

BELONGING, COMMUNITY, AND PREPAREDNESS:
TEACHER EXPERIENCES OF WORKING AND LIVING IN NORTHERN MANITOBA

By

Natalie Pegus

A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies of

The University of Manitoba

In partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of

MASTER OF EDUCATION

Faculty of Education

Department of Educational Administration, Foundations and Psychology

University of Manitoba

Winnipeg

Copyright © 2025 by Natalie Pegus

ABSTRACT

Recruitment and retention of teachers have been continuing obstacles for school divisions in northern Manitoba. Teachers experience unique challenges when relocating and integrating into northern and remote communities. The aim of this qualitative study was to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences of teachers new to northern Manitoba, to help improve recruitment and retention strategies in this region of the province. Teacher preparedness for working in the North and a sense of belonging were also themes explored in this research. Understanding a teacher's relationship to their school and their broader community was a focus to better understand the career decisions in this study (Janzen & Cranston, 2015).

The findings were presented to highlight the experiences and challenges participants faced in their first year of teaching in northern Manitoba. The results provided recommendations for school boards and school districts on how to revise their strategies for recruiting and retaining teachers. Additionally, suggestions were made for universities to better prepare teacher candidates for northern teaching roles.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thank you to my advisor, Dr. Frank Deer. I have appreciated your expertise, support, and guidance throughout my degree and research journey. Thank you for helping me grow both as a researcher and a writer; your detailed and specific feedback has been truly valued.

Thank you to my committee members, Dr. Melanie Janzen and Dr. Marti Ford. I have appreciated your knowledge and valuable insight throughout this process. Your expertise in this area of research has been inspirational and instrumental.

Thank you, Frank, Melanie, and Marti, for fostering such a positive and supportive learning environment.

Thank you to my four participants for sharing their stories and time with me.

Thank you to my family for being my cheerleaders throughout my graduate degree. Mom and Dad, thank you for believing in me and for your unwavering support throughout my entire educational journey.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Table of Contents

ABSTRACT	ii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	iii
TABLE OF CONTENTS	1
CHAPTER 1.....	3
INTRODUCTION.....	3
BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY	3
CONTEXT FOR THE STUDY	5
THE PROBLEM STATEMENT/RESEARCH QUESTIONS.....	7
METHODOLOGY/RESEARCH DESIGN	8
RESEARCHER POSITIONALITY	10
LAYOUT OF THE THESIS.....	11
CHAPTER 2.....	12
LITERATURE REVIEW	12
TEACHING IN NORTHERN AND ISOLATED COMMUNITIES OF CANADA	12
SENSE OF BELONGING IN TEACHING.....	15
TEACHER PREPARATION FOR WORKING IN NORTHERN COMMUNITIES.....	22
CHAPTER 3.....	26
METHODS	26
THEORETICAL & CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK	26
<i>Theory of Belonging</i>	26
<i>Methodology</i>	27
<i>Data Collection Methods</i>	28
<i>Interviews</i>	28
<i>Participants</i>	28
ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS	30
CHAPTER 4.....	31
FINDINGS	31
RECRUITMENT TO THOMPSON	32
SENSE OF BELONGING	35
PREPAREDNESS.....	37
CHALLENGES	39
RETENTION.....	41
CONCLUDING FINDINGS	46
CHAPTER 5.....	48
ANALYSIS, DISCUSSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	48
SENSE OF BELONGING	48
TEACHER PREPAREDNESS.....	50
RECRUITMENT	52

RETENTION	53
RECOMMENDATIONS	56
<i>Recommendations for School Divisions in Northern Manitoba</i>	56
<i>Recommendations for Universities and Teacher Education Programs</i>	58
<i>Recommendations for the Manitoba Teachers' Society</i>	60
<i>Recommendations for Future Research</i>	61
CONCLUSION	63
REFERENCES	65
APPENDIX A: GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS	71
APPENDIX B: RECRUITMENT MATERIALS	73
APPENDIX C: PERMISSION LETTERS	76
APPENDIX D: PARTICIPANT INFORMED CONSENT FORM	80
APPENDIX E: RESEARCH ETHICS AND COMPLIANCE PROTOCOL APPROVAL	85
APPENDIX F: CERTIFICATE OF COMPLETION –TCPS 2: CORE	86

Table of Figures

FIGURE 1: FEELING AT HOME IN TEACHING	54
--	-----------

List of Tables

TABLE 1: BACKGROUND INFORMATION OF PARTICIPANTS	32
--	-----------

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Background of the Study

Teachers transitioning to a new school or community can undoubtedly face challenges while adjusting. These difficulties, such as isolation, sense of belonging, reality shock, demanding assignments, lack of resources, lack of orientation, stress, and adjusting to school culture and expectations (Anhorn, 2008; Bjorklund Jr, 2023; Hellsten et al., 2011; Kutsyuruba et al., 2014) can feel intensified when working in remote and isolated communities (Hellsten et al., 2011; Wotherspoon, 2008). Teacher retention can be particularly challenging for northern Canadian communities, with an annual attrition rate of 40% (Kutsyuruba et al., 2014). The realities of teaching in a northern community might not match the expectations of newly relocated teachers who may experience culture shock, an overlap between professional and personal life, a lack of professional development, and teaching outside of one's area of expertise (Hellsten et al., 2014; Kitchenham & Chasteauneuf, 2010). Understanding which factors are most integral for improving teacher recruitment and retention in northern communities is significant for student access to teachers and the future of education in these remote and isolated areas. It is also integral to understand whether the teachers who choose a northern teaching position feel adequately prepared for the change in culture and community.

Despite recent recruitment efforts by northern Manitoban school divisions, filling teacher vacancies continues to be a challenge. In 2023, Frontier School Division (FSD) doubled its hiring incentive signing bonus to \$10,000 for new teacher graduates for up to three consecutive years, according to an article by CBC News (Greenslade, 2023). Despite these efforts and hiring a full-time recruiter, 34 teaching positions remained vacant in FSD September 2023. The School District of Mystery Lake in Thompson, Manitoba, has also experienced challenges while filling

vacancies (Greenslade, 2023) despite having the top teacher salary in the province (Manitoba Teachers' Society, 2021). Solutions involving financial incentives are unsatisfactory and don't foreclose teachers' return to urban areas after only experiencing northern communities for short periods (Kitchenhaum & Chasteauneuf, 2010).

Although the challenges of teacher retention in “hard-to-staff” schools and communities is a worldwide issue (Cooper & Alvarado, 2006), very few studies explore the unique challenges of teachers working in northern Canadian contexts (Kitchenhaum & Chasteauneuf, 2010) and even less so within a northern Manitoban context. Most recently, Janzen and Cranston (2015) utilized Bakan's (1966) conceptual framework of agency and communion to ascertain the motivations of teachers working in the remote Manitoban community of Norway House. According to Janzen and Cranston (2015), “traditional career theories solely focus on factors of individual need and material gain” and fall short of addressing external factors (i.e. relationship to community) and “their social and emotional implications for teachers to stay or leave” (p.170). They argue that social factors such as relationships, community, and a sense of belonging are typically unrecognized or absent in studies underscoring teacher retention. The authors stress that the continual framing of northern communities as “hard-to-staff” continues to reinforce the negative stereotypes and assumptions of working in the North concerning recruitment and retention.

That same year, Danyluk and Sheppard (2015) followed the experiences of first-year teachers who obtained positions in Alberta's remote, northern, or Indigenous communities. A section of their work also highlights the importance of teachers' integration into the community. The participants of this study share the significance of connecting to a community's culture.

Earlier in 2010, Kitchenhaum and Chasteauneuf published the results of their two-year study (2007-2009) investigating the issues of supply and demand in certain northern Canadian provinces and territories, excluding Manitoba. Their study highlights recruitment and retention methods, teacher professional development opportunities, and the shortage of specialized teachers in these northern parts of the country. Kitchenbaum and Chasteauneuf (2010) recognize that teachers' motivations for migrating and remaining in northern parts of Canada are not solely driven by financial gain (p. 872) but that these incentives are helpful with initial recruitment (p.884). Unlike the previously mentioned studies, their research emphasizes the significance of professional development and mentorship/induction programs. Nonetheless, one of their findings indicates that teachers with a sense of belonging and a "clear connection to place and community" (Kitchenbaum & Chasteauneuf, 2010, p. 887) are likelier to remain in a northern community. Although the focal point of their study was not to unearth teachers' emotional experiences in the North, these emotional elements still emerged in their data collection.

The emerging theories in the studies mentioned above indicate that more needs to be examined beyond the stereotypical assumptions of teaching in northern communities. There are several factors for teachers to consider when deciding to continue working in a particular community beyond financial gain, which this study explores. Teachers new to living in Thompson, Manitoba, were invited to participate in this study. This was not limited to those who were 'new' to the profession but focused on those who were new to working in northern schools of Manitoba.

Context for the Study

Thompson is on Treaty 5 Territory, the largest and most populated city in northern Manitoba. In 2021, Thompson had an estimated population of 13,030, with 45.5% of its

inhabitants identifying as Indigenous (Statistics Canada, 2023). North of the 53rd parallel, it is situated 761 kilometres north of the City of Winnipeg, nestled in the heart of the boreal forest (Lyon, 2012). Colloquially known as the Hub of the North, Thompson is the retail, health care, and services hub for surrounding communities (i.e. Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation, Pikwitonei, Oxford House, Split Lake, Thicket Portage etc.). It is a city birthed through the mining industry by the International Nickel Company of Canada, later purchased in 2006 by Vale (Lyon, 2012).

In 2018, Vale closed its nickel smelting and refining operation, eliminating 500 jobs. Between 2016 and 2021, Thompson's population dropped by 643 residents (Statistics Canada, 2023). Throughout the years, Thompson's population has surged and fallen due to the changes in the nickel market. Once the third largest city in Manitoba, Thompson is currently the sixth largest city in the province.

Until recent years, Thompson has had seven schools—one high school and six elementary schools—with a total student population of 2963 and 245 teachers (School District of Mystery Lake, 2023). However, the number of schools increased in 2008, when the Division Scolaire Franco-Manitobaine (DSFM) opened a K-12 school called “La Voie du Nord” to serve the needs of the francophone community of Thompson.

Despite being “the Hub of the North” with arguably more amenities, transportation sources, and resources than any other northern community, Thompson has had extreme struggles with the recruitment and retention of teachers in recent years (Greenslade, 2023). While smaller northerly communities of Manitoba, such as Norway House (in Frontier School Division), have been featured in relatively recent research (Janzen & Cranston, 2015), cities with more dense populations have not. Thompson was highlighted in this research study to expand upon current

Northern Manitoba research and to showcase a different school division/district with different demographics and teacher experiences.

The Problem Statement/Research Questions

This study explores the experiences and preparation of teachers new to working in Thompson, Manitoba, to better understand how to improve recruitment and retention strategies in Northern Manitoba.

More specifically, this study addresses the following research questions:

- 1) What are the challenges experienced by teachers new to living in northern Manitoba?
- 2) In what ways have these new teachers experienced a sense of belonging in their school community and the broader community of Thompson?
- 3) In what ways are new teachers prepared to live and teach in a northern community?
- 4) What has influenced the decisions of these new teachers to stay or leave northern Manitoba?

These research questions have emerged partly in response to Janzen and Cranston (2015) and the work of other researchers (Danyluk & Sheppard, 2015; Janzen, 2019), who have previously delved into the studying of northern teaching experiences. As Janzen and Cranston (2015) contend, new research surrounding northern teaching experiences must also address the emotional and social implications of integrating oneself into a new school and community. This study pays attention to the emotional experiences of working in a remote and isolated community. There is also limited literature that explores a sense of belonging experienced by teachers, and even fewer studies that study a sense of belonging experienced by new teachers (Bjorklund, 2023). This study also aimed to understand if a sense of belonging is a factor in teacher retention in Thompson, Manitoba.

Methodology/Research Design

This study utilizes qualitative research methods. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with teachers new to Thompson, Manitoba, at the end of the school year (May/June 2025). Because I was living in Winnipeg at the time, these interviews were conducted on UM Teams. The sample of participants selected for this research was limited to teachers newly relocated to Thompson; four teachers were selected for interviews. The selection aimed to include individuals from diverse backgrounds (e.g., males, females, people of different origins) and experiences. According to the Human Resources Department at a school division in Thompson (through an e-mail inquiry), 21 first-year teachers were hired for the 2023-2024 school year. Teachers from different schools in Thompson were interviewed to include diverse experiences.

Significance of Study

Teaching is often referred to as a profession that “eats its young” or an experience that will “make or break” its new (Anhorn, 2008; Kutsyuruba et al., 2014). Statistically, 30-40% of teachers throughout many countries leave the profession within their first five years (Struyven & Vanthournout, 2014), regardless of financial incentives (Black, 2001). The issues concerning recruitment and retention are complex and unique to every situation and community (Mueller et al., 2011). According to Kitchenbaum and Chasteauneuf (2010), these complexities are underexamined within northern Canadian contexts and, upon investigation, even less so within Manitoba. Although the participants of Janzen and Cranston’s (2015) case study share highly positive experiences of teaching and living in Norway House, the general struggles surrounding recruitment and retention in northern Manitoba continue to persist (Baxter, 2022; Greenslade, 2023; Macintosh, 2023).

This study focuses on the experiences of teachers new to working in northern Manitoba. New graduates are often targets of recruitment by northern school divisions, and these new hires can shape the future landscape of education within these communities. However, experienced teachers also relocate north of Manitoba for differing reasons. These teachers may develop into more experienced professionals and potentially obtain leadership positions, further extending their influence on the community.

Individual teacher attrition can erode the quality of education and have negative implications for the school community and the greater community (Ingersoll, 2001; Kukla-Acevedo, 2009). As Janzen and Cranston (2015) assert,

Given the amount of human and financial capital required to recruit and retain teachers, as well as the negative implications that high levels of teacher attrition have on student success and emotional well-being, it is important to understand teachers' perspectives on their experiences working in communities that are perceived as hard to staff (p. 869).

Understanding the experiences of teachers new to living in the northernmost region of Manitoba may inform school boards and hiring personnel on how to reframe their recruitment and retention strategies and reduce attrition rates. This study aims to determine how adequately these teachers are prepared for their new northern experiences. This study is in response to previous research focused on northern teaching experiences (Danyluk & Sheppard, 2015; Janzen & Cranston, 2015; Janzen, 2019) and aims to help further address the unique challenges of this region of the province, which continues to be understudied.

Researcher Positionality

This section will explain my background and how it influenced my decision to select this research topic. I want my readers to fully understand my positionality as a researcher within the context of this subject matter.

Northern Experience

I grew up in Thompson, Manitoba, where I completed my kindergarten through grade 12 education. I valued and enjoyed my childhood in Thompson and returned there as a young adult to begin my career. I spent the first four years of my career teaching in schools where I was once a student, and I consider it a profound privilege to have given back to my home community. Growing up as a student in Thompson, I was fortunate enough to have experienced stability in my education from educators who had settled in the community for many years. The educators who taught me at my elementary school were pillars in our school community for many years, having taught me and my older siblings. However, situations are ever-changing in mining communities, and there are times of stability and uncertainty.

When I returned to Thompson after completing my undergraduate degree, the community had undergone significant change. The mine was preparing to close its smelting and refining operations, eliminating 500 positions in Thompson. At this time, recruiting and hiring teachers in Thompson was also becoming more challenging. A generation of teachers were retiring, and a large gap of teaching positions needed to be filled. I understand some of the challenges Thompson has faced in recruiting teachers to the North. I wish to explore these issues to help the community in its continuing journey of hiring teachers.

I was fortunate that when I returned to Thompson to teach, I felt a strong sense of belonging to the community. However, there have been pockets throughout my life where I have

struggled with a sense of belonging, and I do not underestimate the struggles that come with it. I have since considered the perspectives of teachers new to working in northern and remote communities—their feelings of belongingness and preparedness—and the implications for them and their students. I hold a unique position, having been raised in the North and having spent part of my career there. I recognize that my experiences have shaped my biases and strengths in this research.

Layout of the Thesis

This thesis is divided into five chapters: an introduction, a literature review, a methodology section, study findings, and a study summary. The introduction chapter presents the study's purpose, research questions, significance, delimitations, and the researcher's positionality. The second chapter reviews significant sources that have informed this study and relate to the research questions. The themes within the literature review include background information on teaching in northern and isolated communities of Canada, a sense of belonging in teaching, and preparedness for teachers new to the North. The third chapter provides an overview of the methods and procedures of this study, as well as any philosophical underpinnings. Chapter 4 highlights the findings of this study by discussing the data collected through the four interviews conducted. In vivo coding was used to analyze the data, and five sections are organized in this chapter, including recruitment, sense of belonging, challenges, preparedness, and retention. Chapter 5 offers an analysis and discussion of the research findings. Additionally, Chapter 5 provides recommendations to school divisions to help improve teacher recruitment and retention in northern Manitoba. A list of recommendations is also provided to universities on how to better prepare potential teacher candidates for working in the North.

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

This literature review aims to share and critically discuss previous research that has laid the groundwork for this study. This literature review is divided into three thematic sections connecting to the topics of this research. The first section is related to the experiences of teachers working in northern and isolated communities in Canada. To date, sparse research highlights teachers' experiences working in northern Manitoba. Therefore, the research scope was extended beyond Manitoba's borders and into other provinces and territories of Canada, from which some parallels and experiences can be drawn. The second theme explores a sense of belonging in teaching, which has generally been understudied. The final theme highlights teacher preparation for working in northern Canadian communities, although current research is also limited in this area.

Teaching in Northern and Isolated Communities of Canada

As mentioned, there is a dearth of literature that highlights the experiences of teachers working in northern Canada and even less so in northern Manitoba. Therefore, the research presented here extends beyond Manitoba's borders to consider possible similarities in other provinces and territories of Canada.

From 2007 to 2009, Kitchenbaum and Chasteaneuf (2010) conducted a longitudinal study examining the issues of supply and demand in northern Canada. Their research objectives were to ascertain subject areas with chronic needs, investigate recruitment and retention methods, and examine preferred professional development models in these areas of the country (p.1). The geographical focus of their study was on certain northern school divisions and districts in British Columbia, Alberta, the Yukon, and the Northwest Territories.

The research conducted by Kitchenbaum and Chasteaneuf (2010) is significant in that it underscores the notion that northern communities of Canada frequently experience issues of recruitment and retention, and while elaborating on some of the pertinent issues that these teachers may experience. Their research objectives primarily concentrate on external issues that northern teachers may encounter, such as a lack of professional development and teaching outside of one's areas of expertise. However, Kitchenbaum and Chasteaneuf's interviews with teacher participants also reveal specific reasons that participants have for remaining in their northern locales, some of which include matters of belonging and integration into the community.

Kitchenbaum and Chasteaneuf (2010) indicate that their research offers "a snapshot of teacher supply and demand needs and issues" (p. 22) in certain northern parts of Canada. They propose that few studies examine the complexities of northern communities in recruiting and retaining teachers, especially within a Canadian context. This is arguably still true, although recent research has taken a different approach to examining the career motivators of teachers working in northern and isolated Canadian communities.

The research of Danyluk and Sheppard (2015) aims to provide knowledge to Bachelor of Education programs across Canada to better prepare teacher candidates for working in northern, remote, or Indigenous communities. The participants of this study stressed the importance of swift community integration in gaining confidence among community members. Integration by these participants included such things as coaching, participating in cultural traditions, attending students' games, and assuming leadership roles in the community. Danyluk and Sheppard note that integration aided these new teachers in learning local culture and building lasting relationships. A school administrator participant in this study shared the importance of listening

and learning from others while working in small communities. Living under a microscope can cause uneasiness for new teachers in small and isolated communities, and mistakes made can feel more amplified.

Bowman's research (2018) also underlines the potential challenges that teachers who live in northern communities may face. She explains that northern communities can feel isolated due to weather conditions and patterns of extended darkness and daylight. Bowman notes that this lack of daylight in the winter profoundly impacts the psychological welfare of teachers and negatively impacts socialization. She also remarks that the distance and cost of travel to larger urban centers can feel daunting and cement feelings of isolation.

Moreover, Bowman argues that teachers are usually highly visible in northern communities and that expectations can feel heightened for those who are new. She also asserts that some teachers never feel fully integrated in northern communities where they were not born. She contends that teachers can feel like outsiders after years of residing in the same place. What might this say about a teacher's relationship to their community? Her study highlights the inconveniences of working in a small town, emphasizing the significance of community integration. Bowman's solution to successful community integration is school mentorship. Bowman recognizes the challenges teachers can face in adapting to the particularities of northern living. This groundwork serves as a springboard into new territories in this area of research.

Janzen and Cranston (2015) argue that much of the research that does exist on the motivations of teachers working in northern and remote areas is framed "within traditional heuristic approaches that may not represent the complexity that comes with making career choices" (p. 167). Janzen and Cranston shift away from traditional career motivation theories that focus on individual needs and material gain and turn towards teachers social and emotional

needs. This seems poignant in a profession involving emotional work and the interrelations of others. Janzen and Cranston frame their research through Bakan's (1966) concepts of agency and communion. They also expand upon Bakan's conception of communion—which underpins the importance of social connectedness—and integrate perspectives of place consciousness.

According to Janzen and Cranston, utilizing place-consciousness recognizes the importance of one's relationship to a place, not just to others. They write, "Therefore, we use a reconceptualized understanding of communion to recognize the importance of having, knowing, and understanding one's relationship to place" (p. 7).

Janzen and Cranston suggest that a teacher's relationship to their community is integral in understanding career motivations. Their emphasis on community and the reconceptualization of communion lay the groundwork for this research. Janzen and Cranston (2015) share, "Currently, the emphasis focuses on teaching as simply an event occurring within the classroom, as opposed to locating teaching as an engagement within the broader community" (p. 13). Their research indicates that the communal factors experienced by their participants were integral to the positive experiences they shared. Most of their participants shared encouraging experiences of working and teaching in Norway House, Manitoba. Nonetheless, the emotional aspects of relocation and integration for teachers are typically underexamined when discussing teachers' career decisions and motivations. Similarly, Brown (1993) also asserts that a teacher's attachment to their community's natural or social environment can influence their decision to relocate.

Sense of Belonging in Teaching

What is belonging? Belonging has been defined in several ways across fields and perspectives. According to Maslow (1968), belonging is a fundamental human need that emerges

after physiological and safety needs are satisfied. Maslow's *Hierarchy of Needs* model implies that loving and belonging are prerequisites to self-actualization.

In First Nations cultures, belonging means treating everyone as kin. The "Circle of Courage" model –created by Larry Brendtro, Martin Brokenleg, and Steve Van Bockern (1988)—illustrates belonging as a universal growth need of all children. Treating others as family, even when not blood-related, means the survival of a culture. In this description, belonging is synonymous with community and being loved by others. Similarly, Brown (2022) supports the idea that true belonging means being accepted unconditionally. She argues that changing who we are to fit in would be the opposite of belonging. Regardless, our concept of belonging varies globally, with meanings that differ between individualistic and collectivistic cultures (Allen, 2020). There are cross-cultural values to consider. Understanding that belonging has multiple meanings across perspectives and cultures was imperative to recognize during this study.

In psychology, Dr. Kelly-Ann Allen (2020) published "The Psychology of Belonging," an in-depth examination of the history of belonging and its significance in specific scenarios and stages of life. Her volume covers childhood, adolescence, and adulthood. Allen (2020) also affirms that a sense of belonging is a fundamental human need that influences our well-being, mental health, and physical health. She writes, "Academically, belonging is defined as a unique and subjective experience that relates to a yearning for connection with others, the need for positive regard and the desire for interpersonal connection" (Rogers, 1951, as cited in Allen, 2020, p. 19).

As per school settings, Allen's research primarily examines the significance of a student's sense of belonging. She relays that a lack of attachment and belonging felt by students can be

contributing factors to extreme events such as school shootings and adolescent suicide (p. 48.)

Regarding teachers, she mentions, “One thing we do know is that a teacher’s sense of belonging to their schools predicts their students’ sense of belonging” (p. 49). The more teachers feel rooted in their school, the more likely they are to form meaningful relationships with their students, which, in turn, contributes meaningfully towards their students’ sense of belonging and education. Allen’s research also poignantly suggests that the quality of a teacher’s relationship with their principal greatly influences that teacher’s sense of belonging in their school and feeling a part of that school’s “ingroup.” Based on this research, the leadership of a school can have a trickle-down effect on the delicate climate of a school and can either fuel connection and belonging or not.

Allen (2020) further explores the consequences of rejection and the notion of ingroups versus outgroups. Allen writes, “Our desire to belong is so pervasive that a fear of being rejected and not belonging can determine how we navigate our day-to-day life choices and decisions” (p. 64). Prior research by Baumeister and Leary (1995) also supports the idea that humans are motivated by a need to belong. Baumeister and Leary suggest that humans continually seek ways to find and maintain a sense of belonging, shaping our relationships with others, groups, and communities. This likely has significant implications for one’s personal and career decisions.

Feelings of rejection could be a factor in teachers’ career choices. Allen (2020) explains that ingroups are those with whom we identify as members, and outgroups are those with whom we do not. According to Allen’s research, outgroups can sometimes consist of those who belong to racial minorities or those who share different characteristics to the ingroup. How might moving to a northern community of various demographics and cultures shape a teacher’s perception of being a member of an ingroup or outgroup? Allen (2020) notes that being a

member of an ingroup and outgroup can be contextual. These contexts could thus be applied to the school community and the greater community of a teacher, both groups with whom a teacher is a member.

Although Allen (2020) only briefly touches on teachers' sense of belonging, she sheds light on its importance across the different stages of adulthood, focusing on the workforce. A sense of belonging can undoubtedly shape the experiences of someone new to a group, regardless of that setting. Our innate human need to belong may hold meaning for teachers new to a school and community. Allen's foundational research on belonging helps set the groundwork for this study. It aids in considering the implications of belonging for new teachers and their experiences moving to northern and remote communities. Her research probes many questions of how belonging holds meaning for people in a multitude of situations and settings. More specifically, in the case of this study, how might a sense of belonging influence the decisions of teachers new to remote and isolated settings? Allen's book provides a relevant and thorough background on psychological understandings of belonging that inform this study.

More recently, Allen et al. (2025) delved more specifically into teachers' sense of belonging. Their findings emphasize that a sense of belonging enhances a teacher's passion for their profession. Allen et al. identified six themes influencing a teacher's sense of belonging: interpersonal relationships (peer relationships, student relationships, and parent relationships); support and collaboration; professional and personal growth; institutional factors; motivators; and external networks. Relationships with colleagues emerged as a prominent theme, with participants citing the importance of sharing their teaching experiences with others in their profession. Their study reinforces the vital role of relationships — whether with colleagues, leadership, students, or parents — in facilitating belonging.

Also, recently, Wator et al. (2025) reviewed themes of enablers and barriers to a teacher's sense of belonging. The main themes of their study included collegial interactions, shared values, and school leadership. Regarding collegial relationships, several participants noted that feeling connected to colleagues increased their job satisfaction and sense of belonging. Conversely, other participants reported that a lack of collegial connection led to feelings of isolation and frustration. Shared values with other members of the school community also fostered a sense of belonging and purpose among many participants. Teachers who felt connected to the school's mission believed they belonged there. Supportive school leadership also helped foster a sense of connection and belonging among the participants in this study. Wator et al. (2025) argue that effective leaders create a positive climate and strengthen a teacher's sense of belonging. Similarly, themes of collegial relationships, school leadership, and their connection to belonging also emerged from my research findings.

Özdoğan (2022) similarly argues that the actions of school leaders are directly connected to a teacher's sense of belonging and, consequently, their effectiveness as an educator. Participants in this study indicated that clear communication, transparency, support, and fairness from school leaders promote teacher belongingness. Özdoğan stresses that a teacher who does not feel a sense of belonging at work will have low commitment to their school and may consider teaching in a different environment.

Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2011) suggest that there is no causal relationship between belonging and leaving the teaching profession. However, their data indicates that belonging protects against the emotional exhaustion experienced by teachers, which is directly related to teachers leaving the profession. They suggest belonging serves as a barrier, cushioning the other challenges teachers may encounter. They also note that a teacher's sense of belonging to their

school has not been systematically studied, whereas a student's sense of belonging has been more thoroughly investigated. According to Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2011), the results of these previous studies indicate that a sense of belonging at school positively affects motivation and satisfaction for students. They assumed that the results of their research would correspond similarly with teachers and job satisfaction, but their data collection produced something different. Skaalvik and Skaalvik admit to certain limitations in their study and cannot explain all variances in their variables. They suggest that future research should consider other variables such as school contexts, teacher characteristics, teachers' life situations, and social status. A teacher's relationship to their community may also be a missing piece.

Kachchhap and Horo's (2021) quantitative research examines the influence of selected factors on a sense of belongingness in educational settings. They contend that a teacher's level of performance can be elevated when their sense of belonging is improved. They argue that organizations should consider employees' sense of belonging to improve attrition rates. Kachchhap and Horo's research also implies that an organization's perceived climate is closely related to belonging.

Johnston and Dewhurst (2021) explore the sense of belonging of student teachers. They argue that a student teacher's early experience of belonging in a school may impact their decision to remain in the profession. The student teachers in their study who felt a sense of belonging were in school contexts where they felt welcome, valued, and able to contribute. Johnston and Dewhurst argue that individual factors and actions also impact a sense of belonging. They state, "But it is also clear that the building of a sense of belonging to department and school involves students in agentic action, a process of developing professional agency" (p. 9). The ideas of agency and decision-making to improve one's sense of belonging came through in the results of

my study in conversation with a couple of participants. This prompts the question: whose responsibility is it for a teacher or a student teacher's sense of belonging in a school setting?

Bjorklund Jr. (2023) highlights poignant research regarding first-year teachers and their experiences with belonging. Bjorklund Jr. shares the results from a 2-year longitudinal study tracking pre-service teachers at the end of their education program and into their first year of teaching. In his research, Bjorklund Jr. interviews nine participants periodically throughout their first year of teaching. His work successfully conveys the changes of belonging felt by first-year teachers presented through individual narratives. Bjorklund Jr.'s descriptive narratives feel authentic, thorough, and genuine, as do the experiences of his participants. Bjorklund Jr. (2023) argues that reporting individual narratives instead of a thematic approach conveys the changes participants feel more authentically. His results remark that all participants felt shifts of belonging throughout their first year of teaching. Across the themes collected from his interviews, Bjorklund Jr. notes five common themes shared by his participants. Among these themes, he notes community participation outside the classroom being one. Although Bjorklund Jr. discusses little in this section, he observes that informal social interactions among staff can help foster belonging. He writes, "Social relationships are at the core of the sense of belonging in groups and for early career teachers" (p. 9). Besides sharing these remarks, Bjorklund Jr.'s study does not probe deeper into the influence of community integration on teachers and their sense of belonging. Still, it does raise its potential relevancy for this study.

Bjorklund Jr. (2023) writes conclusively, "fostering a sense of belonging in new teachers offers a buffer against difficulties associated with learning to teach" (p. 9). His work implies that first-year teachers often feel like members of the periphery in their school community simply by being first-year teachers. Bjorklund Jr. (2023) also notes that the first year of teaching can often

be fraught with many difficulties, and belonging can be among these challenges. Perhaps parallels be drawn to teachers new to isolated and northern communities. Bjorklund Jr.'s research promotes further inquiry into this subject and urges further investigation of belonging in teaching more broadly. Bjorklund Jr. (2023) offers that school leaders are the solution for creating and ensuring a school climate of belonging.

While previous studies have laid the groundwork for a sense of belonging in teaching, *this study* focuses on belonging in a specific northern context, with the aim of offering strategies to improve recruitment and retention in northern Manitoba.

Teacher Preparation for Working in Northern Communities

Are teacher candidates adequately prepared to teach in northern and remote communities of Manitoba? Teacher programs are responsible for preparing teachers to work in different geographic locations, yet many education programs in Canada remain urban-centric (Janzen, 2019; White & Reid, 2008). It is worth examining the field experience options for teacher candidates living in Southern Manitoba. The University of Manitoba 2023-2024 practicum guide lists a variety of options for students and field practicums. At the University of Manitoba, teacher candidates can apply for a northern practicum but are not necessarily guaranteed one. Teacher candidates are also responsible for the extra costs of doing a Northern practicum, creating potential barriers. The University of Winnipeg does not grant student requests for practicum placements or indicate an option for a practicum outside Winnipeg. The 2024-2025 University of Winnipeg practicum guide states that students will be placed in at least one school with “inner city characteristics” and guarantees that students will be placed in more than one school division. Again, it is not clear whether any of these practicums transpire outside the city. The 2023-2024 Brandon University practicum handbook specifies that students can submit practicum requests and

encourages one practicum to be outside Brandon for job-marketability reasons. Much depends on the successful arrangement of a field practicum. However, it seems unsurprising that northern communities struggle with recruitment and retention when university students are not guaranteed diversity in their practicums (Kutsyuruba & Tregunna, 2014). Facilitating and encouraging northern practicum options would improve teacher candidates' understanding of the North, expose future teachers to other career options, and help retain quality teachers in northern communities (Brandon, 2015; Janzen, 2019).

Choosing a teaching position in northern Manitoba means living in an area home to a large Indigenous population, including First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples (Janzen, 2019). Recognizing the North as an area of Canada with unique cultural and historical elements is important. Teacher candidates need to understand the diversity of this region and would benefit from specific and meaningful preparation for this distinct northern culture.

Beyond universities, other initiatives have been emerging to prepare teachers for northern teaching. According to the Canadian Teachers Federation (2015), in 2013, a non-profit organization called *Teach for Canada* was launched to recruit, prepare, and retain teachers for northern First Nations communities across Canada. Teach for Canada, funded through corporate and private donors, accepts applications from teachers interested in working in First Nations communities and provides successful applicants with a four-week summer preparation course before placing them in a community for two years. The Canadian Teachers Federation (2015) argues that although the motivations of Teach for Canada may be well-intentioned, the preparation of these teachers is insufficient and not sanctioned by the provincial government. CTF explains, "In targeting Aboriginal and hard-to-staff schools, TFC arguably perpetuates a colonial mindset as it rests on the presumption that eager, well-meaning individuals from outside can come into school

systems and essentially fix all that is not working” (p. 2). It is worth recognizing that teachers working in northern positions may have varying types of experiences and preparation for teaching in the North beyond traditional teaching practicums.

Sheppard and Danyluk's (2014) study examines the preparation of teacher candidates at Laurentian University's concurrent Bachelor of Education program in Ontario. This university program embeds Indigenous content in all undergraduate courses and mandates all final-year education students to connect with elders. According to the findings of Sheppard and Danyluk (2014), this embedded Indigenous component at Laurentian University has contributed positively to their graduates finding work. The B.Ed. graduates of this program experienced confidence and a willingness to accept teaching positions in northern, rural, and remote communities in and outside Ontario, with job acquisitions higher than the provincial average. Sheppard and Danyluk's research suggests that northern practicum experiences and Indigenous-centered education programs can positively influence teacher candidates' experiences and understandings of teaching and living in the North.

Janzen (2019) asserts that teacher candidates having access to and proper preparedness for northern practicums is a starting point for addressing the inequities of student learning in the North. Janzen writes, “It is our responsibility as educators, teacher educators, and educational researchers to respond to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's (2015) Calls to Action in order to improve the educational inequalities for children on reserve and in northern communities” (p. 8, 2015). Her research on teacher candidates' experiences of northern practicums illustrates the deficiency of urban-centeredness of Bachelor of Education programs in Canada, suggesting a lack of support for non-urban teaching experiences. Janzen proposes that simply offering northern practicum options is insufficient. According to her, the lack of preparedness for northern teaching

practicums can risk the reinforcing narratives of saviourism and settler-colonial perspectives.

Northern practicum options, if offered, must be appropriately supported to enrich the experiences of our future teachers in this region. Several years have passed since Janzen's study; therefore, it will be relevant to understand the current feelings of teachers new to living and teaching in the North. As Danyluk and Sheppard's study implies, preparation likely influences teacher decisions and willingness to take risks and relocate.

CHAPTER 3

Methods

Theoretical & Conceptual Framework

The main aim of this study is to explore the experiences and preparedness of teachers new to working in Thompson, Manitoba, to help improve recruitment and retention strategies in northern Manitoba. The research questions were to: 1) understand the challenges faced by teachers new to the North; 2) explore how these new teachers have experienced a sense of belonging in their school and community; 3) investigate teachers' level of preparedness for living and teaching in a northern community; and 4) understand teachers' decisions for remaining or leaving the North.

Theory of Belonging

Belonging has been defined and operationalized differently across studies (Allen et al., 2021). Despite needing more consistency and conceptual clarity in defining belonging, there are commonalities across perspectives and studies. One commonality across studies is that an individual's sense of belonging is often tied to their perception of a chosen group or place (Allen, 2020; Allen et al., 2021; Bjorklund, 2023; Mahar, 2014). Beyond social belonging, a connection to *place* and culture is also essential to recognize (Allen et al., 2021; Janzen & Cranston, 2015). For this study, the exploration of belonging focuses on one's relationship to community: the workplace community (Bjorklund, 2023) and the broader community — to place (Janzen & Cranston, 2015). Teachers' relationships with their school community and the broader community of Thompson were explored.

Although research is beginning to burgeon regarding belonging in the workplace (Filstad et al., 2019), more needs to be known about belonging for teachers (Bjorklund, 2023; Pesonen et

al., 2021; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011). A sense of belonging in education has mainly been studied from the perspective of students (Pesonen et al., 2021). Little is typically mentioned about a teacher's relationship to place and their sense of belonging. Janzen and Cranston's research addresses perspectives of place consciousness and significantly considers one's relationship to others *and* to place. Understanding a teacher's relationship to their school and their broader community may be essential to better understand career decisions and improve retention. Highlighting a teacher's *sense of belonging* has helped generate unique results in this study. Bjorklund's (2023) existing research on a sense of belonging for first-year teachers also helped set the foundation for this study by highlighting the importance of belonging for teachers in new workplace settings. This prior research inspired the focus of exploring a sense of belonging for teachers new to working and living in northern Manitoba.

Methodology

This qualitative research aims to understand participants' views and construct meaning from their situation as best as possible. A constructivist worldview was necessary to address the significance of social interactions in a small northern city (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Utilizing this lens also benefited in a study with a specific northern context with a unique cultural and historical background. Although participants were interviewed towards the end of their first year of teaching in Thompson, they were also asked to share the changes in their feelings and experiences throughout the year. The process of this study was more about discovery than confirmation. This research aims to examine the sense of belonging and preparedness of teachers new to Thompson, Manitoba.

After receiving University of Manitoba Research Ethics Board approval to conduct the study (see Appendix for the Approval Certificate), I sought and received permission from the school district in Thompson, Manitoba, to conduct research and interview participants.

Data Collection Methods

Recruitment. Thompson, Manitoba's superintendent(s), was contacted for initial permission to conduct the study and to disseminate recruitment information to schools (Appendix B). The superintendent presented the details of this study at a school board meeting for approval. After obtaining this approval, the principals of the schools were contacted for permission to recruit participants at their schools (Appendix C). The principals were asked to share “an invitation to participate in the study” with their teachers, who then self-identified as potential participants to me. Appropriate materials were distributed to teachers who agreed to participate in the study, including an initial study letter and a consent form (Appendix B & D).

Interviews. For this qualitative methods study, data was collected through individual semi-structured interviews. A list of open-ended questions guided the conversation. The interviews were video and audio-recorded with participant consent and transcribed verbatim. The interviews were held on UM Teams. To validate the analysis, participants were provided with the transcriptions to allow for any amendments. The interviews ranged from 50 to 60 minutes. Interviews occurred between May and June 2025, towards the end of the school year. Questions were curated for open-ended responses from participants to collect meaningful qualitative data. Questions centred around themes of sense of belonging, preparedness, recruitment, and retention. (See Appendix for the interview protocol).

Participants. I interviewed four teachers who were new to living in Thompson, Manitoba, and who were in their first year of teaching in the city. Teachers were provided with information

about the study in all schools of Thompson, and four teachers identified themselves as meeting the inclusion criteria. The sample population were also to include teachers in their second year of teaching in Thompson if an insufficient number of teachers were unable to participate in their first year; however, this was unnecessary. This study included teachers new to the North of Manitoba but not necessarily new to the profession. The sample included teachers from the elementary schools and high schools in Thompson, Manitoba, with the aim of including a variety of participants from different schools and backgrounds. The researcher sought permission from the school district in Thompson, Manitoba, to conduct research and interview teacher participants.

Data Analysis and Management of Data. Participant interviews were reviewed and analyzed using the themes of this study: preparedness, sense of belonging, and recruitment and retention. A sense of belonging and preparedness were not initial research themes of this study. While reviewing literature on recruitment and retention, a sense of belonging emerged as a potential prominent theme for further exploration. Bjorklund's (2023) foundational research on belonging and first-year teachers centred my thinking on the possible connections between belonging and teaching in the North. While more recent research has burgeoned on belonging and teaching (Allen et al., 2025; Wator et al., 2025), little has yet been explored about belonging as it relates to teacher retention in Northern Canada, and more specifically in northern Manitoba. Teacher preparation also emerged as another potentially significant theme during the review of the practicum handbooks of the education programs in Manitoba. While the University of Manitoba practicum handbook included a direct reference to a northern practicum option, other programs seemed more restrictive. This prompted me to consider focusing more on teacher preparation in northern Manitoba.

I coded interview transcripts manually, using In Vivo coding to analyze the data. In Vivo, or verbatim coding, was particularly useful in this research as it honours participants' voices in their actual words (Chase & Martin, 2021). I reviewed the data, searching for direct quotes relevant to the themes of this study; however, I remained open to discoveries during the analysis. For example, the theme of collegial relationships as it relates to belonging emerged as a common theme in the interviews, which was not initially a focus.

Recordings were stored on the UM network drive during this study. The interview data was kept confidential through pseudonyms (participant A, B, C, D.), and the schools were not individually named. A code list connecting the actual names to the pseudonyms, along with the Microsoft Teams interview recordings, was kept securely on the UM network drive. Names and identifying information about individuals or schools were removed from the transcript as an additional step to safeguard confidentiality. Recordings were conducted via Microsoft Teams and were stored on the UM network drive, and were deleted at the end of August 2025 after they were transcribed. Coded data and physical copies will be destroyed (electronic data will be deleted, and paper will be shredded) by the end of December 2025. Advisor Dr. Frank Deer has had access to the interview transcripts to assist in the research process. The collected data will be destroyed after the thesis research is complete and defended.

Ethical Considerations

The research projects required the study of human subjects and, therefore, approval from the UM REB was sought and received. Participants had the option to withdraw until data aggregation was complete. I stored the collected data from this study on a UM drive, sharing it only with my supervisor. Participants received gift cards as compensation for their involvement in the study.

CHAPTER 4

Findings

As previously mentioned, the objective of this study was to explore the experiences and preparation of teachers new to working in Thompson, Manitoba, to enhance recruitment and retention strategies in northern Manitoba by addressing the research questions from Chapter 1:

- 1) What are the challenges experienced by teachers new to living in northern Manitoba?
- 2) In what ways have these new teachers experienced a sense of belonging in their school community and the broader community of Thompson?
- 3) In what ways are new teachers prepared to live and teach in a northern community?
- 4) What has influenced the decisions of these new teachers to stay or leave northern Manitoba?

This study sought to recruit participants from various schools and backgrounds. At the time of this study, two of the teachers were working in two different elementary schools, and two taught at the high school in Thompson. The group included two males and two females. Additionally, one teacher was originally from southern Manitoba, one from Alberta and two were relative newcomers to Canada. Hearing diverse voices helped improve understanding of the unique challenges faced by those from various locations. Most of the recruited teachers were new to living in northern Canada. Two participants were first-year teachers and were open to settling in Thompson. Another participant, a newcomer from India, spent a year living in Winnipeg before accepting a teaching position in Thompson. The fourth participant, originally from Jamaica, had an established career and had prior northern experience working in Nunavut for four years before moving to Thompson. Background information about the participants is shown in Table 1:

Table 1: Background Information of Participants

Participant	Years of Experience Teaching	Originally From	Grades Taught in Thompson
Participant A	First year	Southern Manitoba	Middle Years
Participant B	First year	Alberta	Senior Years
Participant C	Fourth year	India	Middle Years
Participant D	Seventeenth year	Jamaica; spent four years in Nunavut	Middle Years

For this study, the interview transcripts of participants were reviewed and analyzed for themes related to recruitment, sense of belonging, preparedness, challenges, and retention. After completing data analysis through In Vivo coding, categories were developed under these themes. The following chapter provides a summary of data collected from these emergent themes (recruitment, sense of belonging, preparedness, challenges, and retention).

Recruitment to Thompson

All four participants had been encouraged to take positions in Thompson through word of mouth from family members, mentors, or friends who already lived in the North or had connections to the North. Participant B had siblings living in Thompson who spoke positively about living in northern Manitoba and encouraged her to join them. Participant C, originally from India, also had family already living in Thompson, which helped ease his decision to relocate. Another participant felt it was easier to secure jobs in the North compared to other parts of the province or country. Participant D, originally from Jamaica, noted: “After getting through in Toronto, getting my papers together, applying for jobs, I realized that most of the jobs were part-time or substitute teaching.” After finding it financially unsustainable to teach in Toronto without guaranteed work, he taught for four years in Nunavut before accepting a teaching position in Thompson. Participant D heard about Thompson from a friend working there, who

knew they were hiring teachers. He explained, “He got a job here, and I think whoever he spoke to told him that they were looking for teachers. So, I said, ‘OK, nice’ and I spoke to the superintendent who told me about positions.”

The financial incentives of teaching in Thompson were mentioned as motivating factors for two participants. Participant B highlighted the \$4,000 moving allowance as an “attractive” incentive in her “big leap” decision to accept a position in northern Manitoba over other options closer to home. Participant D also agreed that the financial aspects of teaching up north serve as an incentive. He stated, “It can be a good incentive. And yes, it will attract you because at the end of the day, if you’re going to move up North, you’re giving up more than where you live.” He further explained, “It’s not just about the location. What you’re talking about, climate change, personality change... but yes, the financial aspect of it is good, and in my opinion, it should be better. I’m grateful for what it is.” Being several hours from an urban center was discussed as an occasional challenge, and the financial bonus of living in the North helped offset the lack of amenities.

While three participants had the support of family members or friends living in Thompson, one did not. Nevertheless, the opportunity to start a career in a new community was appealing to those who were first-year teachers. Participant A felt uneasy about continuing in the education field after completing her degree, but believed that an experience in the North would be a chance to reset and grow as an educator. She described:

I kind of struggled a bit in my fifth year, and I was like, OK, I don’t think I can do it. I’m done. And then a lot of people did a lot of talking to me and convincing. A lot of convincing, including talking to my professors. But essentially, a professor said to me, ‘Like you know—these are the people out there—they’re good teachers. They will be very

supportive. It's your first year. Go and make your mistakes.' It ended up turning into more than that, but that was kind of the starting point.

Participant A also found it challenging to secure a position in her specific area of teaching and was willing to step outside her comfort zone. Participant A explained:

I am in a specialty, and I quickly realized that I couldn't be picky necessarily about staying in Winnipeg. Even though that's where my family is, it's where my friends are, and that's kind of where I wanted to be.

As mentioned, Participant B became familiar with Thompson through her siblings *and* gained experience in northern Manitoba by substituting for two summers while completing her education degree. She noted, "I was blessed with connections and had the advantage of siblings that helped root my connection (in Thompson). Participant B also shared, "What helped me come back (to Thompson) was my positive experience with subbing." Through this experience, she built relationships within the community's schools, which led her to accept a full-time teaching position.

Although some participants had initial reservations about moving to Thompson, encouragement from others ultimately helped them solidify their relocation plans. Their close circles ultimately persuaded them to move to Thompson. Based on the interviews, it may have been daunting for some participants to move North without encouragement; however, the endorsements they heard helped affirm their decisions. Having these prior relationships and links to the North likely helped ease their initial sense of belonging in the community, as much research sheds light on the key role of relationships and belonging.

Sense of Belonging

All teachers stated that their collegial relations contributed to their overall sense of belonging in their schools. For example, Participant B shared, “I work in a good environment with seven other teachers in my department. I feel a sense of community in my department”. Participant A also shared similar sentiments: “I get along really, really well with my department, and we hang out and have made friends with teachers from other schools.” All participants described their work environments as welcoming and highly supportive, helping them integrate both into the school and the community. Participant C shared, “I want to talk about the staff here and, you know, the people from the school board office. And the students, too. When you spend time with them, then you forget a little about your family”. The significance of ‘support’ was a recurring theme across all the interviews. All teachers felt that they had the support of both their colleagues and their administration, and that this was important to them. Participant B noted, “The support didn’t just stop after being hired.” She felt that her admin checked in with her often throughout the year. She continued, “No one will turn you down or not welcome you”.

First impressions of a school in Thompson planted the seeds of belonging in one instance, as a participant felt compelled to accept a teaching position after a positive, welcoming interview. Participant D explained:

Just from doing the interview, I think maybe that sold me. Speaking to the principal and the previous vice-principal, who were the ones who interviewed me, and just talking to them made me feel like, 'Wow, I want to work with these people.' That was a great positive because at the end of the day, wherever you’re working, you want to feel comfortable there.

Beyond their school, some teachers recognized the importance of engaging with the wider community to foster a sense of belonging. Participant B, who was heavily involved in organizing school extracurricular activities, felt that this helped her build relationships with families and feel more connected to the community. Participant A mentioned that, although it was daunting, stepping outside her “comfort zone” was essential for a successful year. She described attending teacher events, socializing with colleagues, and taking part in recreational sports as ways to become part of the community. Participant A expressed:

It’s gonna be what you make it. And if you go out there and you don’t know anybody and you don’t make any effort to know anybody or you don’t kind of push yourself outside of your comfort zone, it’s going to be lonely. Like you can’t just go there and be like, well, whatever happens, happens, and just wait.

Participant A shared that, although she was not naturally extroverted, taking these steps ultimately helped her persevere through her year and boosted her overall sense of belonging. Participant A concluded by saying, “It ended out working out a lot, and I haven’t felt lonely. Like there’s times I feel homesick, and I miss the people in Winnipeg, but I’m OK.”

For Participant C, transitioning from India to teaching in Thompson felt like a cultural shock. He described feelings of isolation and missing his family; however, he found that the openness and accommodating nature of the students and staff helped make the transition easier. Participant C recalled his first interaction with a student: “The students, they’re pretty much welcoming. I even remember my first day here—a student—he talked to me, interacted with me like he knew me for a long time—and even the staff.” The teacher also mentioned that the school board office staff contributed positively to his sense of belonging when seeking assistance. He explained, “Everybody’s so supportive. I would say the school board office, there are a lot of

Indigenous people, and they will talk with you like you are not new. It's like you are totally, you know, familiar with them". Participant C mentioned many times in his interview that the school board office was a positive source of support for him.

The teachers generally felt positive about school community. While some participants focused more on building relationships outside of school than others, all felt supported within their school community. Our discussions about belonging often centred on the participants' connections with their school community, rather than their relationships outside of work. Their adjustment to their new workplace seemed to be the focal point of their year.

Preparedness

Three participants, regardless of background, noted they did not feel culturally prepared to teach in Thompson. Participant B shared, "My university integrated Indigenous perspectives, but it doesn't quite prepare you for what's in person." This participant, from a predominantly white community in a different province, explained that Indigenous traditions seemed naturally embedded in daily life in Thompson. In contrast, land acknowledgments felt like mere formalities back home. Participant A echoed this view, feeling that conversations with others helped her better prepare for the cultural differences, and described how the media influenced her perception and understanding of the North. Participant A said, "I didn't feel prepared through university, more so, just through you know, people talking and the news." Furthermore, Participant C mentioned that doing initial work as a substitute teacher or educational assistant might have eased his adaptation to the culture before taking on a permanent teaching role in Thompson. Participant C expressed:

If you work as a sub or an educational assistant, then you will learn a lot from the teacher.

If you work as a permanent teacher directly, you have to learn a lot. You have to face a lot of challenges.

Participants A and B, who completed their university education in Canada, noted that their universities generally did not offer practicums in northern Manitoba or other northern regions, except in exceptional circumstances. Participant A, originally from Southern Manitoba, mentioned that her university preferred to keep students “close” during practicums, likely for easier logistics related to evaluations. However, both participants expressed that they would have felt intimidated by the idea of a northern practicum if given the chance, as their mindsets about teaching in northern Canada had changed during their degrees. Participant A explained, “My headspace in university was very, very scared and the distance and the not knowing anybody...not having a connection”.

Participant D, with prior teaching experience in Nunavut, felt relatively adapted to the North by the time they relocated to Thompson. However, he acknowledged that there was a period of adjustment during his initial time in northern Canada. Participant D shared, “When I moved to Nunavut, which is more north, some of it was kind of shocking ‘cause when I went there, it was headed into the time where you had nothing but night”. The long winters and extended periods of darkness were an initial shock, leaving a sense of unpreparedness for those conditions. He also felt unprepared for how the prolonged darkness would impact his students' learning. Participant D attested that transitioning to Thompson was relatively easy after his experience in the “extreme north.” His adaptability had grown through varied experiences throughout his career. Therefore, Participant D required minimal support during his first year of teaching in Thompson. Participant D further explained:

I have taught maybe every level you can think of, right up to pre-college level. I've experienced a lot of different situations, so I think that has played a significant role. I've learned to adapt and change.

The level of preparedness each participant felt before accepting a role in Thompson depended on their level of experience in teaching and prior familiarity with the North. All participants expressed different types of areas in which they felt they could have been more prepared before relocating to northern Canada, such as a better understanding of Indigenous perspectives, climate, or pedagogical practices.

Challenges

The areas of need and challenges faced by participants varied and were unique to each individual's situation. Regardless of origin, some participants cited the climate as an initial challenge, mentioning that the winters felt especially prolonged. Participant C, a newcomer to Canada, shared, "First of all, it's very cold. I am coming from very hot. So, the first challenge was cold. And then the second one is cultural difference, I think." Participant B, from Alberta, also noted the climate. She shared, "Winter as a whole was long. However, the school district can't control that." After initial adaptation to the climate, participants faced professional and personal challenges.

Participant A noted that the challenges they encountered weren't due to living in the North, but rather stemmed from general feelings of insecurity as a first-year teacher. The participant said, "I was worried about what my colleagues thought of my teaching. Fortunately, my fears were unfounded". Navigating both a new profession and a new community would indeed add unique layers of challenges for first-year teachers.

It felt particularly challenging for Participant C, who was relatively new in his career and in his first year of teaching in a Canadian community, to adapt to differences in pedagogy, classroom management, and culture. Participant C described: “I had to learn a lot of things like classroom management and how to, you know, interact with students. I didn’t have any kind of experience of the Canadian education system.” Participant C found classroom management in Canada especially demanding and felt that other teachers in the school district, who were also new to the country, were experiencing similar difficulties. He elaborated, “They have some kind of experience from other, you know, from other countries, but they are having a pretty hard time with the students”. Participant C strongly emphasized that having the opportunity to work with other experienced Canadian teachers would help with adjusting to a new culture and with classroom management. He also described the compounded challenges of being so far away from family. Participant C continued, “I miss my family a lot, especially my mom. I was about 24 years old when I moved here, so it’s kind of a feeling of isolation”. He expressed an eventual desire to return to India to be close to his immediate family again.

Participant D, with several years of experience in the teaching profession, described various challenges outside of teaching, such as accessing reliable taxi services around Thompson and finding authentic Caribbean food. He shared, “I’m from the Caribbean, so I love Caribbean food. I could hardly find anything that I would love”. Most notably, the distance and cost of travelling outside Thompson were among his most significant challenges. The teacher participant said:

If I want to get out of Thompson, it’s not as easy as it might seem...because we have to drive a minimum of seven hours (to the international airport). If you have an emergency

and have to go somewhere, you can't. If you decide to go to the airport (describing the local airport), you'll need a heavy wallet.

Similarly, Participant A expressed concern about the distance to the North. Participant A said, "I had the fear of being so far away from home and then being stuck." This individual, originally from Southern Manitoba, explained that Dauphin was her most northern experience while student teaching. She shared, "I freaked out about going to Dauphin, and that was only two hours away." Her decision to move up North felt significant at the time.

The challenges faced by participants in the study varied, reflecting different types of needs based on their professional and personal backgrounds. For some participants, especially those new to the profession, the focus was on adjusting to the pedagogical demands of teaching and managing the classroom as first-year educators. Another layer of challenge—particularly for one participant new to Canada—was the cultural shock of adapting to a completely different educational system, including new pedagogical approaches and classroom management styles. In contrast, the participant with several years of teaching experience, including teaching in a different northern setting, had developed a higher level of adaptability through prior career experiences. For this individual, the challenges shifted away from direct teaching methodologies and more towards community-related aspects. This suggests that once fundamental teaching and cultural adjustments are managed, needs can emerge that focus on a broader lifestyle.

Retention

Decisions

All four participants plan to continue teaching in the North in the incoming school year, with one moving to a different community to work in their area of expertise. Although all participants stated that they generally had positive experiences living in Thompson, some shared

long-term plans to move closer to their families out of Thompson. Others felt uncertain about their futures but were content to stay in the North for now. Participant D shared, “I’m heading to my second year. Let’s just see what happens after.” He further shared, “And since I’ve been here, I really like the place. I’m a quiet person, so I like where I live. It’s not too crowded.” Participant D appreciated living in a small community, coming from a smaller town in Jamaica.

Participant C described, “I want to be here, I think, at least for five to six years. Then, like I’m thinking, to move back (to India).” In his interview, he described wanting to be closer to his family, especially his mom. However, he expressed that if he were to remain in Canada, it would be in Thompson. Participant C explained, “I like 99% want to move back, but I don’t know about the 1%. I’m planning to go back to India and teach there, but if I’m here in Canada, then I’ll be in Thompson only. I’m not moving anywhere”.

Participant A expressed interest in pursuing further education in their teaching specialty and mentioned it would be easier to do so in Southern Manitoba. Participant A said, “Long term would be to go back to Winnipeg and get my master’s degree. Getting back to my friends and family is the plan, but I need to kinda, you know, fly away from the nest for a little bit and figure myself out and then come back.” At the end of our interview, Participant A shared that she had accepted a teaching position in another northern community for the upcoming year and was comfortable continuing her teaching experience in the North.

Participant B, from Alberta, expressed a desire to stay in Manitoba but considered moving to a slightly larger community with more amenities than Thompson offers. Participant B stated, “Thompson is awesome, and I prefer to live in Manitoba, but I’m young and want to see what else is out there.” Overall, everyone felt satisfied living in the North at this stage in their lives and careers, at least in the short term.

Advice to School Division

Participants were asked to share advice they would give to the school division for recruiting and retaining teachers. Participant D stressed that school leaders should provide teachers with full support from the start of their employment. This participant had several years of teaching experience before moving to Thompson, including prior experience in the North, and didn't require much support to feel successful; however, he acknowledged that others might not be in the same situation. Participant D explained, "If you hire somebody and put them here, you should not assume they are OK because not everybody will come forward and say, I need help." Participant D also emphasized the importance of mental health for teachers and highlighted the risks of burnout, suggesting that teachers should be given time to recover when necessary.

Although participants acknowledged many opportunities for teacher socialization through events organized by the local teachers' union, some remarked that they felt overwhelmed by meeting only "veteran" teachers at these gatherings. They suggested that attending a teacher event specifically designed for newcomers to Thompson would be beneficial. Participant C explained: "When you meet the new people who are also new to the place, then you feel like you are not alone. You can share your feelings that they may also be feeling."

The disadvantages of not having prior teaching experience in Canada were also discussed with Participant C, who had only taught outside of Canada. A suggestion for a teacher mentorship program was made. The teacher highlighted:

The new teachers should work with other experienced teachers in other schools, so that they can get some kind of experience of class management. I want some kind of environment and system from school board so that new teachers can work with experienced teachers.

It's worth noting that a different participant mentioned that the school district recently launched a new teacher mentorship program in Thompson. The teachers involved in this program were offered various opportunities, such as time to connect with other new teachers, meetings with the superintendent to express their needs, release time to shadow an experienced mentor of their choice, attend professional development sessions suited to their needs, and the opportunity to join a new teacher book club. The participants in *this* study did not take part in this mentorship program because they were either unaware of it, felt it did not apply to them, had access to other mentorship opportunities, or believed they already received sufficient support from their colleagues. The program's criteria for joining may also have influenced participation. Those who were new to Thompson, having arrived from other countries with some teaching experience, might not have had the chance to join, but could have benefited from the program during their adjustment period.

Regarding outreach, Participant B suggested that having school district members attend career fairs in other provinces would be beneficial. For this teacher, meeting "a face" from the North would have felt comforting before accepting the role. Participant A felt very embraced by colleagues when starting her position in Thompson and was given a tour of the community. Being shown the community was a welcoming gesture that she felt all new teachers would benefit from, whether from colleagues or other members of the school district.

Advice to New Teachers

Participants were also asked to provide any advice that may be valuable for teachers new to working in northern Manitoba. Participant D emphasized the importance of adaptability and openness in teaching in any new locale, regardless of whether it be the North. He shared:

Be able to adapt, be able to accept that things are not always going to be how you want them to be, because especially when it comes down to teaching everywhere you go, you're going to find that kids are different.

Regarding the North specifically, Participant D shared that students' interests and attitudes varied across the environments in which he taught. He observed that a lack of sun influenced the energy and attitudes of his students while teaching in Nunavut. He noted, "When it's darkness, you realize that their mood, their interest to learn all goes down. So that is something that should be taken into consideration from both teachers and administration." He felt it was important to understand how climate can influence a student's learning in a northern locale.

Participants A and B both shared similar feedback about socializing and connecting with others outside of teaching. Participant B said, "Go to every single event and any extracurricular activities. Put yourself out there. No one will turn you away." Participant A expressed similar thoughts, "It is what you make it out to be. Push yourself out of your comfort zone." They both took part in activities—such as women's hockey or community band—that helped them feel more rooted in the community. For them, relationship building was the key to their success in teaching in the North.

Participant C emphasized the importance of being culturally prepared. He commented, "You have to be familiar with the culture of Indigenous people." Participant C taught at a community school in Thompson with a large Indigenous population and volunteered at a family school event that helped him better connect with the families of his school. He explained his experience: "I learned a lot in that program because I talked with Indigenous people. The families came to the schools, and we cooked food for them and prepared everything." He

suggested that teachers become as familiar as possible with Indigenous cultures before moving North and get involved in school events that build connections with families.

Concluding Findings

This chapter presents the findings of this study, highlighting the experiences of four new teachers during their first year in Thompson, Manitoba. Despite facing diverse challenges, each participant achieved success in their initial year of teaching in the North. All participants completed their first year with positive results, supported by the nurturing environments they experienced. They established strong relationships with colleagues, which facilitated their adaptation to the new setting. The teachers overcame personal and professional hurdles, finding purpose in their roles. One teacher overcame initial doubts about remaining in the profession, while another navigated cultural and pedagogical adjustments.

Even when circumstances were difficult, participants often interpreted their challenges as learning opportunities. Participant A noted that moving outside their comfort zone allowed them to better understand themselves, both personally and professionally. Others mentioned how their efforts to integrate—whether through participating in local events, building relationships, or embracing new routines—ultimately helped them feel more grounded in their work and in the community.

A key finding in recruitment was the profound influence of personal networks; every participant was encouraged and ultimately persuaded by individuals within their "inner circles" to make the move to Thompson. This highlights the powerful role of word-of-mouth and trusted connections in attracting educators to northern communities.

The challenges these teachers faced were uniquely shaped by their professional journeys and life stages. For some, particularly those just beginning their teaching careers, the primary hurdles revolved around mastering pedagogy and classroom management within a new educational system, sometimes compounded by the cultural adjustments of moving to a new country. In contrast, the participant with extensive and diverse prior teaching experience faced different types of challenges. Having already developed strong adaptability in his career, his focus moved beyond the classroom to broader community integration, including navigating local services and the logistics of northern living.

Crucially, a strong sense of belonging within their school settings proved vital for all participants. The consistent and significant support they received from colleagues and administration was a recurring and deeply valued aspect of their experience, contributing immensely to their ability to thrive. This support system was instrumental in helping them persevere through their respective challenges.

Despite diverse origins, varied challenges, and distinct professional needs, all participants demonstrated adaptability. They successfully navigated their first year in Thompson and expressed contentment with their current lives and careers in the North, at least for the time being. Their experiences offer valuable insights into the multifaceted journey of new teachers in northern communities, underscoring the importance of personal networks in recruitment, the need for tailored support systems, and the profound impact of a welcoming school environment on fostering success and retention.

CHAPTER 5

Analysis, Discussion, and Recommendations

This chapter presents a comprehensive analysis and discussion of the findings derived from this qualitative study, integrating them with the theoretical and conceptual frameworks established in the literature review. The discussion is structured around the key themes identified in the research: sense of belonging, teacher preparedness, recruitment and retention. Following the analysis, specific recommendations are provided for both school divisions in Northern Manitoba and for universities, aimed at improving the experiences of teachers new to the North and enhancing long-term recruitment and retention strategies.

Sense of Belonging

The concept of a sense of belonging emerged as a critical theme in understanding the experiences of teachers new to Thompson, Manitoba. As highlighted in the literature review, a sense of belonging is a fundamental human need (Allen, 2020; Maslow, 1968), deeply influencing an individual's well-being, mental health, and decision-making (Allen, 2020; Baumeister & Leary, 1995). This study's findings strongly corroborate the significance of belonging, particularly within the immediate school environment, for new teachers integrating into a northern community.

The participants all consistently emphasized that their collegial relations and the supportive nature of their work environments were paramount to their overall sense of belonging within their schools. Fortunately, all teachers felt supported in their school settings by their colleagues and school leaders. Relationship dynamics are not always predictable in work settings; however, a clear correlation was found between collegial relations and job satisfaction in this study. One participant's decision to accept a position was even swayed by the positive and

welcoming experience of their interview. This directly aligns with Allen's (2020) assertion that the quality of a teacher's relationship with their principal significantly influences their sense of belonging within the school. This illustrates how early, positive interactions can plant the seeds of belonging, fostering a sense of comfort and acceptance from the outset.

While the literature, particularly Janzen and Cranston (2015), emphasizes the importance of a "relationship to place" and integration into the broader community, the findings suggest that for these new teachers, the school community served as the primary nexus for their sense of belonging. Participants generally felt positive about their school community, and discussions about belonging often centred on their connections within the school rather than relationships outside of work. This is likely because the immediate relationships they were forming were within their work settings as they acclimated to living in Thompson. This indicates that the immediate professional environment acted as a crucial anchor during their initial adjustment period.

However, some participants did find it essential to actively engage with the wider community to foster a broader sense of belonging. One participant, who was heavily involved in extracurricular activities, found that this helped build relationships with families and connect to the greater community of Thompson. Another highlighted the necessity of stepping "outside their comfort zone" by attending teacher events, socializing with colleagues, and participating in recreational sports to become part of the community, concluding, "It's gonna be what you make it... I haven't felt lonely." This echoes Johnston and Dewhurst's (2021) varying descriptions of belonging as an "act of doing" and aligns with Danyluk and Sheppard's (2015) findings on the importance of swift community integration for new teachers in northern contexts. The participant who experienced initial cultural shock upon arriving from outside Canada also found that the

"openness and accommodating nature of the students and staff" within the school facilitated their transition, even recalling a student's immediate, welcoming interaction. This highlights the significance of interpersonal connection, a fundamental aspect of belonging as defined by Allen (2020).

The sense of belonging for new teachers in Thompson was primarily cultivated within the supportive confines of their school communities, with strong collegial and administrative relationships being key. While broader community integration was recognized as beneficial by some, the immediate school environment appeared to be the most critical factor in fostering a sense of acceptance and connection, thereby contributing significantly to their perseverance and positive initial experiences in the North. This reinforces Skaalvik and Skaalvik's (2011) suggestion that belonging can serve as a barrier, cushioning the other challenges teachers may encounter.

Teacher Preparedness

The study's findings on teacher preparedness for working in northern communities reveal a nuanced picture, largely aligning with existing literature that points to the urban-centric nature of many Canadian teacher education programs (Janzen, 2019; White & Reid, 2008). Despite varied backgrounds, most participants expressed a feeling of being culturally unprepared for teaching in Thompson.

Participants who completed their university education in Canada noted that their programs did not offer northern practicums, except in rare circumstances, and even then, they would have felt "intimidated" by the prospect at the time. The influence of the media may have influenced their perceptions of the North, as mentioned by one participant. The findings suggest that while universities might incorporate Indigenous perspectives, the authenticity and practical

application of this preparation for a northern context were perceived as lacking. This speaks to Janzen's (2019) concern that simply offering indigenous content might not be sufficient if it doesn't adequately prepare teachers for the lived realities and unique cultural dynamics of northern indigenous communities.

One notable finding is that new teachers experienced varying needs, largely shaped by their educational and cultural backgrounds. Teachers who trained in Canadian universities generally felt pedagogically prepared, even if they lacked familiarity with northern indigenous communities. Their challenges centered more on social-emotional adjustment and environmental factors like isolation and long winters. In contrast, participants who came from outside Canada faced multi-faceted challenges: learning the mechanics of Canadian pedagogy while also adapting to unfamiliar cultural expectations and community norms. These teachers were navigating multiple transitions simultaneously—professionally, culturally, and personally—which amplified the complexity of their first-year teaching experiences. Recognizing this layered adjustment process is critical when designing induction, mentorship, or support programs.

For the participant who was the most recent newcomer to Canada, a large part of his preparation focused on adapting to the pedagogical differences within the Canadian education system. His suggestion of initial work as a substitute teacher or educational assistant highlights the need for tailored support for teachers new to the country. This participant didn't explore relationships outside of their work setting, as their priority was adapting to pedagogical differences in their teaching.

The study's findings on preparedness reveal a gap between current university offerings and the practical, cultural, and environmental realities of teaching in northern Manitoba. While formal education may provide theoretical knowledge, the participants' experiences highlight the

critical need for more authentic cultural immersion, practical pedagogical adaptation support, and direct exposure to northern contexts, ideally through structured practicums or mentorship opportunities, to genuinely prepare new teachers for these unique environments.

Recruitment

The challenges of teacher recruitment and retention in northern Canadian communities are well-documented (Kutsyruba et al., 2014; Kitchenbaum & Chasteauneuf, 2010), and this study offers valuable insights into the factors influencing these dynamics in Thompson, Manitoba. The findings reveal that while financial incentives play a role in initial attraction, personal networks and a supportive professional environment are crucial for both recruitment and the decision to stay. This suggests that colleagues play a significant role in retaining other teachers, which is a variable that can be unpredictable.

Regarding recruitment, one key finding is the significant influence of personal networks and word-of-mouth. All four participants were encouraged and ultimately persuaded by individuals within their "inner circles"—family members, mentors, or friends with northern connections—to consider and accept positions in Thompson. This underscores a powerful, informal recruitment channel that complements formal efforts. A main takeaway is the relational nature of recruitment: teachers are more likely to move north if they can see connection and support. Recruitment strategies that include personal stories, direct outreach from school representatives, and community visibility may resonate more deeply than generic job postings.

While financial incentives, such as the \$4,000 moving allowance, were acknowledged as "attractive," they were not the sole or primary driver for relocation. This aligns with Kitchenbaum and Chasteauneuf's (2010) and Janzen and Cranston's (2015) arguments that

motivations for teaching in the North extend beyond material gain, emphasizing the social and emotional implications of career choices.

Retention

The findings suggest that teacher retention cannot be understood as a one-size-fits-all issue. Instead, participants' experiences were shaped by interconnected needs influenced by prior experiences and cultural familiarity. Teachers who completed their education in Canada did not need to adjust to a new pedagogical system; their challenges were more often related to classroom management, emotional well-being, and long-term career considerations. In contrast, participants who immigrated to Canada navigated a broader range of challenges, including adapting to an unfamiliar educational system, learning new cultural norms, and developing classroom management practices, all while managing the practical realities of settling into a new community. These layered experiences highlight the need for supports that are both flexible and responsive. Approaches to retention that acknowledge the varied ways teachers come to feel at home in their profession are more likely to address their needs and encourage long-term commitment.

The findings paint an optimistic picture for the short term, as all four participants expressed intentions to continue teaching in the North for the upcoming year. This immediate retention can be largely attributed to the strong sense of belonging fostered within their schools, as well as their overall positive initial experiences. However, the participants' long-term plans reveal motivations to move closer to family or larger communities in Southern Manitoba for further education or more amenities.

Figure 1: Feeling at Home in Teaching



1. **Basic External Needs:** Housing, transportation, winter clothes
2. **Cultural & Contextual Adaptation:** Understanding northern and Indigenous contexts, adjusting to local norms.
3. **Pedagogical Confidence:** Curriculum familiarity, classroom management, student engagement
4. **Sense of Belonging:** Supportive colleagues, inclusive school culture, community connection
5. **Professional Growth:** Mentorship, leadership opportunities, advanced education

The above figure illustrates an interconnected model of what it means for teachers to feel at home in their profession. Rather than representing teacher needs as a linear or hierarchical progression, this model reflects the overlapping and relational nature of the experiences shared by participants in this study. At the centre of the figure is the concept of *feeling at home in teaching*, surrounded by five interrelated areas of need: basic external needs, cultural and contextual adaptation, pedagogical confidence, sense of belonging, and professional growth. Together, these areas reflect the conditions that supported teachers as they navigated their

personal and professional lives in northern Manitoba. This model could perhaps be applied to other teaching contexts.

The circular and overlapping nature of the figure emphasizes that these areas do not operate in isolation. Rather, they continually interact, reinforcing one another in ways that help a teacher feel settled, supported, and committed to the profession over time. For example, when basic external needs such as stable housing or reliable transportation are unmet, teachers may find it more difficult to fully engage in their professional roles or invest in relationships within the school community. Similarly, pedagogical confidence is often strengthened through a sense of belonging, as supportive colleagues and administrators provide guidance, reassurance, and opportunities for collaboration. Feeling accepted within a school culture can, in turn, encourage teachers to take professional risks, seek mentorship, and pursue leadership opportunities that support ongoing professional growth.

Cultural and contextual adaptation intersects with all other areas of the model. As teachers develop a deeper understanding of northern and Indigenous contexts, they often feel more confident in their teaching practices and more connected to their communities. This understanding supports stronger relationships with students and colleagues, reinforcing a sense of belonging and purpose. Professional growth is also shaped by these interactions, as teachers who feel culturally grounded and professionally supported are more likely to envision a future for themselves within their school division. Taken together, the figure illustrates that feeling at home in teaching is not achieved by any single factor but by the ongoing interaction of personal, cultural, and professional supports that collectively sustain teacher well-being, engagement, and retention.

Recommendations

This section includes recommendations informed by the findings of this study and the experiences shared by participants. The recommendations are directed toward three key groups: school divisions in northern Manitoba, universities and teacher education programs, and the Manitoba Teachers' Society. Together, these recommendations highlight ways in which institutions can more effectively support teachers who live and work in the North. These recommendations aim to strengthen conditions that help teachers feel supported in their roles and more likely to remain in northern communities over time.

Recommendations for School Divisions in Northern Manitoba

Teachers new to the North face challenges that go beyond the classroom. School divisions have an essential role in shaping how teachers experience their transition to northern communities. While housing and orientation are important, divisions can also influence whether teachers feel supported, connected, and valued. The following recommendations focus on ways that school divisions can strengthen teacher retention by promoting belonging, professional support, and community integration.

- **Foster a Culture of Belonging in Schools:** Teachers are more likely to remain in positions where they feel welcomed and valued. Divisions can encourage principals to create inclusive environments within their school where teachers' contributions are recognized and where efforts are made to integrate new teachers into the school culture. Principals could use professional development days to foster a sense of community within schools, as there are no guarantees that teachers will build connections outside of work. Ensuring that time is intentionally set aside during school hours to build relationships may be one of the most reliable and effective ways to strengthen belonging.

- **Enhance Visibility at Recruitment Fairs:** Sharing authentic stories and sending representatives to education fairs across Canada provides prospective teachers with a realistic picture of teaching in the North. This approach not only attracts candidates but also ensures that those who apply have clearer expectations.
- **Improve New Teacher Orientation:** Orientation could extend beyond the school to include community tours, introductions to local services, and opportunities to meet other teachers. This can help new arrivals settle more quickly and reduce feelings of isolation.
- **Develop and Promote Mentorship Programs:** School principals could pair new teachers with experienced mentors within their school. Peer mentorship could be critical for fostering a teacher's sense of belonging in their new school, and these relationships may not happen organically. Without guidance, new teachers are often left to figure out much on their own. A mentor can help by showing them how the school functions, checking in periodically, and, if possible, introducing them to the broader community. These intentional but straightforward supports can make the transition less overwhelming and help teachers feel connected and valued from the start.
- **Design Events Specifically for New Teachers:** Hosting regular meetups or discussion groups for teachers new to the North creates intentional spaces where they can share experiences, ask questions, and receive support. These opportunities build community and help teachers develop networks outside of their immediate classrooms.
- **Explore Travel Partnerships and Discounts:** One of the major challenges identified by participants in this study was the high cost of travel to and from Thompson. If possible, school divisions could explore partnerships with transportation companies such as Calm Air or regional bus lines to provide teachers with discounted fares. Similar arrangements

already exist for hospital staff in Thompson, and extending such benefits to educators would not only ease financial strain but also allow teachers to stay more connected to family and friends outside of the North.

Together, these recommendations encourage divisions to go beyond basic logistical support and focus on creating an environment where teachers feel both supported and connected. When divisions demonstrate care for teachers' personal and professional well-being, they create conditions that support retention and strengthen the overall school community.

Recommendations for Universities and Teacher Education Programs

Universities have a critical role in preparing teachers for the realities of teaching in northern and remote contexts. Too often, teacher preparation focuses narrowly on curriculum and pedagogy without addressing the cultural, social, and environmental challenges that new teachers face when relocating to the North. By embedding northern perspectives into teacher education and offering practical experiences in these settings, universities can help ensure that new teachers are better prepared to succeed and thrive.

- **Encourage Northern Practicum Opportunities:** Providing equitable access to northern practicums, along with financial support, allows pre-service teachers to gain firsthand experience in remote schools. These placements give candidates a realistic understanding of life in the North and can spark long-term interest in northern education. Without this exposure, many teachers enter the North unprepared for the realities of its context, which contributes to higher turnover.
- **Embed Northern and Indigenous Perspectives Throughout Curriculum:** Integrating Indigenous histories, cultures, and perspectives across teacher education programs is essential. It prepares educators to work respectfully and responsively with Indigenous

students and communities, who make up a significant portion of the northern population. Embedding these perspectives also challenges students to move beyond surface-level cultural awareness to a deeper, more meaningful understanding of reconciliation in education.

- **Create Partnerships with Northern School Divisions:** Building formal relationships between universities and northern divisions can improve recruitment pipelines and provide ongoing support for new teachers. Partnerships could include collaborative research that explores the needs of pre-service teachers, their preparedness for northern placements, and their perceptions of the North. This type of research could inform how both universities and divisions design support and better prepare new teachers. Another important area of collaboration is facilitating student teaching practicums in the North. Universities and divisions could work together to reduce barriers, provide financial and logistical support, and make the transition as smooth as possible. These efforts could be complemented by inviting current northern teachers to speak about their experiences. For example, universities could host round table discussions where teachers share authentic perspectives with students, considering northern placements. Hearing directly from teachers already in the North can be one of the most compelling recruitment tools. However, participation should always be voluntary, ensuring that teachers are free to share their insights authentically without feeling pressure from administrators.
- **Prepare Candidates for Cultural and Environmental Realities:** Moving to the North requires adaptation not only in teaching practice but also in daily life. Teacher candidates should be explicitly prepared for realities such as extreme weather, geographic isolation,

limited amenities, and the need for cultural humility. Preparing teachers for these challenges ahead of time can reduce culture shock and improve resilience.

- **Address Saviourism and Settler-Colonial Narratives:** Universities should actively challenge the harmful narrative that teachers are “saving” northern or Indigenous communities. Instead, programs should encourage humility, openness, mutual respect, and a willingness to learn from the communities in which teachers will live and work. This shift helps foster genuine partnerships and a sense of belonging, rather than reinforcing unequal power dynamics.

These recommendations highlight the importance of preparing teachers not just academically but also socially and emotionally. Universities that expose students to northern realities early in their training help ensure that teachers arrive with realistic expectations, cultural humility, and the adaptability needed to succeed. By preparing teachers in this way, universities can help strengthen retention and foster more sustainable education in the North.

Recommendations for the Manitoba Teachers’ Society

Given the unique challenges and opportunities associated with teaching in northern Manitoba, the Manitoba Teachers’ Society also has an important role to play in supporting educators working in these contexts. While MTS provides broad advocacy and professional support for teachers across the province, participants’ experiences in this study suggest that more targeted and visible support for northern educators would be beneficial.

- **Increase Outreach and Engagement in Northern Manitoba**

Strengthen MTS presence in northern regions through regular in-person or virtual engagement with teachers and school divisions, ensuring that northern educators feel seen, supported, and represented.

- **Offer Targeted Professional Learning Opportunities**

Develop and provide workshops and resources focused on Indigenous perspectives, northern contexts, and culturally responsive teaching practices that reflect the realities of teaching in the North.

- **Support Recruitment and Promotion of Northern Teaching**

Collaborate with universities and school divisions to promote teaching in northern Manitoba as a meaningful and sustainable career path, including sharing teacher experiences and highlighting professional opportunities in the North.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study focused on the experiences of teachers who were new to working in northern Manitoba, with a particular emphasis on belonging, preparedness, recruitment, and retention. While the findings highlight key areas of concern and insight, they also point to some directions for future research.

One area to further explore is the role of *collegial relationships*. Every participant in this study pointed to the value of feeling supported by colleagues and administrators. While school divisions can offer formal mentorship programs, the informal relationships that teachers build with one another are often just as impactful. These relationships can't be manufactured, but they play a significant role in a teacher's sense of belonging and their decision to stay. Further research could explore how professional relationships within a school community influence retention, particularly in remote or isolated settings.

With Canada continuing to welcome more immigrants and newcomers, it's also important to better understand the specific needs of international teachers. Their transitions often involve additional challenges—adjusting to a new culture, learning local teaching norms, and

navigating unfamiliar systems. As the teaching workforce becomes more diverse, research should focus on how best to support these teachers *so they can thrive, not just adapt*.

Another potential area of interest is further investigating what it means to *feel at home* in the teaching profession. Based on the experiences of the four participants, five interrelated areas of need emerged in this northern context: basic external needs, cultural and contextual adaptation, pedagogical confidence, sense of belonging, and professional growth. These five interrelated areas of what it means to feel at home in teaching emerged from the data.

Understanding how teachers' needs evolve over time—and what supports help them move from survival to stability to engagement—may provide a useful lens for improving retention across diverse educational settings.

In addition, two major themes emerged in this study that may warrant closer attention in future research: sense of belonging and teacher preparedness. While both proved to be essential factors in shaping participant experiences, they are areas that remain underexplored in the broader literature. A stronger understanding of how belonging is cultivated and how it impacts retention and job satisfaction could be particularly valuable. Similarly, preparedness for teaching in the North, especially among educators new to Canada, is not well documented and deserves further study. Research in these areas could help universities and school divisions tailor their recruitment and support practices more effectively.

While much existing research tends to focus on student needs, this study reinforces the need to prioritize teacher well-being. A healthy, supported teacher population is essential for any education system to thrive—especially in northern and remote regions where recruitment and retention remain ongoing challenges.

Conclusion

This study aimed to understand the experiences of teachers new to working and living in Thompson, Manitoba, and to explore broader issues of recruitment, retention, and preparedness in northern education. Through the voices of the participants, it became clear that connection, support, and adaptability are central to a teacher's experience in the North.

A strong sense of belonging within the school environment stood out as especially important. While some participants also formed relationships outside of work, it was the day-to-day support from colleagues and school leaders that shaped their early experiences. Belonging wasn't just about location—it was about feeling accepted, understood, and included.

Although financial incentives played a role in attracting some teachers to the North, personal networks often had a stronger influence. Teachers were encouraged to take a chance on Thompson by people they trusted. Similarly, retention was tied to whether teachers felt supported and could imagine a future in the community.

One of the most valuable insights from this research was understanding that teachers do not arrive in the North with the same set of needs. Some require support adapting to the climate, community, or a new country, while others focus on improving classroom management or building professional confidence. A model of what it means to *feel at home in teaching*—emerged from these stories, demonstrating how personal and professional needs can vary depending on background and experience—yet these needs are often interconnected.

Moving forward, it's important that school divisions and universities approach teacher support with increased flexibility and understanding. If we truly want teachers to stay *and* thrive in northern communities, we must acknowledge the full scope of what it means to belong, to be prepared, and to *feel at home in one's profession*. By paying attention to the diverse needs of new

teachers and by investing in relationships and community, we can work toward creating a more sustainable future for education in the North.

References

- Allen, K. A. (2020). *The psychology of belonging*. Routledge.
- Allen, K. A., Longmuir, F., Thorn, M. G., Melzak, E., Berger, E., Gallo Cordoba, B., Phillips, M., & Reupert, A. (2025). What facilitates a sense of belonging amongst Australian teachers?. *Australian Journal of Psychology*, 77(1), 2459190.
- Anhorn, R. (2008). The profession that eats its young. *The Delta Kappa Gamma Bulletin*, 74(3), 15–26.
- Bakan, D. (1966). *The duality of human existence: Isolation and communion in Western man*. Chicago, IL: Rand McNally.
- Baumeister, R. F., & Leary, M. R. (2017). The need to belong: Desire for interpersonal attachments as a fundamental human motivation. *Interpersonal development*, 57-89.
- Baxter, D. (2022, October 4). DESPERATE times: Northern students are feeling the pinch as the school division short 25 teachers. *Winnipeg Sun*. Retrieved November 6, 2023, from <https://winnipegsun.com/news/provincial/desperate-times-northern-students-feeling-pinch-as-school-division-short-25-teachers>.
- Bjorklund Jr, P. (2023). “I kind of have that place to sit”: First-year teachers’ experiences of belonging. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 131, 104187, 1-10.
- Black, S. (2001). A lifeboat for new teachers. *American School Board Journal*, 188(9), 46–48.
- Bowman, M. (2018). The necessity of mentoring programs in the north. *BU Journal of Graduate Studies in Education*, 10(1), 21–24.
- Brandon, J. (2015). Excellent teachers for northern and remote Alberta schools. *The complexity of hiring, supporting, and retaining new teachers across Canada*, 150.

Brandon University (2023). *Field Experience 2023-2024 Handbook*, Brandon University.

Retrieved July 28, 2024, from <https://www.brandonu.ca/education/files/HANDBOOK-2023-2024-1.pdf-1.pdf>

Brendtro, L., & Brokenleg, M. (2009). *Reclaiming youth at risk: Our hope for the future*.

Solution Tree Press.

Brown, B. (2022). *The gifts of imperfection: Let go of who you think you're supposed to be and embrace who you are*. Simon and Schuster.

Brown, R. (1993). Rural community satisfaction and attachment in mass consumer society. *Rural Sociology*, 58(3), 387-403.

Canadian Teachers' Federation (2015). *Teach for Canada CTF Briefing*.

Chase, E., & Martin, J. (2021). I can't believe I'm still protesting: Choppy waters for women in educational leadership. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, 24(1), 1–23.

DOI 10.1080/13603124.2019.1623917

Cooper, J. M., & Alvarado, A. (2006). *Preparation, recruitment, and retention of teachers*

(Education Policy Series No. 5). Paris, FR: International Institute for Educational

Planning, International Academy of Education. Retrieved from:

https://smec.curtin.edu.au/local/documents/5_Cooper_web_151206.pdf.

Creswell, J., & Creswell, J. (2018). *Research design* (5th ed.). SAGE Publishing.

Danyluk, P., & Sheppard, G. (2015). Early teaching experiences in northern, remote, or First

Nation, Métis and Inuit communities: Implications for Initial Teacher Education. *Change*

and progress in Canadian teacher education: Research on recent innovations in teacher

preparation in Canada, p. 217.

- Filstad, C., Traavik, L. E., & Gorli, M. (2019). Belonging at work: The experiences, representations and meanings of belonging. *Journal of workplace learning, 31*(2), 116-142.
- Greenslade, B. (2023, September 6). *Northern Manitoba School Division struggling with teacher shortage, increasing incentives* | CBC News. Retrieved from:
<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/manitoba/school-teacher-shortage-manitoba-1.6957001#:~:text=Frontier%20School%20Division%20is%20offering%20new%20teachers%20an%20additional%20%2410%2C000%20a%20year&text=The%20head%20of%20Manitoba's%20northernmost,to%20work%20in%20the%20area>.
- Hellsten, L. A. M., McIntyre, L. J., & Prytula, M. P. (2011). Teaching in rural Saskatchewan: First-year teachers identify challenges and make recommendations. *The Rural Educator, 32*(3), 11–21.
- Ingersoll, R. M. (2001). Teacher turnover and teacher shortages: An organizational analysis. *American Educational Research Journal, 38*(3), 499–534.
- Janzen, M. D. (2019). “The event of place”: Teacher candidates’ experiences of a northern practicum. *in education, 25*(2), 73-90.
- Janzen, M. D., & Cranston, J. (2015). Motivations and experiences of teachers in a northern Manitoba community. *Alberta Journal of Educational Research, 61*(2), 166-183.
- Johnston, D. H., & Dewhurst, Y. (2021). A study of student teachers’ experiences of belonging on teaching practice. *International Journal of Educational Research, 108*, 101780.
- Kachchhap, S. L., & Horo, W. (2021). Factors influencing school teachers' sense of belonging: An empirical evidence. *International Journal of Instruction, 14*(4), 775-790.

- Kitchenham, A., & Chasteauneuf, C. (2010). Teacher supply and demand: Issues in northern Canada. *Canadian Journal of Education*, 33(4), 869-896.
- Kutsyuruba, B., Godden, L., & Tregunna, L. (2014). Curbing early-career teacher attrition: A pan- Canadian document analysis of teacher induction and mentorship programs. *Canadian Journal of Educational Administration and Policy*, 161, 1-42. Retrieved from https://www.umanitoba.ca/publications/cjeap/pdf_files/kutsyuruba_etal.pdf.
- Kukla-Acevedo, S. (2009). Leavers, movers, and stayers: The role of workplace conditions in teacher mobility decisions. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 102(6), 443-452.
- Lyon, D. (2012). Thompson. In *The Canadian Encyclopedia* (March 2015 ed.). Retrieved from: <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/thompson> (Accessed: 01 November 2023).
- Macintosh, M. (2023, May 24). “Great disservice”: Manitoba certification rules freeze educators out of north. *Winnipeg Free Press*. Retrieved November 6, 2023, from <https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/breakingnews/2023/05/24/great-disservice-manitoba-certification-rules-freezes-educators-out-of-north>.
- Manitoba Teachers’ Society (2021). *Division comparisons*. Retrieved from: <https://www.mbteach.org/mtscms/2016/05/25/division-comparisons/> (Accessed: 26 October 2023).
- Mahar, A.L., Cobigo, V., & Stuart, H. (2014). Comments on measuring belonging as a service outcome. *Journal on Developmental Disabilities*, 20(2), 20–33.
- Maslow, A. H. (1968). *Toward a psychology of being*. D. Van Nostrand.

Mueller, R., Carr-Stewart, S., Steeves, L., & Marshall, J. (2011). Teacher recruitment and retention in select First Nations schools. *in education*, 17(3), 56-71.

Özdogru, M. (2022). School administrators' behaviors in the professional belonging of teachers. *Education Quarterly Reviews*, 5(2), 321-336.

Pesonen, H. V., Rytivaara, A., Palmu, I., & Wallin, A. (2021). Teachers' stories on sense of belonging in co-teaching relationship. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*, 65(3), 425-436.

School District of Mystery Lake (2023). *Facts about our district*. Retrieved from: https://www.mysterynet.mb.ca/about_us/facts_about_our_district (Accessed: 30 October 2023).

Skaalvik, E. M., & Skaalvik, S. (2011). Teacher job satisfaction and motivation to leave the teaching profession: Relations with school context, feeling of belonging, and emotional exhaustion. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 27(6), 1029–1038.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2011.04.001>

Statistics Canada. (2023). (table). *Census Profile*. 2021 Census of Population. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 98-316-X2021001. Ottawa. Released March 29, 2023.

<https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/dp-pd/prof/index.cfm?Lang=E> (accessed November 1, 2023).

Struyven, K., & Vanthournout, G. (2014). Teachers' exit decisions: An investigation into the reasons why newly qualified teachers fail to enter the teaching profession or why those who do enter do not continue teaching. *Teaching and teacher education*, pp. 43, 37–45.

University of Manitoba (2023). *Practicum Guide 2023-2024*. Available at:

<https://umanitoba.ca/education/sites/education/files/2021-08/bed-practicumguide.pdf>

(Accessed: 28 July 2024).

University of Winnipeg (2024). *Certification Student Handbook 2024-2025*. Retrieved July 28,

2024, from <https://www.uwinnipeg.ca/education/docs/practicum/cert-student.pdf>

Walkerdine, V. (1997). *Daddy's girl: Young girls and popular culture*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Wator, J., Patrick, P., & Yip, S. Y. (2025). Teachers' sense of belonging in school: a scoping review. *The Australian Educational Researcher*, 1-29.

White, S., & Reid, J.A. (2008). Placing teachers? Sustaining rural schooling through place-consciousness in teacher education. *Journal of Research in Rural Education*, 23(7), 1–

Wotherspoon, T. (2008). Teachers' work intensification and educational contradictions in Aboriginal communities. *The Canadian Review of Sociology*, 45(4), 389–418.

Appendix A: Guiding Questions for Research Participants

Introductory:

Tell me about yourself and your teaching career so far.

Prompts:

- Where are you from?
- Where did you graduate from?
- Where have you taught prior to this?

Recruitment

1. Why did you decide to move to Thompson?

Preparation for the North

1. What kind of preparation did you have for living and teaching in the North?
 - *What kinds of previous experiences did you have?*
 - *Where there people who encouraged/supported you?*
2. How prepared were you for teaching and living in the North?

Follow up: what type of preparation would have been helpful?

3. Did your university programme offer a northern practicum option?

Follow Up: If yes, did you participate in it? If yes, what was that experience like?

Follow up: How supported did you feel in doing the northern practicum?

Follow up: what would have been helpful in regards to support?

4. Do you feel that students in Thompson have cultures, interests, or needs that might be different from [where you came from]? If yes, please explain.
5. Follow up: How prepared do you feel in supporting your students and their particular cultures, interests, or needs? *Prompt: what type of preparation has helped or would have helped (depending on how they answer). If not, please explain what type of preparation could have helped.*

Sense of Belonging

1. Do you feel a sense of belonging in your school?

Prompt: Why/why not? Please describe experiences that have influenced your response.

2. Do you feel like you have a sense of belonging in the North?

Prompt: Why/why not? Please describe an experience or two that has influenced your response.

3. What would improve or impede your sense of belonging...

Prompt: At school? In your community?

4. *If you were to give advice to a new teacher about moving to Thompson what would it be?*

Retention

1. Tell me about your short- and long-term goals when it comes to teaching and where you want to end up?
Prompt:
 - How long do you think you will live and teach in Thompson?
2. What factors would influence your decision to stay in Thompson?
Follow up: What factors would influence your decision to leave?
3. If you could give the school division advice on recruiting and retaining teachers to Thompson what would it be?
4. What challenges have you experienced while teaching in Thompson?
5. Do you plan on living and teaching here long term?
6. What has influenced your decision to remain or leave Thompson?
Prompt: If leaving, is there anything that could happen that might change this decision?

Closing

1. Is there anything you would like to add or say that we haven't had a chance to talk about?

Appendix B: Recruitment Materials

EMAIL LETTERHEAD

EMAIL TO SUPERINTENDENT

To: Superintendent of Human Resources & Policy, Thompson, Manitoba

From: Natalie Pegus, Principal Investigator, Graduate Student at the University of Manitoba

Subject Line: Permission to Perform Study: Belonging, Community, and Preparedness: Teacher Experiences of Working and Living in Northern Manitoba

My name is Natalie Pegus, and I am a graduate student completing my master's thesis in the Faculty of Education at the University of Manitoba. I am currently working on a research project to better understand the challenges of teachers new to working in northern Manitoba to help improve recruitment and retention strategies in this province region. For this study, I hope to interview teachers in your school division. I have attached a few documents to this email. The first document shares more study details and is a permission form addressed to you for conducting this study in your school division. I have also attached a letter of permission addressed to the principals in your school division. I ask for your willingness to share this document with your principals if you agree to have this study conducted in your school division. Upon the approval of your school principals, teachers will be given information to contact me directly should they meet the inclusion criteria. For your reference, I have attached the informed consent form that will be shared with participants to help you better understand the objectives of this study.

Please don't hesitate to contact me if you have any questions.

Natalie Pegus
pegusn@myumanitoba.ca
Principal Investigator
Graduate Student
University of Manitoba

LETTERHEAD

Letter to Potential Research Participants

Date: May, 2025

To Teachers of Thompson, Manitoba

From: Natalie Pegus, Principal Investigator, Graduate Student at the University of Manitoba

**RE: Participation in Study: Belonging, Community, and Preparedness:
Teacher Experiences of Working and Living in Northern Manitoba**

To Whom it May Concern,

I am a graduate student completing my master's thesis in the Faculty of Education at the University of Manitoba. The purpose of this qualitative study is to better understand the challenges of teachers new to working in northern Manitoba to help improve recruitment and retention strategies in this region of the province. Themes of teacher preparedness, sense of belonging, and community will be explored in this study. This research will explore a teacher's relationship with their school and community. A constructivist worldview will be utilized to address the significance of social interactions in a small and northern community (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The overarching research question of this study is: What are the perceived challenges of teachers new to living in northern Manitoba?

In this qualitative study, I will conduct **one-hour** interviews via University Manitoba Microsoft Teams with teachers new to living and working in Thompson. The overall aim of this research is to improve recruitment and retention strategies in northern Manitoba. As compensation, I will offer a \$25 gift card of choice.

Participants should meet the following criteria:

- As a participant, you are a teacher in your first or second year of teaching in Thompson, Manitoba and new to living in Northern Manitoba. Not necessarily your first year in the profession.
- As a participant, you are an adult (18 years or older).

Confidentiality will be maintained via the use of pseudonyms for all participants and any school names that participants refer to during the interview. All appropriate processes for storing and shredding research materials will be followed. This research has been approved by the Research Ethics Board at the University of Manitoba, Fort Garry Campus.

In order to conduct this study, I require your permission to participate. If you would like additional information prior to participating, you can contact me at:

Natalie Pegus

pegusn@myumanitoba.ca

Principal Investigator

Running head: BELONGING, COMMUNITY, AND PREPAREDNESS

Graduate Student at University of Manitoba

My advisor's contact information is the following:

Dr. Frank Deer

Frank.deer@umanitoba.ca

Curriculum Teaching and Learning (CTL)

Professor at University of Manitoba

I look forward to hearing from you and thank you for considering participating in this qualitative research project.

Sincerely,

Natalie Pegus

Graduate Student

University of Manitoba

Appendix C: Permission Letters

LETTERHEAD

Letter of Permission to Superintendent

Date: May, 2025

To: Angele Bartlett, Superintendent of Human Resources & Policy, Thompson, Manitoba

From: Natalie Pegus, Principal Investigator, Graduate Student at University of Manitoba

**RE: Permission to Perform Study: Belonging, Community, and Preparedness:
Teacher Experiences of Working and Living in Northern Manitoba**

Dear Ms. Bartlett,

I am a graduate student completing my master's thesis in the Faculty of Education at the University of Manitoba. The purpose of this qualitative study is to understand better the challenges of teachers new to working in northern Manitoba to help improve recruitment and retention strategies in this region of the province. Themes of teacher preparedness, sense of belonging, and community will be explored in this study. This research will explore a teacher's relationship with their school and community. A constructivist worldview will be utilized to address the significance of social interactions in a small and northern community (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The overarching research question of this study is: What are the perceived challenges of teachers new to living in northern Manitoba?

In this qualitative study, I will conduct **one-hour** interviews via Microsoft Teams with teachers new to living and working in Thompson. The overall aim of this research is to improve recruitment and retention strategies in northern Manitoba. Participants will be offered a \$25 gift card of their choice as compensation.

The participants will be chosen based on the following criteria:

- The participants will be teachers in their first year working and living in Thompson, Manitoba. They will also be new to working and living in northern Manitoba. They don't need to be in their first year of profession.
- If insufficient participants can be interviewed in their first year of living in Thompson, teachers in their second year will be considered.
- Participants must be adults (18 years or older).
- Five participants will be selected from as many different schools as possible.

I request your permission to conduct this study and your willingness to share study information and consent forms with your school principals. Through these materials, principals will choose to

contact me directly with their consent to conduct this study in their schools. Upon approval, the principals will share recruitment materials with their teachers. Teachers who self-identify as meeting the inclusion criteria will also contact me directly with their interest in participating in the study.

Confidentiality will be maintained via pseudonyms for the participants and any school names they refer to during the interview. All appropriate processes for storing and shredding research materials will be followed.

I agree for this study to be conducted in the School District of Mystery Lake and am willing to share study materials with school principals.	<input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO
---	--

Name	Signature	Date
------	-----------	------

This research has been approved by the Research Ethics Board at the University of Manitoba, Fort Garry Campus. Any concerns can be directed to:

Human Ethics Officer
Fort Garry
208-194 Dafoe Road
University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, MB R3T 2N2 Ph: (204) 474-7122

humanethics@umanitoba.ca

If you would like additional information, you can contact me and/or my advisor at:

Natalie Pegus
pegusn@myumanitoba.ca
Principal Investigator
Graduate Student
University of Manitoba

Dr. Frank Deer
Frank.deer@umanitoba.ca
Curriculum Teaching and Learning (CTL)
Professor
University of Manitoba

Sincerely,

Natalie Pegus
Graduate Student
University of Manitoba

LETTERHEAD

Letter of Permission to Principals

Date: May, 2025

To: School Principal, Thompson, Manitoba

From: Natalie Pegus, Principal Investigator, Graduate Student at the University of Manitoba

**Subject Line: Participation in Study: Belonging, Community, and Preparedness:
Teacher Experiences of Working and Living in Northern Manitoba**

To Whom it May Concern,

I am a graduate student completing my master's thesis in the Faculty of Education at the University of Manitoba. The purpose of this qualitative study is to better understand the challenges of teachers new to working in northern Manitoba to help improve recruitment and retention strategies in this region of the province. Themes of teacher preparedness, sense of belonging, and community will be explored in this study. This research will explore a teacher's relationship with their school and community. A constructivist worldview will be utilized to address the significance of social interactions in a small and northern community (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The overarching research question of this study is: What are the perceived challenges of teachers new to living in northern Manitoba?

In this qualitative study, I will conduct **one-hour** interviews via the University of Manitoba Microsoft Teams with teachers new to living and working in Thompson. The overall aim of this research is to improve recruitment and retention strategies in northern Manitoba. As compensation, the participants will receive a \$25 gift card of their choice.

Teachers will be selected to participate based on the following criteria:

- As a participant, the teacher will be in their first or second year of teaching in Thompson, Manitoba and new to living in Northern Manitoba. Not necessarily in their first year in the profession.
- As a participant, they will be an adult (18 years or older).

Confidentiality will be maintained by using pseudonyms for all participants and any school names that participants refer to during the interview. All appropriate processes for storing and shredding research materials will be followed. This research has been approved by the Research Ethics Board at the University of Manitoba, Fort Garry Campus.

I request your permission to conduct this study at your school and your willingness to share the study information and consent forms with your school teachers. Through these materials, teachers who self-identify as meeting the inclusion criteria will contact me directly with their interest in participating in this study.

Appendix D: Participant Informed Consent Form

LETTERHEAD

Participant Informed Consent Form

Study Title

Belonging, Community, and Preparedness: Teacher Experiences of Working and Living in Northern Manitoba

Student Principal Investigator

Natalie Pegus

Master's Student

Educational Administration, Foundations and Psychology

pegusn@myumanitoba.ca

Student's Advisor

Dr. Frank Deer

Professor

Curriculum, Teaching and Learning (CTL)

Frank.Deer@umanitoba.ca

Conflicts of Interest and Undue Influence

There is no conflict of interest.

You are being invited to participate in a research study. This consent form, a copy of which a copy of which you can download or print, is only part of the process of informed consent. If you want more details about something mentioned here or information not included here, feel free to ask any of the people named above. Please take the time to read this document and any accompanying information carefully. It is very important that you understand:

- what is being asked of you,
- what the risks and benefits of participation are, and
- how the information you provide will be used and stored

Purpose of the Study

I am doing this research for a thesis project under the supervision of Dr. Frank Deer. The purpose of this study is to understand better the challenges of teachers new to working in northern Manitoba and to help improve recruitment and retention strategies in this region of the province. This study will focus on teachers new to living and working in Thompson, Manitoba. Themes of teacher preparedness, sense of belonging, and community will be explored in this study. This research will explore a teacher's relationship with their school and broader community.

Study Procedures

If you decide to participate in the study, we will meet for a 50 to 60-minute interview through UM Teams. With your consent, I will video-record our conversation through UM Teams. After your interview, you can review the transcript (the document of what you said). You can add, change, or delete information from the transcript as you see fit. I will email you a copy of the transcript approximately 2 weeks after the interview, and you will have 2 weeks to respond. If I don't hear from you after 2 weeks, I will assume you are okay with the transcript. I will also email you the analysis of our interview as written in the results section of my thesis so you can make comments and suggest revisions. You will have 2 weeks to respond from the date the results are emailed, if no response is received, I will continue with the research study under the presumption that the content is approved.

Study Risks

When sharing personal information, there is always a risk that bringing up specific memories could become uncomfortable or upsetting. You will not be pressed to share experiences you find distressing or uncomfortable. I will ensure that interviews are private so that you feel safe and secure while expressing yourself.

There is also a risk that individuals can be identified, even though I will do my utmost to protect identities. If your identity is inadvertently exposed, and critical comments of your school district or others are shared, it could potentially harm your professional reputation.

Study Benefits

Although there are no direct benefits of participating in this study, sharing your perspective as a new teacher working and living in northern Manitoba may influence future recruitment and retention practices by school leaders. The results of this study could also affect the future preparation of teacher candidates wishing to obtain a northern teaching post. A better understanding of the challenges of teachers living in northern Manitoba will ultimately help serve the needs of northern students who deserve a consistent and reliable education from teachers thriving in the North. To better support teachers is to support students better.

Compensation

You will be given a \$25 gift certificate of your choosing to compensate you for your time in this study. Your name and signature on an honorarium form will be required as a condition to receive compensation. My advisor will retain this form through the UM OneDrive for 7 years to comply with UM financial procedures. Compensation will be given when consent is given to participate in this study. The gift certificate will be shared via email as this study will be conducted virtually.

Use and Storage of Information

All the information you provide as a participant in this study is confidential, so we, as the research team must keep it safe. We will do our best; however, it is impossible to guarantee absolute confidentiality.

I will be required to share your personal information if allegations of child abuse are revealed to me in the interview. I will be legally obligated to report those allegations to authorities.

Coded Data

Your information will be stored on UM OneDrive. We will have a file that links your name to your information using a code. We will keep the file with your name, contact information, and code separate from the research information you share. When the results of this study are shared, pseudonyms will be used.

Recordings will be destroyed by approximately August 2025 after the research is complete. Coded transcripts will be kept until approximately December 2025 for potential review. Any potential paper documents will also be shredded by December 2025.

Your research information may be shared outside of the University of Manitoba with researchers, other organizations, and/or made publicly available. The information is being shared for further analysis or testing, as part of the research study, and/or because a funder or journal requires it. It will not include your name or any information that could identify you.

Dissemination

The study results will be shared through 1) the publication of a master's thesis, 2) possible journal publications and presentations in relevant academic fields, and/or 3) a summarized report of the study results to be sent to interested participants.

Withdrawing

Your participation in this research study is voluntary. You can choose the level of participation in the study to which you feel comfortable. You may withdraw from the study without any explanation. You will not be penalized in any way. You will keep your honorarium, but the honorarium declaration form will be retained for 7 years. All your information will be destroyed if you withdraw partway through the study. You may withdraw from the study until May 2025. After this date, the data analysis will start, so withdrawing your information may not be possible. To withdraw, please contact me at my phone number or email. I can be reached at pegusn@myumanitoba.ca.

Questions or Concerns

Designated University of Manitoba personnel may check that this study is being done safely and properly. To do this, they may visit the study site or review the research records. We will tell you if someone outside the research team will be there while you are participating. If this makes you uncomfortable, please tell a member of the research team, who will ask the personnel to return at another time. This study has been reviewed and approved by a Research Ethics Board at the University of Manitoba. However, this does not mean that participation is risk-free. If you have questions about

your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Office of Human Research Ethics at humanethics@umanitoba.ca or (204) 474-7122. If you have any questions, concerns, or complaints about this study, you may contact any members of the research team listed on the first page or the Office of Human Research Ethics.

Consent

By signing this document, I agree that:

- I have read the above information or had it read to me.
- I have had the opportunity to ask and have answered all of my questions.
- I understand what is being asked of me.
- I will be taking part in a research study.
- I may freely stop or leave the research study activities at any time.
- My information may be shared outside the University of Manitoba.
- I do not waive my legal rights by participating in the study.

Notice Regarding Collection, Use, and Disclosure of Personal Information

Your personal information is being collected under the authority of *The University of Manitoba Act*. The University of Manitoba is committed to preserving your right to privacy. The information you provide will be used by the University to support our research. Your personal information will not be used or disclosed for other purposes, unless permitted by The Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act or The Personal Health Information Act. If you have any questions about the collection of personal information: Ph: 204-474-9462 or Email: fippa@umanitoba.ca.

I agree to participate in this study.	<input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO
---------------------------------------	--

Name of Participant

Participant's Signature

Date

For oral consent:

I read and explained to the participant all the information in this consent form before receiving the participant's consent. The participant verbally told me their consent to participate in this research.

Name of Participant

Researcher's Signature

Date

Other Consent Statements

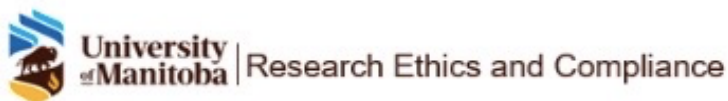
I agree to have the video enabled on Microsoft Teams call during the interview.	<input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO
I agree to have our video conversation recorded on Microsoft Teams.	<input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO

I agree to have (check one):

A pseudonym (fake name) will be used to protect your identity when the results of this study are shared...

- I would like the researcher to select my pseudonym.
- I want to choose my pseudonym. I would like my pseudonym to be:

Appendix E: Research Ethics and Compliance Protocol Approval



Human Research Ethics - Fort Garry
66 Chancellors Circle
Winnipeg, MB R3T 2N2
humanethics@umanitoba.ca

PROTOCOL APPROVAL

Effective: March 28, 2025

Expiry: March 27, 2026

Principal Investigator: Natalie Pegus
Advisor(s): Frank Deer
Protocol Number: HE2025-0001
Protocol Title: *BELONGING, COMMUNITY, AND PREPAREDNESS: TEACHERS SHARE EXPERIENCES OF WORKING AND LIVING IN NORTHERN MANITOBA*

Martha Koch, Acting Chair, REB2

Research Ethics Board 2 has reviewed and approved the above research. The Office of Human Research Ethics (OHRE) is constituted and operates in accordance with the current *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans- TCPS 2 (2022)*.

Please note the following important information about your protocol approval:

- i. Approval is granted for the research and purposes described in the protocol only.
- ii. Any changes to the protocol or research materials must be approved by the OHRE **before implementation**.
- iii. Any **deviations** to the research or **adverse events** must be reported to the OHRE immediately through an **REB Event**.
- iv. This approval is valid **for one year only**. A Renewal Request must be submitted and approved prior to the above expiry date.
- v. A **Protocol Closure** must be submitted to the OHRE when the research is complete or if the research is terminated.
- vi. The University of Manitoba may request to audit your research documentation to confirm compliance with this approved protocol, and with the UM [Ethics of Research Involving Humans](#) policies and procedures.

Appendix F: Certificate of Completion –TCPS 2: Core

