliberately planned to incorporate self-rewards into their experience, understanding they needed such incentives to persevere through the pervasive challenges. Others shared that they deeply valued certain perks that they only understood as self-rewards in retrospect. By far the most frequent reference to self-rewards among participants pertained to travel opportunities and examples of these were frequently shared in the photovoice and memory box artifacts.

Popular Self-Reward #1: Comfortable Home Living. One participant, who shared the below photovoice artifact, which depicts the view from the participant's luxury apartment, proposed that participants who indulged in some added home comforts had an easier time making the cultural adjustment. The participant further shared that they would enjoy stepping out to the balcony and observing the evening view, and this view would make the participant feel professionally successful. Insofar as stressful days at work, which the participant felt was more of an exception than the rule, having a variety of comforts immediately accessible at home would buffer acculturative stress. This educator was a long hauler and had seen teachers come and go. The participant explained that teachers who opted for the more frugal options did not stay as long in the host country as those who treated themselves to more luxurious living. The participant's decision to enjoy comfortable home living meant that he could enjoy his self-reward intertwined with his periods of teaching. He did not have to wait for time off to benefit from his deliberately chosen reward. Surrounding themselves with an abundance of luxury meant that they stayed motivated to continue with their teaching.



Photovoice artifact. Above: View of the city from one participant's balcony.

Another participant, who was not a long hauler at the time of data collection but had extended their contract for a second term, marveled at the amenities where they lived, explaining that unwinding after work here was very pleasant. After a day of teaching, returning to a comfortable living place meant that their self-reward was integrated into their daily living. The image of the pool surrounded by an abundance of plants shared by the participant demonstrates the tranquility comfortable home living provided. Choosing to live in a comfortable accommodation meant that they could enjoy self-rewards in the quotidian, regardless of what they experienced at work.



Photovoice artifacts. Above: Olympic-sized pool and manicured landscaping at one participant's rented condo.

Popular Self-Reward #2: Making Great Holiday Adventures. When discussing what participants did to maintain their well-being in the interviews and supporting these discussions in the photovoice and memory box data, participants discussed their frequent and diverse holiday adventures. They emphasized these excursions as a highlight of their experiences teaching abroad. One participant merged their holiday adventures with an interest in cultural learning. This participant's photovoice artifacts included numerous images of the participant's engagement in cultural learning, which the participant shared also augmented their ability to teach culturally responsively. The participant saw these experiences as intrinsically satisfying rewards that they could integrate their holiday learning in the classroom. Below, a Buddhist monastery can be seen amidst green foliage nestled in mountainous terrain. The image itself shows the beauty of one chosen holiday spot. The monastery was a place where the participant could consider what the culture valued and gain a more historical understanding of the land they were teaching on. The

great holiday adventure is a type of self-reward that could only be experienced periodically. Instead of providing integrated relief like the comfortable home living reward, the holiday adventure offered a longer-term incentive to work through the challenges that teaching brings, with the knowledge that a reward would come after a certain interval.



Photovoice artifact. Above: Buddhist monastery

Another participant shared numerous photo images of various holidays in their photovoice collection. This participant was drawn to two types of self-rewards on their trips. The first was to engage in adventures that were unique to the regions being visited. The second was to indulge in relaxing events.



Photovoice artifact. Above: Big Buddha, a temple, Chinese New Year decorations.

Engaging in adventures served as lasting self-rewards. Once the adventure was over, the participant held onto their memory long after. It also provided a sense of making the most of the experiences working abroad. Such engagement with an experience invokes meaning-making that can last long after the fact and provide a deep sense of personal fulfillment (Yalom, 2009). Indulging in relaxing events provided the participant with immediate reward, which also reinforced a self-valuing that can also have lingering effects. Rewarding oneself is a way of communicating one's own perceived value.

Yet another participant endeavored to take trips to nearby countries that were not high-traffic tourist areas but that offered historical and cultural learning. Their interest in seeking locations that provided unique experiences highlights a common theme across participants that used self-rewards. Such rewards were individualized and based on personal interests. Self-leadership strategies mean that the individual pays attention to the self and develops experiences and incentives that will support their wellness.



Photovoice artifacts. Above left: Enjoying a relaxing holiday. Above right: Trip to Vientiane, Laos.

Discussion

This study provided data about the lived experiences of seventeen educators who were living as sojourners and working abroad in international schools. All of the participants were educated and trained in Anglo-Western higher education institutions. The data include narratives and artifacts that provide cursory snapshots of some of the joys and challenges of living and working abroad as an educator in an international school. These stories provide an opportunity to affirm, contrast, and extend the extant literature on acculturation and on teaching internationally, the latter of which is in very short supply. This study explored a perceived set of phenomena broadly known as acculturation in the context of educators, which has already been noted to be a missing stakeholder in the extant research. To this end, the study has revealed numerous avenues for further research, as well as some preliminary propositions that can serve to further both theorizing and practice.

A better understanding of the experiences of educators abroad will help educational organizations harness the power of failures by turning them into meaningful learning opportunities.

These opportunities serve to guide the new sojourning teacher towards a successful career. Several studies have shown that self-talk, also referred to as thought self-leadership, helps teachers manage their thinking tendencies (Neck & Manz, 1996). Participants presented many self-leadership strategies, without necessarily articulating them as such, demonstrating that it may be helpful for educators to pay closer attention to self-leadership strategies early on in their careers.

Actionable Responses

Given the varied challenges that culture shock brings on, school leaders and incoming teachers can both play a role in preparing for and supporting early career failures. First, we will discuss the actions that school leaders can take. We offer four considerations to help school leaders prepare incoming teachers:

1. **Normalize Culture Shock.** Make incoming teachers aware that culture shock is both an expected and welcome part of a new teacher's transition to the school. Information on what culture shock is, along with what strategies are helpful, will help the new teacher plan for early hardship.
2. **Include Veteran Perspectives.** Include veteran international teachers' perspectives on their own early career challenges in information packages that are sent out prior to the teacher's arrival. This may include using quotations from long-haulers that speak to their experience with culture shock or the challenges that come with managing a class for the first time in preparation material.
3. **Encourage Self-Leadership.** Encourage the development of self-leadership strategies, such as developing social networks, goal-setting, and embedding self-rewards before the new teacher travels to the international school.
4. **Model Failure.** Sharing personal struggles and challenges shows the newcomer that hardship is common and can be overcome. A school leader's openness about personal struggles and challenges provides a model for new teachers.

We offer four considerations to help future teachers prepare for their first sojourn abroad.

1. **Develop a Self-Reflective Inventory.** The inventory should be developed individually with as much self-knowledge driving it as possible. One example recommended by participants included knowing why you want to move overseas to teach in the first place, and to parse out

said priorities such that when conducting one's research on both prospective international schools and host countries, how the dynamics map onto one's priorities. Include in the inventory items that are deemed must have, must not have, and negotiable.

2. **Practice Goal-Setting.** Develop a practice of goal setting prior to departing for a sojourn in a new country. Setting goals independently and using self-observation of performance towards the goals is a skill that improves with practice. It can also enhance self-motivation to continue teaching. Developing a practice prior to departing for a sojourn will make goal-setting easier upon arrival at the international school.
3. **Build relationships.** Develop a scaffolded approach to building relationships that can help to keep connected with friends, family, and colleagues in one's home country, as well as to develop friendships and collegial relationships in the host country. Some teachers develop de facto families for the duration of their sojourn and reported these to help. Several participants emphasized the importance of developing relationships with local people, not just other expatriates, who, while they may be able to appreciate and be supportive of culture shock, may also inadvertently lead to cultural isolation without the presence of friends who are local to the host region. If possible, reach out to get in contact with a local teacher prior to arriving to help develop an early relationship, which can help with acclimatization.
4. **Build in Self-Rewards.** A scaffolded approach to self-rewards may help to provide large, **memorable** life events (e.g., a holiday to a nearby country or region), as well as smaller rewards (e.g., embedding ongoing cultural learning in one's host region), and ongoing, or constant rewards, such as finding a comfortable residence and then decorating it in a way that makes the sojourner feel good.

Both school leaders and teachers can help soften the new coming teacher's transition to working abroad. These actions provide pathways to support for the teacher and invite the new teacher to be open about their struggles.

Limitations

The data from this study represent the experiences of 17 educators who were living in five regions of the world. These data may resonate with sojourning experiences within these regions and beyond, but they are not representative of any region, nor do we claim these to be generalizable to sojourning international educators. Rather, they offer snapshots of experiences from which further probing is recommended to better understand acculturative processes in the context of

sojourning international educators. The demographics of this participant set are associated with at least two limitations. The first is that all participants received higher education training in Anglo-Western universities from either Canada, the USA, or the UK. There were a few participants who identified as belonging to a home culture other than Anglo or Western, and a couple of participants indicated that English was not their mother tongue, yet for the most part, the educators represent the mainstream of expatriate teachers in international schools. International schools also hire local teachers (non-sojourners) and sojourning international teachers whose mother tongues are neither Anglo nor that of the host country. We believe that studies are needed to explore all demography sets and call for studies that aim at demographic populations of educators who do not represent the hiring trends that favoured Anglo-Western teachers. Lastly, most of the participants in this study had prior sojourning experiences, and as such, they had the luxury of time to engage in retrospective self-analysis. We believe that studies aiming at early career teachers who are just discovering their pedagogies, as well as at first-time sojourners, who are new to acculturation processes, are also needed to help understand this phenomenon better.

Summary and Implications

We summarize the key takeaways from this paper and leave readers with three implication propositions. Amidst a significant shortage of teachers in the international school community, there is a need to ensure that new teachers are supported as they acculturate so they might thrive at their new school. Early career struggles—often understood as failures—play a significant role in a teacher’s experience teaching and living abroad. How the teacher views failure matters and reconceptualizing it as a necessary part of an early teaching experience is important. As such, school leaders can set the conditions for new teachers to *fail intelligently* so that the pervasive struggles can instead be perceived as meaningful and necessary; the experiences can lead to growth and creativity. These experiences, if met with mentorship and support, provide a foundation for a thriving long-term career. The participants in this study gave insight into how they coped and managed through their struggles with culture shock and acculturation, all identifying several self-leadership strategies that enabled them to find a balance that facilitated an innovative and confidence-building experience.

Based on the data, there are three major implications. First, culture shock should be an expected part of a sojourning experience. Normalizing the experience lessens the effects on newcomers, who learn to expect hardship and plan to engage with it. All participants shared stories

of hardship. These stories reveal that such experiences can be enriching in the longer term if appropriate care is taken by both the school leader and teacher to navigate them. Second, using self-leadership strategies facilitates actions that fully align with the individual teacher's interests and context. Because the strategies are centered on the individual teacher, the individual teacher is the primary driver and their navigation through the hardship is authentic and self-authored. School leaders play a role in supporting this self-authoring journey, which leads to our last and most significant implication—the role of mentorship. School leaders play a vital role in fostering conditions that support new teachers in being prepared and open with their struggles. Mentoring begins before the teacher starts, when school leaders reach out to help prepare new teachers for culture shock. Once the teacher has arrived in the host country, the school leader must continue to normalize the struggle and support the further development of self-leadership strategies. Flipping understandings of failure will support new teachers. A school culture that meets struggle with mentorship and compassion is one that sets the foundations for a stronger teaching force. This sets the stage for increasing self-efficacy and growing capacity to face professional challenges rather than to be defeated by them.

References

- Berry, J. W. (2006). Acculturative stress. In P. T. P. Wong & L. C. J. Wong (Eds.), *Handbook of multicultural perspectives on stress and coping* (pp. 287-298). Springer.
https://doi.org/10.1007/0-387-26238-5_12
- Berry, J. W., & Sam, D. L. (2016). Introduction. In D. L. Sam, & J. W. Berry. (Eds.), *The Cambridge handbook of acculturation psychology* (2nd ed., pp. 1-7). Cambridge University Press.
- Bhaskar-Shrinivas, P., Harrison, D. A., Shaffer, M. A., & Luk, D. M. (2005). Input-based and time-based models of international adjustment: Meta-analytic evidence and theoretical extensions. *The Academy of Management Journal*, 48(2), 257-281.
<https://doi.org/10.2307/20159655>
- Blandford, S., & Shaw, M. (2001). *Managing international schools*. Routledge Falmer.
- Brummitt, N., & Keeling, A. (2013). Charting the growth of international schools. In R. Pearce (Ed.), *International education and schools: Moving beyond the first 40 years* (pp. 25-36). Bloomsbury Academic.

- Bunnell, T. (2015). International schools and international curricula: A changing relationship. In M. Hayden, J. Levy, & J. J. Thompson (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of research in international education* (2nd ed., pp. 325-336). SAGE.
- Cannon, M. D., & Edmondson, A. C. (2005). Failing to learn and learning to fail (intelligently): How great organizations put failure to work to innovate and improve. *Long Range Planning*, 38(3), 299-319. <https://doi.org/doi.org/10.1016/j.lrp.2005.04.005>
- Darling-Hammond, L. (2001). The challenges of staffing our schools. *Educational Leadership*, 58(8), 12-17.
- Dweck, C. S. (2006). *Mindset: The new psychology of success*. Random House.
- Harford, T. (2011). *Adapt: Why success always starts with failure*. Little Brown Book Company.
- Hayhurst, J. Hunter, J., Kafka, S., & Boyes, M. (2015). Enhancing resilience through a 10-day developmental voyage. *Journal of Adventure Education and Outdoor Learning*, 15(1), 40-52, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14729679.2013.843143>
- Heyward, M. (2002). From international to intercultural: Redefining the international school for a globalized world. *Journal of Research in International Education*, 1(1), 9-32. <https://doi.org/10.1177/147524090211002>
- Higgins, A., & Wigford, A. (2018). *Wellbeing in international schools: The 2018 report*. ISC Research.
- Hofstede, G. (1993). Cultural constraints in management theories. *The Executive*, 7(1), 81-94.
- Houghton, J. D., Wu, J., Godwin, J. L., Neck, C. P., & Manz, C. C. (2011). Effective Stress Management. *Journal of management education*, 36(2), 220-238. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1052562911430205>
- Hottola, P. (2004). Culture confusion: Intercultural adaptation in tourism. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 31(2), 447-466. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2004.01.003>
- Howkins, J. *The creative economy: How people make money from ideas*. Penguin.
- Ingersoll, M., Hirschhorn, M., Landine, J., & Sears, A. (2018). Recruiting international educators in a global teacher shortage: Research for practice. *The International Schools Journal*, 37(2), 92-102.

- ISC Research. (2023IS, December 4). International schools market growth.
<https://iscresearch.com/data/>
- Kutsyuruba, B., Walker, K., Makhamreh, M. A., & Stroud Stasel, R. (2018). Attrition, retention, and development of early career teachers: Pan-Canadian narratives. *In Education, 24(1)*, 43-71.
- Kutsyuruba, B., Walker, K. D., Stroud Stasel, R., & Makhamreh, M. A. (2019). Developing resilience and promoting well-being in early career teaching: Advice from the Canadian beginning teachers. *Canadian Journal of Education, 42(1)*, 285-321.
- Leach, R. J. (1969). *International schools and their role in the field of international education*. Pergamon Press.
- Lim, B. (1996). *Dare to fail*. Loveable Store.
- Mancuso, S. V., Roberts, L., & White, G. P. (2010). Teacher retention in international schools: The key role of school leadership. *Journal of Research in International Education, 9(3)*, 306-323. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1475240910388928>
- Mansfield, C. F., Beltman, S., Pric, A., & McConney, A. (2012). “Don’t sweat the small stuff:” Understanding teacher resilience at the chalkface. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 28(3)*, 357-367. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2011.11.001>
- Manz, C. C. (1992). Self-leadership...The heat of empowerment. *Journal for Quality and Participation, 15(4)*, 80.
- Matson, J. V. (1992). *The art of innovation: Using intelligent fast failure*. Dynamo.
- Miller, A. K. (2015). *Freedom to fail: How do I foster risk-taking and innovation in my classroom?* Arias.
- Oberg, K. (1960). Cultural shock: Adjustment to new cultural environments. *Practical Anthropology, 7(4)*, 177-182. <https://doi.org/10.1177/009182966000700405>
- Neck, C. P., & Houghton, J. D. (2006). Two decades of self-leadership theory and research. *Journal of Managerial Psychology, 21(4)*, 270-295.
<https://doi.org/10.1108/02683940610663097>

- Neck, C. P., & Manz, C. C. (1996). Thought self-leadership: The impact of mental strategies training on employee cognition, behavior, and affect. *Journal of Organizational Behavior, 17*(5), 445-467. [https://doi.org/10.1002/\(SICI\)1099-1379\(199609\)17:5<445:AID-JOB770>3.0.CO;2-N](https://doi.org/10.1002/(SICI)1099-1379(199609)17:5<445:AID-JOB770>3.0.CO;2-N)
- Roskell, D. (2013). Cross-cultural transition: International teachers' experience of 'culture shock'. *Journal of Research in International Education, 12*(2), 155-172. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1475240913497297>
- Rutter, M. (1990). Psychosocial resilience and protective mechanisms. In J. E. Rolf, A. S. Mastern, D. Cicchetti, K. H. Nuechterlein, & S. Weintraub (Eds.), *Risk and protective factors in the development of psychopathology* (pp. 181-214). Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511752872.013>
- Saldaña, J. (2013). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers* (2nd ed.). SAGE.
- Seligman, M. (2011). *Flourish: A visionary new understanding of happiness and well-being*. Free Press.
- Stephenson, W. T. (2015). *Midnight running: How international human resource managers make meaning of expatriate adjustment* [Doctoral dissertation, University of Georgia]. Athens, GA.
- Stroud Stasel, R. (2021). Educator acculturation while living and working overseas: Stories from seventeen sojourning teachers and school leaders at international schools [Doctoral dissertation, Queen's University]. Kingston, ON.
- Sumsion, J. (2004). Early childhood teachers' constructions of their resilience and thriving: A continuing investigation. *International Journal of Early Years Education, 12*(3), 275-290. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0966976042000268735>
- Tahirsylaj, A. S. (2012). Stimulating creativity and innovation through intelligent fast failure. *Thinking skills and creativity, 7*(3), 265-270. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tsc.2012.05.005>
- Tracy, S. J. (2020). *Qualitative research methods: Collecting evidence, crafting analysis, communicating impact* (2nd ed.). John Wiley & Sons.

- Tschannen-Moran, M., & Tschannen-Moran, B. (2011). Taking a strengths-based focus improves school climate. *Journal of School Leadership, 21*(May), 422-448.
- UNESCO. (2016). *The world needs almost 69 million new teachers to reach the 2030 education goals*. <http://uis.unesco.org/en/document/world-needs-almost-69-million-new-teachers-reach-2030-education-goals>
- Wang, C.-H., & Varma, A. (2019). Cultural distance and expatriate failure rates: The moderating role of expatriate management practices. *International journal of human resource management, 30*(15), 2211-2230. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2017.1315443>
- Wang, W., Wang, B., Yang, K., Yang, C., Yuan, W., & Song, S. (2018). When project commitment leads to learning from failure: The roles of perceived shame and personal control. *Frontiers in Psychology, 9*(Feb), 1-12.
- Ward, C., Bochner, S., & Furnham, A. (2005). *The psychology of culture shock* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- Yalom, I. D. (2009). *Staring at the sun: Overcoming the terror of death*. Wiley.

Biographies:

Rebecca Stroud* completed her Ph.D. in educational leadership and policy studies at Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario. Her research interests also include early-career teachers, mentoring, international education, arts-based and Indigenous methodologies. Her SSHRC-funded doctoral study chronicled experiences of teachers and school leaders who lived and worked overseas to examine various acculturation challenges and opportunities that they face. She currently works as a researcher and teaches courses at faculties of education. Rebecca has taught in middle and high schools for twenty years, primarily in drama, debate, and language arts. She is a sojourner. She was the recipient of the *Ethics in Education Award* (USA) for her work in social justice education, and the *Thesis in Education Award* at Queen's University for her M.Ed. thesis. [*Corresponding author: r.stroud@queensu.ca]

Rebecca Evans is a Ph.D. student in education at Queen's University in Canada. Her doctoral work focuses on civic learning for young people in education contexts beyond public school. Her research interests include citizenship education, historical thinking, and youth leadership. Rebecca has over twenty years of experience leading and volunteering with youth organizations, such as Big Brothers & Sisters, Girl Guides Canada, Royal Canadian Air Cadets, and language learning programs. Rebecca has fifteen years of leadership experience as an officer in the Canadian Armed Forces, where she enjoyed a meaningful career collaborating with great people and tackling big problems both domestically and internationally.