

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN TEACHERS VIEW THEIR CAREERS
IN AMERICAN SCHOOLS ABROAD:
A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF OVERSEAS HIRED TEACHERS IN THREE
AMERICAN INTERNATIONAL SCHOOLS IN CHINA

A Dissertation

by

Susan Langley Peacock

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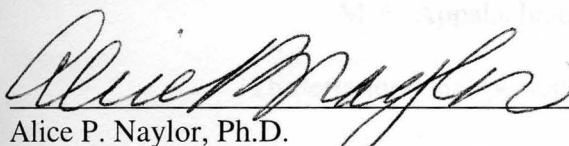
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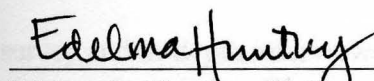
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ABSTRACT

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN TEACHERS VIEW THEIR CAREERS IN AMERICAN SCHOOLS ABROAD: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF OVERSEAS HIRED TEACHERS IN THREE AMERICAN INTERNATIONAL SCHOOLS IN CHINA (May 2005)

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International Schools Services indicates that it receives approximately 20,000 inquiries per year concerning teaching opportunities abroad (Larsson, J., personal communication, August 3, 2004). This pool of possible applicants indicates that international teaching may be coming into the mainstream as a career in its own right.

This study was constructed to explore how women teachers at international schools perceive their career paths and to answer the following research questions:

1. What factors influence North American overseas hired women teachers' decisions to continue teaching abroad or return to their home countries?
2. What policies and procedures of overseas schools support and encourage women teachers to pursue an international teaching career?

The research methods of this study were the distribution of a fact-gathering survey and in-depth interviews with participants from three international schools in China that are similar in organization, but differ in size and location.

This qualitative study is a descriptive narrative. The thoughts of the interviewees are grouped around several central themes that emerged from the study and are presented in their own words as much as possible. In the review of the literature, attention was given to the history and nature of American schools abroad as a method of defining the international school teaching culture.

The findings suggested that for this group of women, the overseas teaching environment, in the nature of the work and of the living environment surrounding that work, provides a strongly satisfying situation. The women in the study can be characterized by a strong sense of autonomy with attachments to both a personal and a professional history and a motivating desire for intellectual stimulation and cultural diversity. The respondents perceived that overseas schools are generally successful in providing policies and procedures to support their personal and professional needs in pursuing careers in international teaching. The study indicates a disconnect, however, between the women's intellectual ambition and professional assertiveness and their aversion to taking on administrative positions. The findings also suggest a need for professional organizations to support women teachers and provide mentors for women interested in moving toward the administrative aspects of international education.