

Factors Influencing Expatriate Teacher Engagement in K-12 International Schools in
China

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to determine the factors that influence expatriate teacher engagement in K-12 international schools in China. Using an exploratory qualitative methodology, 23 teachers and 6 administrators at three different international schools in China were interviewed on site in focus groups and individual interviews. The following research questions guided the inquiry:

1. In what ways do expatriate international-school teachers and administrators describe teacher engagement?
2. In what ways do expatriate international-school teachers exhibit engagement?
3. What are the barriers to expatriate teacher engagement in K-12 international schools?
4. What are the drivers of expatriate teacher engagement in K-12 international schools?

Key findings suggest that highly engaged teachers impact student learning directly through their interactions with students and continuous modification of instruction in response to student performance and learning needs. Teachers further support student learning through engagement with colleagues and with the profession. Supportive leadership, meaningful work, and supportive colleagues were seen as key drivers of teacher engagement. Teacher transience, overwhelm, cultural differences, and personal health or family issues were seen as barriers to teacher engagement.

Implications for practice include guidelines for developing a school-level teacher-engagement strategy based on embedding key drivers of engagement into the culture of the school and using a transformational leadership approach and the Job-Demands Resources model at the organizational and individual level.

The impact of teacher transience is an important area for future research as is expatriate teachers' intercultural competence as international schools continue to grow and accommodate more host-country students.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Statement of the Problem

The concept of employee engagement has attracted interest from an increasing number of researchers and practitioners in recent years because it appears to be a promising pathway to better organizational results and employee well-being during a time described as an “employee engagement crisis” (Mann & Harter, 2016, para. 1). The number of peer-reviewed articles on issues related to employee engagement published since 2010 has increased fivefold over the previous decade, fueled largely by both the reported benefits of employee engagement, the costs of disengagement, and the realization industrial-era human resource practices are not effective in a knowledge economy (Friedman, 2014; Shantz, 2017). Employee engagement is considered “one of the most compelling if not the single most important issue in management research and practice in the last decade” (Saks, 2017, p. 76).

There is no single widely-accepted definition of employee engagement, though most definitions indicate employee engagement involves “a holistic investment of the entire self, focuses on work performed on a job, and involves a willingness to dedicate physical, cognitive, and emotional resources to one’s job” (Saks, 2017, p. 78). Engagement is contrasted with burnout, thus, “whilst burned-out workers feel exhausted and cynical, their engaged counterparts feel vigorous and enthusiastic about their work” (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003, p. 3). One of the most widely used definitions used in research is the definition of work engagement associated with the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES):

Engagement is a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption. Rather than a momentary and

specific state, engagement refers to a more persistent and pervasive affective-cognitive state that is not focused on any particular object, event, individual, or behavior. Vigor is characterized by high levels of energy and mental resilience while working, the willingness to invest effort in one's work, and persistence even in the face of difficulties. Dedication refers to being strongly involved in one's work and experiencing a sense of significance, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride, and challenge. Absorption, is characterized by being fully concentrated and happily engrossed in one's work, whereby time passes quickly and one has difficulties with detaching oneself from work (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003, pp. 4–5).

Employee engagement has been associated with better employee performance, lower absenteeism, better health, more positive attitudes, organizational citizenship behavior, employee retention, organizational productivity, safety, profitability, quality, and customer satisfaction (Gallup, 2013; Saks, 2017). Conversely, actively disengaged employees are estimated to cost U.S. companies \$450 to \$550 billion per year in lost productivity (Sorenson & Garman, 2013). Disengagement is also associated with burnout, which can lead to health problems, turnover, and negative effects on family life (Coulter & Abney, 2008; Hakanen, Bakker, & Schaufeli, 2006). American companies are currently spending an estimated \$1 billion on engagement-related initiatives annually (Hollon, 2012). However, despite the increase in research and various solutions offered by management consulting companies, worldwide engagement levels remain stagnant or in decline (Aon Hewitt, 2015; Gallup, 2013; Saks, 2017). Saks (2017) suggested there is a gap between what is known from engagement research and what is being fruitfully applied in the workplace and has proposed organizations need better context-specific

understandings of engagement. As a result, in the current study, I focused on the specific context of expatriate teachers in K-12 international schools.

In a survey of school administrators, Eisele-Dyrli and Bollinger (2016) found over 80% of administrators believe teacher engagement has a high impact on student success. The same percentage also believe teacher engagement has a high impact on staff morale and teacher retention, factors that can indirectly influence student success (Eisele-Dyrli & Bollinger, 2016). Empirical research on teacher engagement supports connections between teacher engagement and teacher performance, organizational citizenship behavior, student engagement in learning, and student performance in math, science, and reading (Bakker & Bal, 2010; Gallup, 2014; Runhaar, Konermann, & Sanders, 2013).

Teacher engagement levels can have an impact on student success directly through performance in the classroom, and indirectly through an impact on school culture and teacher retention. A five-year plan for the education sector of Alberta, Canada includes increasing teacher engagement as an explicit objective and states, “when educators are fully engaged in their work, they have the energy, drive, and passion to meet the needs of the learners in their care. Teacher engagement is key to pushing the envelope of learning innovation, student success and teacher retention” (Government of Alberta, 2010, p. 18).

In the classroom, teacher engagement can be expressed as both emotional and behavioral engagement. A teacher’s emotional engagement, as demonstrated by his or her demeanor, enthusiasm, intensity, or sense of humor, can influence students’ emotional engagement with learning (Marzano & Pickering, 2011). Many exemplary teacher behaviors such as creating differentiated assignments or quickly addressing

problematic student behaviors are indicative of teachers' behavioral engagement and have been found, in empirical studies, to improve student learning (Danielson, 2013).

Beyond the classroom, teacher engagement levels may influence school climate, which is also associated with better student performance (MacNeil, Prater, & Busch, 2009). For example, teachers may interact frequently with colleagues, offering support and sharing ideas and resources, or may withdraw and retract support, isolating themselves and leaving others isolated. Whether positive or negative, school climate can be contagious, leading to a self-perpetuating cycle and continuous influence (Gallup, 2013; Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001).

Finally, teacher engagement may be linked to teacher retention, which is frequently cited as a critical issue in both domestic and international education (Barnes, Crowe, & Schaefer, 2007; Ingersoll, 2001; Mancuso, Roberts, & White, 2011; Ronfeldt, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2013). Excessive teacher turnover leads to high costs for recruitment, training, and teacher induction. Moreover, excessive turnover has a negative impact on student learning because it burdens the staying-teachers and disrupts student-teacher relationships, staff cohesion, and program coherence (Ronfeldt et al., 2013). In the recent discourse on teacher retention, researchers have called for a look beyond the proximal causes of teacher retention such as low salary and into underlying conditions that may help sustain teachers in a fulfilling career (Schaefer, Long, & Clandinin, 2012). As teacher engagement may be an important antecedent to teacher turnover, an understanding of teacher engagement may help school leaders reduce teacher turnover (Rana, Ardichvili, & Tkachenko, 2014; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). To summarize the nature of the problem, engaged teachers are more effective in the classroom, have a positive influence on school culture, and are less likely to leave the job or the profession.

What is the extent of the teacher engagement problem? This question has been difficult to accurately quantify due to the varying measures used and evolving definitions of engagement, though there have been claims of teacher engagement being a widespread problem. Articles titled “Most Teachers Are Not Engaged in Their Jobs” (Bidwell, 2014) and “Lack of Teacher Engagement Linked to 2.3 Million Missed Work Days”(Hastings & Agrawal, 2015) appeared after the 2014 Gallup report, *State of America’s Schools*, which reported just 31% of teachers were engaged in their jobs. However, Eisele-Dyrli and Bollinger (2016) reported 70% or more teachers were somewhat or highly engaged based on a survey of U.S. school administrators. Whether the percentage in any particular school is closer to 30% or 70%, teacher engagement is worth assessing and addressing due to the numerous associations between teacher engagement and positive school outcomes.

Teacher engagement may be influenced by both internal and personal factors or external job-related factors; numerous antecedents of engagement have been proposed and some have been empirically tested (Wollard & Shuck, 2011). In the job-demands resources (JD-R) model of employee engagement, engagement is hypothesized to be driven by either personal or job “resources” (Bakker, Demerouti, & Sanz-Vergel, 2014). In the model, job resources include things such as autonomy, feedback, and social support and personal resources include attitudes such as optimism, self-efficacy, and self-esteem.

Personal resources and individual factors such as age, education, and attitudes have been found to have a lesser effect on engagement than job resources, though some findings are contradictory (Maslach et al., 2001; Runhaar et al., 2013). There is a perception among school administrators in the United States that older teachers are less

engaged than younger teachers and this has been empirically supported in some studies (Eisele-Dyrli & Bollinger, 2016; Guglielmi, Bruni, Simbula, Fraccaroli, & Depolo, 2016). However, experience has shown to be positively correlated with teacher engagement (Faskhodi & Siyyari, 2018). In a study of Italian teachers, Guglielmi et al. (2016) found age may be more of a mediating variable between resources and engagement rather than a simple predictor of engagement. In their study, various job resources influenced varying teacher age cohorts differently; namely, younger teachers were more influenced by opportunities for professional growth and interaction with colleagues, while older teachers were more influenced by opportunities to be recognized as an expert (Guglielmi et al., 2016). As the findings on the effects of age and experience on teacher engagement are inconsistent, these variables need further study.

In this study, I focused on the relationship between job resources, as opposed to personal resources, and teacher engagement because job resources can be shaped by school leaders and have been proven to have a greater effect on engagement than personal resources (Maslach et al., 2001; Runhaar et al., 2013). An understanding of the interplay between job demands, job resources, and teacher engagement could help school leaders allocate limited school resources where they are most likely to have the greatest effect.

Context of the Study

The context of this study was K-12 international schools in the East Asia Regional Council of Overseas Schools (EARCOS) region, specifically in China. EARCOS was founded in 1968 to develop a supportive collaborative network for schools in the region, many of which were geographically isolated (EARCOS, n.d.). The EARCOS association began with 19 member schools and now has grown to 159 schools in 19 countries. Demand for international education in East Asia continues to grow rapidly. The subjects of this study were the expatriate teachers in EARCOS schools. Expatriate teachers in international schools presumably face many of the same demands that they would if they were teaching in their home countries such as student behavior, parent relationships, and workload in addition to the stress of expatriation, or moving to a new country. The additional uncertainty, ambiguity, and loss of control that comes with international relocation makes the international school environment and experience a unique context for the study of teacher engagement. Upon moving to a new country, expatriate teachers face multiple life stressors before even starting work and have to cope with them without a familiar social support network (Wilkinson & Singh, 2010). These demands could erode teacher engagement. However, researchers have found in some cases expatriate teachers exhibit less burnout, thus possibly higher engagement, than teachers working in their country of origin (Coulter & Abney, 2008). This may be due to favorable work environments and the availability of pertinent job resources within the school. In the review of literature on this subject, I explored the recent research findings and identified factors that are likely to influence expatriate teacher engagement.

Statement of Study Purpose

The purpose of this study was to determine the factors that influence expatriate teacher engagement in K-12 international schools in China.

Research Questions

1. In what ways do expatriate international-school teachers and administrators describe teacher engagement?
2. In what ways do expatriate international-school teachers exhibit engagement?
3. What are the barriers to expatriate teacher engagement in K-12 international schools?
4. What are the drivers of expatriate teacher engagement in K-12 international schools?

Definitions

Absorption. As a dimension of work engagement, “absorption is characterized by being fully concentrated and happily engrossed in one’s work, whereby time passes quickly and one has difficulties with detaching oneself from work” (Schaufeli & Bakker 2003, p. 5).

Burnout. Syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization of others, and a feeling of reduced personal accomplishment (Maslach, 1982).

Dedication. As a dimension of work engagement, “dedication refers to being strongly involved in one’s work and experiencing a sense of significance, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride, and challenge”(Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003, p. 5).

International school. A school that “delivers a curriculum to any combination of pre-school, primary or secondary students, wholly or partly in English outside an English-speaking country. Or...a school...in a country where English is one of the

official languages,...offers an English-medium curriculum other than the country's national curriculum and the school is international in its orientation (International School Consultancy Research, n.d., para. 6).

Job demands. Physical, psychological, social, or organizational aspects of the job that require sustained physical and/or psychological (i.e. cognitive or emotional) effort and are therefore associated with certain physiological and/or psychological costs (Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, & Schaufeli, 2001).

Job resources. Physical, psychological, social, or organizational aspects of the job that (a) may reduce job demands and the associated physiological and psychological costs; (b) are functional in achieving work goals; and (c) stimulate personal growth, learning, and development (Hakanen et al., 2006).

Vigor. As a dimension of work engagement, "vigor is characterized by high levels of energy and mental resilience while working, the willingness to invest effort in one's work, and persistence even in the face of difficulties" (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003, p. 5).

Work engagement. A multidimensional construct defined as a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption (Schaufeli, Salanova, Gonzalez-roma, & Bakker, 2002).

Significance of Study

The international school work context has been drawing more attention from researchers as the number of international schools is growing rapidly and is predicted to employ nearly 800,000 teachers within 10 years (Brummitt, 2016). According to Brummitt (2016), the number of international schools worldwide was just 2,500 in the year 2000, but will increase to over 16,000 schools by the year 2026, and will serve

nearly 9 million students. The future leaders of these schools are faced with recruiting, developing, and retaining high-quality faculty members in an increasingly competitive environment.

Authors of human resource development studies regarding international school teachers have focused mainly on teacher recruitment and turnover (Cox, 2012; Mancuso et al., 2011; Odland & Ruzicka, 2009). International school leaders are understandably concerned with teacher retention; recruiting is expensive, sometimes requiring administrators to attend recruitment fairs around the world and pay high fees to recruiting agencies. Furthermore, high turnover rates can have negative impacts on student learning (Ronfeldt et al., 2013). Multiple studies have shown administrative leadership, compensation, and working conditions are among the key factors influencing a teacher's decision to accept a position or to leave an international school (Cox, 2012; Mancuso et al., 2011; Odland & Ruzicka, 2009). These studies provide insight regarding the reason teachers are attracted to international schools as well as the reason(s) they leave these schools, but the literature leaves a gap in our understanding of how various factors affect teacher engagement throughout the teachers' tenure at the school. Furthermore, teacher engagement could be measured and used as a leading indicator of a school's organizational health, whereas teacher turnover is a lagging indicator.

A teacher's day-to-day level of engagement could have an impact on decisions and organizational outcomes every day. Furthermore, a better understanding of the factors influencing teacher engagement among expatriate teachers can contribute to what is already known about teacher recruitment and retention. Teacher engagement has been proven to be positively associated with organizational commitment (Hakanen et al., 2006) and may be a contributing factor in both teacher retention and teacher recruitment.

In this study, I sought to identify the factors that influence teacher engagement in the context of K-12 international schools. The study results helped to broaden the literature and understanding of teacher engagement, and provided context-specific information to practitioners in international schools. A better understanding of teacher engagement gained from this study contributed to the human resource development research already conducted in international schools by filling in some of the gaps between what was known about teachers' recruitment decisions and retention decisions.

The experience of teaching in an international school as an expatriate combines the stressors of moving to another country with being a classroom teacher. This combination of stressors may cause tremendous strain on teachers. At the same time, and somewhat paradoxically, the experience can be richly rewarding and invigorating for teachers. The experience can also be a source of energy and motivation for personal and professional growth as well as a driver of organizational commitment. One study compared burnout levels among teachers working in international schools and teachers working in their country of origin and found significantly lower levels of burnout among teachers in international schools (Coulter & Abney, 2008). An understanding of the factors that influence whether a teacher gravitates toward one end of this spectrum or the other could help teachers and school leaders maximize teacher engagement, which could improve student learning.

Theoretical Framework

One of the most commonly used models used to provide a comprehensive framework for employee engagement is the JD-R model (Bakker et al., 2014). In the model, as shown in Figure 1, resources are seen as drivers of engagement and are divided into job resources such as autonomy, feedback, and social support as well as personal

resources such as optimism, self-efficacy, and self-esteem. Job demands are the emotional, physical, and mental demands of the work.

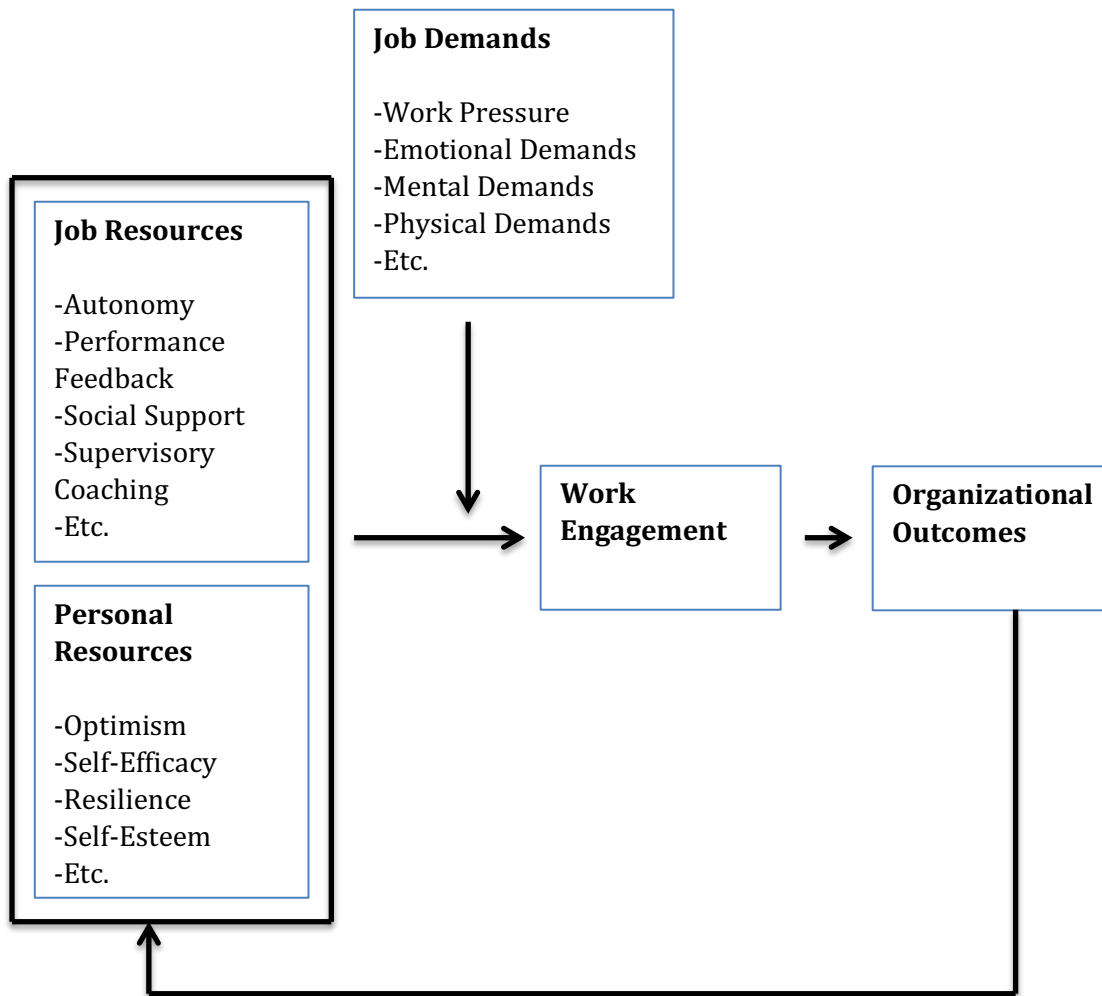


Figure 1: The Job-Demands Resources Model of Work Engagement Adapted from "Towards a Model of Work Engagement," by A. M. Bakker and E. Demerouti, 2008, Career Development International, 13(3), p. 218. Copyright 2008 by Emerald Group.

Job resources are hypothesized to buffer the impact of job demands and are assumed to “start a motivational process that leads to engagement,” (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008, p. 218) which drives performance. The model also contains a positive feedback loop in which performance is intrinsically rewarding and fuels job resources. Baker and Demerouti (2008) used the term “work engagement” rather than “employee engagement”

in their model, which they described as “a multidimensional construct defined as a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication and absorption” (Schaufeli et al., 2002).

There may be some commonalities among salient job demands and resources across occupations, however, each work context is likely to have a unique profile of demands and resources (Demerouti et al., 2001). The JD-R model is flexible and can be adapted to various situations. Researchers designing studies around the JD-R model can insert any desired factors into the model and test the relationships between each resource and engagement. Since its inception, the JD-R model has been used to frame a variety of empirical studies related to employee engagement (Mauno, Kinnunen, & Ruokolainen, 2007; Hu, Schaufeli, & Taris, 2011; Van Droogenbroeck & Spruyt, 2016).

A related model, the demand-induced strain compensation (DISC) model, further categorizes both job-demands and resources as cognitive, emotional, or physical (De Jonge & Peeters, 2009) and reveals particular job demands are best mediated by job resource within the same dimension. This idea is known as the matching hypothesis (Van den Tooren & De Jonge, 2011). In a study of German school teachers, based on the DISC model, Feuerhahn, Bellingrath, and Kudielka (2013) examined the influence of emotional and cognitive job demands and resources specific to teaching on emotional exhaustion in teachers. Their findings supported the JD-R model and the matching hypothesis. Teachers exhibited greater emotional exhaustion when faced with more cognitive and emotional demands, but complementary resources mitigated this effect. For example, teachers who reported high conflict with colleagues and low emotional support showed much greater emotional exhaustion than teachers with high conflict and high emotional support (Feuerhahn et al., 2013).

In their discussion of the JD-R model, Bakker and Demerouti (2008) made a brief reference to self-determination theory (SDT) and suggested job resources may play a role in intrinsic motivation by helping to fulfill one of the basic psychological needs of autonomy, relatedness, and competence. For example, feedback, which is considered a job resource, leads to learning and increased competence. Meyer and Gagne (2008) also considered employee engagement in relation to SDT and proposed the theory, developed by Ryan and Deci (2000), was well tested and could serve as a unifying theory for employee engagement. SDT distinguishes between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation and helps the researcher explain the conditions that nurture intrinsic motivation. Ryan and Deci (2000) identified three innate psychological needs—competence, relatedness, and autonomy—that, when met, form the basis of the conditions for fostering self-motivation.

According to SDT, intrinsic motivation is an innate human predisposition. However, it can be enhanced or thwarted by environmental conditions. Ongoing research in SDT is necessary to identify environments and social conditions that enhance or diminish intrinsic motivation. Cognitive evaluation theory is a sub-theory within SDT that helps to explain the relationship between environmental factors and the enhancement or diminishing of intrinsic motivation. Studies results have repeatedly shown external rewards, which are contingent on performance, tend to diminish intrinsic motivation for the task (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Other factors negatively affecting intrinsic motivation include deadlines, demeaning evaluations, and threats. Cognitive evaluation theory explains the effect of these rewards and punishments as reinforcing an external locus of control and undermining feelings of autonomy (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Applied to teacher engagement, SDT, and Cognitive evaluation theory could be used not only to predict or

test the relationship between variables but also to explain the underlying psychological basis for the effect.

To frame the parameters of this study, I used SDT as an overarching theoretical framework, and the JD-R model as the conceptual framework. In narrowing down the list of likely job resources that most influence expatriate teacher engagement in international schools, I took into consideration, through the review of literature, those job resources were most likely to predict engagement or a related construct in prior studies of teachers in their country of origin, expatriate teachers outside their country of origin, and other expatriate employees.

Positionality

Having worked in international schools as a teacher and a principal for nearly 20 years, I have observed and experienced a wide range leadership styles and have had opportunities to experiment with my own leadership style. I entered this study with a bias toward the importance of school leadership as a key driver of teacher engagement.

Summary

Teacher engagement may be a key mediating variable between leadership actions, organizational conditions, and organizational outcomes in schools. The JD-R model helps predict how job resources interact with job demands in a way that either promotes or inhibits teacher engagement. The implication for schools is leaders may be able to influence job resources in a way that drives teacher engagement and results in increased student achievement, positive organizational climate, and reduced teacher turnover. The international school context is significant because it is rapidly expanding, under-researched, and challenges teachers with the stress of international relocation and cultural adjustment. However, some schools may have organizational conditions that foster high

levels of teacher engagement despite these challenges. International school leaders need an understanding of the factors that influence teacher engagement to make decisions that might increase teacher engagement and further organizational goals.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

This review of literature provides the history and development of the employee engagement concept, empirical work on employee engagement, the importance of engagement in relation to performance and organizational goals, and the emerging construct of teacher engagement. Likely predictors of teacher engagement in international schools were explored, as is the role of school leadership in promoting teacher engagement.

Employee Engagement

The term *employee engagement* was used in addition to other terms in the search and review of literature on this topic as it is the most commonly used term on this subject. The broad concept of employee engagement has become very popular in business literature and among human resource consultants, though it is a relatively immature construct, still being vigorously debated and tested against various theoretical models (Meyer & Gagne, 2008; Shuck, Ghosh, Zigarmi, & Nimon, 2013; Bakker, Hakanen, Demerouti, & Xanthopoulou, 2007). Though employee engagement is the most commonly used term, it is problematic as there are dozens of proposed definitions but no clear consensus among scholars (Shuck et al., 2013; Wollard & Shuck, 2011). To avoid further confusion, I used the term employee engagement to refer to a general concept that does not have a firm definition. I used the term *work engagement* specifically to refer to the construct as defined by Schaufeli et al. (2013).

Notwithstanding the lack of scholarly consensus on what employee engagement is, numerous claims about employee engagement have appeared in the popular press. Recently, three business-consulting companies have made claims about the global nature of employee engagement. A report from Aon Hewitt (2015) stated global employee

engagement levels were at 62% in 2014; Mann & Harter (2016) claimed only 13% of workers were engaged worldwide and this figure had not changed much in several years; finally, a study from Willis Towers Watson (2014) reported 40% of employees worldwide were engaged in their work. The lack of consensus on the definition and measurement of employee engagement is a possible cause for such disparate results.

There is a scholarly debate regarding whether or not employee engagement is a new construct, a repackaging of established related constructs such as organizational commitment and work satisfaction, or merely a buzzword with little theoretical backing (Shuck et al., 2013). Shuck et al. (2013) noted the employee engagement construct is still early in its evolution and sought to distinguish it from other similar constructs such as organizational commitment, job involvement, and job satisfaction. They defined employee engagement as “cognitive, emotional, and behavioral energy directed toward positive organizational outcomes” (Shuck et al., 2013, p. 24). Shuck et al. (2013) also argued although employee engagement, organizational commitment, job involvement, and job satisfaction share some conceptual space, they can also be empirically separable with employee engagement in its own territory; however, much more work needs to be done in order to establish this distinction.

Regardless of the present state of agreement, or lack thereof, employee engagement as a concept is gaining increasing attention in the private sector, with companies spending nearly \$1 billion annually in efforts to improve employee engagement (Graber, 2015). In the literature, employee engagement appears with increasing frequency in the fields of business and management, psychology, and organizational behavior (Welch, 2011).

Coining of the term employee engagement has been credited to the Gallup firm (Welch, 2011). The term appeared in the popular business book, *First Break all the Rules*, written by Buckingham and Coffman in 1999. The authors detailed the findings of a Gallup study of managers, employee organizations that led to the development of Gallup's Q12, an instrument for measuring employee engagement based on 12 antecedents of engagement (Buckingham & Coffman, 1999). Since 2000, Gallup has gathered engagement data on thousands of employees in the United States monthly with this survey. The popularity of the term employee engagement may be largely due to the reports published by Gallup, which are often cited in popular media around the world. For example, an opinion piece in the Korea Times called for companies to have a chief happiness officer and cited the Gallup figure, which revealed only 13% of employees are engaged worldwide (Kim, 2016).

Tracing the origin of the employee engagement concept further back, Maslach and Leiter (1997) conceptualized engagement as the antithesis of burnout and proposed a burnout-engagement continuum. Because of this history and close association, an understanding of employee engagement necessitates an understanding of burnout. Burnout has a substantial history as a scholarly construct (Maslach et al., 2001), and has become accepted, after decades of empirical testing of theoretical models, as a psychological syndrome in response to work-related stressors. Burnout is recognized as a specific, billable condition by the International Classification of Diseases (2016) and has been accepted as an approved reason for sick leave in Sweden (Friberg, 2009). Research on burnout is useful in developing an understanding of teacher work engagement, as many factors negatively associated with teacher burnout have been found to be positively

associated with teacher work engagement (Hakanen et al., 2006; Parker, Martin, Colmar, & Liem, 2012).

Early studies on burnout in the 1970s were qualitative in nature and focused on people who worked in human services and health care. Researchers struggled to define exactly what burnout was, though there was growing concern about the phenomenon (Freudenberger, 1977). Eventually, common themes such as emotional exhaustion as a response to work-related stress began to emerge and burnout interventions began to appear (Maslach et al., 2001). For example, an article in the *Journal of Nursing Administration* provided self-assessment tools and advice at the individual and organizational level for nurses and hospital administrators who may be experiencing or burnout (Clark, 1980).

The burnout construct was refined with the development of the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) and is widely accepted as a multi-dimensional response to job stressors that manifest as exhaustion, depersonalization, reduced personal accomplishment, or inefficacy (Maslach & Jackson, 1981; Maslach et al., 2001). The MBI, which measures burnout on the three subscales of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and personal accomplishment, remains one of the most commonly used measures of workplace burnout, though it has been refined to assess burnout in all occupations, rather than just among people working in human services (Schaufeli et al., 2002).

Of the three dimensions of burnout—exhaustion, depersonalization, and inefficacy—exhaustion is the most commonly reported component of burnout, though exhaustion alone does not constitute burnout. Exhaustion in the context of burnout leads to depersonalization in the human services or cognitive distancing (an indifferent or cynical attitude) in other work. This serves as a means of moderating work demands by

making them less personal (Maslach et al., 2001). Burnout research has consistently shown a strong relationship between exhaustion and depersonalization and a more complex relationship with inefficacy, which may arise as a result of either exhaustion and depersonalization, or both, or may occur simultaneously as a result of a lack of resources (Maslach et al., 2001). After decades of research, burnout can be considered a relatively mature and stable construct and provides a foundation of research to build an understanding of employee engagement.

Evolution of the Work Engagement Construct

Scientific studies related to work engagement began with Kahn's (1990) qualitative work on what he termed *personal engagement* (Welch, 2011). Kahn held the premise "people can use varying degrees of their selves" and sought to develop a grounded theory on engagement by exploring work conditions that influence the extent people "personally engage, or express and employ their personal selves, and disengage, or withdraw and defend their personal selves" (Kahn, 1990, p. 692). From his observations, Kahn (1990) derived three psychological conditions necessary for engagement: meaningfulness, safety, and availability. He described personal engagement as the "simultaneous employment and expression of a person's 'preferred self' in task behaviors that promote connections to work and to others, personal presence (physical, cognitive, and emotional) and active, full role performances" (Kahn, 1990, p. 700).

Kahn's (1990) seminal work on engagement set the stage for future studies. As a result, research interests in occupational health psychology began to shift from negative aspects of work to positive states such as job satisfaction (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003). Work engagement as a positive state fit well into this paradigm (Welch, 2011; Schaufeli et al., 2002). Wollard & Shuck (2011) noted since Kahn's work in 1990, more than 250

peer-reviewed articles have been published on the subject of work engagement or related constructs.

Maslach and Leiter (1997) proposed employee engagement could be measured using the same instrument used to measure burnout, the MBI, with engagement having the opposite score pattern—low exhaustion, low cynicism, and high inefficacy. However, in their discussion of the UWES, Schaufeli et al. (2002) argued work engagement should be measured independently. Schaufeli and Bakker (2003) suggested though there is likely a strong negative correlation between burnout and engagement, an individual who is not experiencing burnout may score high or low on engagement; by only using a different instrument and viewing engagement as a distinct construct, rather than just the polar opposite of burnout, the relationship between burnout and engagement could be studied empirically. They used the term *work engagement*, as opposed to employee engagement, and defined it as “a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption” (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003, p. 5).

Despite the progress made in our understanding of employee engagement, Saks (2017) described several barriers to putting engagement research into practice and noted: “relatively little attention has been given to the meaning, measurement, and theory of employee engagement” (p. 77). He suggested to develop an organizational strategy for engagement, organizational leaders must first define engagement in the context of their organization and then develop measurements aligned with the definition. The development of the Engaged Teacher Scale by Klassen, Yerdelen, and Durksen (2013) represents an important step in the process outlined by Saks (2017). The Engaged Teacher Scale is specific to the teaching

profession and includes measures of social engagement with students and colleagues—two dimensions the authors considered vital to teacher engagement (Klassen et al., 2013).

Employee Engagement and Performance

Employee engagement is widely assumed to have a positive effect on performance, and the number of empirical studies supporting the positive relationship between work engagement and performance has increased over the past decade. In a search for empirical studies on the influence of work engagement on performance, Kim, Kolb, and Kim (2013) reviewed 134 articles on work engagement and identified 20 that tested empirical relationships across a wide variety of countries and work contexts. In 17 of these studies, the authors used a version of the UWES to measure work engagement. The authors did not limit their search by time period; it is interesting to note all 20 of the empirical studies were published between 2005 and 2012 and eight of the studies were published in 2011 or 2012. In 19 of the 20 articles, researchers reported either a direct relationship between engagement and performance, an indirect relationship, or suggested engagement is a mediating variable between other constructs and performance. The following are the work engagement related constructs where employee engagement was shown to play a mediating role in relation to performance:

- Self-efficacy,
- Colleague support,
- Women's engagement (effect on men's performance),
- Actor's engagement (effect on partner's performance),
- Teachers' trust in principal,
- Coaching (effect on financial performance),

- Autonomy,
- Opportunities for development,
- Value congruence,
- Perceived organizational support,
- Core self-evaluations,
- Procedural justice,
- Workplace ostracism, and
- Transformational leadership (Kim et al., 2013).

Teacher Engagement and Teacher Performance

How does teacher engagement affect teaching performance? A growing body of empirical evidence demonstrates the relationship between teacher engagement and student learning as affected by teachers' turnover-intention, absenteeism, organizational citizenship behavior, and commitment to student learning.

Retention and Absenteeism

The issue of teacher retention often rises to the top of human-resource concerns because it is highly visible and expensive. Various sources put the U.S. national total turnover rate for teachers at 14-16% compared to a national average turnover of 11% for all employees (Barnes et al., 2007; Ingersoll, 2001). Included in this figure is teacher attrition, which is notably high in the first few years of employment—approximately 30% of new teachers in the United States leave the profession within 5 years (Darling-Hammond, 2003). Belgium, the United Kingdom, and Canada also have new teacher attrition rates above 20% (Fernet, Trepanier, Austin, & Levesque-Cote, 2016). Among 22 international schools studied in the Near East South Asia region, Mancuso et al. (2011) found turnover rates ranging from 0 to 60% with an average turnover rate of 17%

from 2006 to 2009. In national and international schools alike, teacher turnover occurs at higher rates than the U.S. average.

In a study of employees in four different Dutch service organizations, Schaufeli & Bakker (2004) found burnout was positively associated with turnover-intention and engagement mediated the relationship between job resources and turnover-intention. In a study of Finnish teachers, Hakanen et al. (2006) found a strong relationship between work engagement and organizational commitment was considered to be closely associated with turnover and intention to stay in teaching (Ware & Kitsantas, 2011). Absenteeism is a related concern; actively disengaged teachers are estimated to take twice as many sick days as engaged teachers (Gallup, 2014). Sick days can also be costly, but more importantly, student learning suffers when the teacher is absent. Intention to quit or taking excessive sick days are among the more visible signs of withdrawal from work, but a lack of engagement may have an impact on many subtler behaviors as well.

Organizational Citizenship Behavior

For teachers who remain in the profession or at a particular school, increased organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) is one of the most important outcomes of work engagement among teachers (Chughtai & Buckley, 2009; Runhaar et al., 2013). OCB was first described as an “individual behavior that is beneficial to the organization, is discretionary, is not directly or explicitly recognized by the formal reward system, and in aggregate contributes to the effective functioning of the organization” (Runhaar et al., 2013, p. 99) Such behaviors include helping colleagues in need, informal mentoring, and taking initiative to suggest or make improvements where needed. In contrast, a lack of teacher engagement has been documented as the absence of such behaviors; in a

description of a persistently low achieving school, Cardwell (2011) noted “some teachers appeared to lack engagement at work. This was evidenced by...lack of participation at school functions, and minimal interaction with students outside of assigned instructional time.” (p. 4).

Links between work engagement and organizational citizenship behavior have been found in varying school contexts around the world. Chughtai and Buckley (2009) conducted a study among country of origin teachers in Pakistan. They found work engagement fully mediated the relationship between trust in principal and self-reported in-role job performance. Work engagement partially mediated the relationship between trust in principal, organizational citizenship behavior, and learning goal orientation (Chughtai & Buckley, 2009). Runhaar et al. (2013) conducted a study of Dutch teachers and found that as teachers were more engaged, they were more likely to exhibit organizational citizenship behaviors. Similarly, in a study on Finnish teachers, Hakanen et al. (2006) included measures for both burnout and work engagement and demonstrated the opposing effects of each on a related concept, teachers’ organizational commitment. Teacher burnout was negatively related and teacher work engagement was positively related to organizational commitment.

Organizational citizenship behavior is extremely important in the discussion of school-wide teacher engagement because of its potential to spread and begin a positive feedback cycle. Both work engagement and burnout are considered to be contagious (Jacobs, 2013; Maslach et al., 2001) and this may be explained by OCB. In the context of the JD-R model, OCBs such as collegial support and mentoring could act as job resources and fuel engagement of others. Furthermore, from the perspective of social exchange theory, OCBs teachers perceive as supportive will promote positive reciprocal

relationships (Runhaar et al., 2013). Likewise, the absence of OCB could lead to a scarcity of social or psychological resources, waning engagement, and ensuing downward spiral.

Teaching Quality

Perhaps the greatest area of concern regarding disengaged teachers is their reduced capacity to respond to the needs of students (Maslach et al., 2001). Teaching is a complex job and the quality can vary tremendously with teachers' engagement. Teachers make an estimated 3,000 decisions every day (Danielson, 1996), each of which could be influenced by a teacher's engagement level. Described in the *Framework for Teaching: Evaluation Instrument*, developed by Danielson (2013), are domains and indicators of teaching practice, that have been found, in empirical studies, to improve student learning. Table 1 includes examples of teacher behaviors from the Danielson (2013) framework at the unsatisfactory level and the distinguished level.

Table 1

Teaching Domains and Selected Example Behaviors

Domain	Unsatisfactory Level	Distinguished Level
1. Planning and Preparation	“The teacher’s lesson plan has the same assignment for the entire class in spite of the fact that one activity is beyond the reach of some students” (p. 12).	“The teacher plans his lesson with three different follow-up activities, designed to meet the varied ability levels of his students” (p. 13).
2. The Classroom Environment	“An object flies through the air, apparently without the teacher’s notice” (p. 46).	“The teacher notices that some students are talking among themselves and without a word moves nearer to them; the talking stops” (p. 47).
3. Instruction	“After the students present their research on globalization, the teacher tells them their letter grade; when students ask how he arrived at the grade, the teacher responds, ‘After all these years in education, I just know what grade to give’” (p. 74).	“The teacher reminds students of the characteristics of high-quality work, observing that the students themselves helped develop them.” (p. 75).
4. Professional Responsibilities	“The teacher says, ‘I work from 8:30 to 3:30 and not a minute more. I won’t serve on any district committee unless they get me a substitute to cover my class’” (p. 96).	“The teacher hosts a book study group that meets monthly; he guides the book choices so that the group can focus on topics that will enhance their skills” (p. 97).

Note. (Danielson, 2013).

In each example in Table 1, the exemplary level of practice requires additional discretionary effort from the teacher. Because an erosion of employee engagement typically manifests in a reduction of discretionary effort, teachers’ performance in each of the four domains identified by Danielson (2013) may vary in direct relation to levels of teacher engagement (Saks, 2006).

Relationships and Collaboration

Engaged teachers, as measured by the Engaged Teacher Scale, exhibit social engagement with students. This is measured with survey items such as “in class I show

warmth to my students” and “in class, I care about the problems of my students” (Klassen et al., 2013, p. 41). Aspects of the student-teacher relationship with regard to care, support, trust, approachability, and expectations have all been found to have a positive effect on student motivation (Jasmi & Hin, 2014). With regard to approachability, a student in a study by Jasmi and Hin (2014) stated, “if the teacher is not friendly, always has a serious-looking face, students will feel scared to ask questions, and just let the unclear concept remain.” (p. 79). Regarding support, another student commented, “...because teacher A always supports me. She always guides me, and is willing to spend extra time to teach me outside class. The way she taught me, I knew that I can succeed if I worked hard” (Jasmi & Hin, 2014, p. 78).

Writing about the international school context, Poore (2005) described the importance of teacher-student relationships:

In our schools, relationships with staff compensate for the absence of our students’ traditional support systems and serve as a cornerstone in defining our school culture. Through this web of relationships, our students are either challenged and nurtured or left unsupported and defeated in their efforts...Our students know what we also know in our hearts: that for our schools to truly fulfill our lofty missions, they must be based upon sincere, honest and mature relationships. Relationships that engender trust, support, and forgiveness. Relationships that model the empathy and perspective necessary for intercultural and, therefore, international understanding” (pp. 358–359).

Social engagement with colleagues is another dimension of the Engaged Teacher Scale. It is assessed with items such as “at school I am committed to helping my colleagues” and “I connect well with my colleagues” (Klassen et al., 2013, p. 41)

Support for colleagues, like organizational citizenship behavior, is both an indication of engagement and a resource that fuels further engagement (Bermejo-Toro, Prieto-Ursúa, & Hernández, 2016). Lim and Eo (2014) studied the impact of teachers' reflective dialog, for example how often they talked with each other about helping students learn, on collective efficacy. They also compared this to the effects of perceived organizational politics, or teachers competing with each other rather than collaborating. As expected, reflective, supportive dialog had a strong positive relationship with collective efficacy, whereas perceived organizational politics had a negative association with collective efficacy (Lim & Eo, 2014). This is significant for learning because teachers' collective efficacy has been shown to be very strongly correlated with student achievement across a variety of subjects and settings (Eells, 2011). This reveals at least one empirically demonstrated pathway that teachers' social engagement with colleagues (in supportive, reflective dialog) can lead to an increase in student achievement.

Antecedents of Employee Engagement

The various assumed benefits of employee engagement on performance have driven researchers to try to identify antecedents to employee engagement. These are of particular interest to policy makers and practitioners because if there are clear antecedent variables that can be modified in the work environment, there is a clear, at least theoretical, line of logic from antecedent to engagement, to increased performance, and other presumed benefits.

In their 2011 literature review, Wollard & Shuck identified 42 possible antecedents of employee engagement and grouped them as either individual or organizational antecedents (see Table 2). Wollard and Shuck (2011) noted that few antecedents have been extensively tested and their list showed that only about half of

them have been empirically tested at all. Others may have merely been suggested in conceptual models. The recent literature reviews by Kim et al. (2013) and Wollard and Shuck (2011) show that interest in the work engagement construct is increasing and that more empirical evidence is needed to support theoretical models of work engagement. The list of antecedents from Wollard and Shuck (2011) provided a starting place for identifying possible factors influencing expatriate teacher engagement, but the studies took place in a wide range of work contexts and the findings may not apply to teaching.

For possible factors influencing expatriate teacher engagement, I reviewed studies on expatriate teachers and two related contexts: teachers in their country of origin and expatriate employees involved in other types of work. Then, I focused on factors that could be considered job resources in the JD-R model. Job resources are considered to be “those physical, psychological, social, or organizational aspects of the job that may (1) reduce job demands and the associated physiological and psychological costs, (2) are functional in achieving work goals, and (3) stimulate personal growth, learning, and development” (Hakanen et al., 2006, p. 497).

Table 2

Individual and Organizational Antecedents of Employee Engagement

Individual Antecedents to Employee Engagement	Organizational Antecedents to Employee Engagement
Absorption	Authentic corporate culture*
Available to engage	Clear expectations*
Coping Style	Corporate social responsibility*
Curiosity	Encouragement
Dedication	Feedback
Emotional Fit	Hygiene factors
Employee Motivation	Job characteristics*
Employee/work/family status	Job control
Feelings of choice and control	Job fit*
Higher levels of corporate citizenship	Leadership
Involvement in meaningful work*	Level of task challenge*
Link individual and organizational goals*	Manager expectations*
Optimism	Manager self-efficacy*
Perceived organizational support*	Mission and vision
Self-esteem, self-efficacy	Opportunities for learning
Vigor*	Perception of workplace safety*
Willingness to direct personal energies	Positive workplace climate
Work/life balance	Rewards*
Core self-evaluation*	Supportive organizational culture*
Value congruence*	Talent management
	Use of strengths*

Note. *denotes antecedent with empirical evidence (Wollard & Shuck, 2011).

Factors Influencing Expatriate Teacher Engagement

In searching for the most salient factors influencing teacher work engagement in international schools, I reviewed studies of employee engagement in three contexts: (a) teachers in their country of origin, (b) expatriate teachers in international schools, and (c) expatriates involved in other work. Studies included research on burnout, work

engagement, and related variables such as turnover-intention and organizational commitment.

Individual Factors

Some individual factors were reported in the studies reviewed, though they were found to have less influence than organizational factors. For example, in a study of Dutch teachers, Runhaar et al. (2013) found little correlation between teacher engagement and age, experience in education, or experience at the school. Similarly, in their study of burnout in international and country of origin Canadian teachers, Coulter and Abney (2008) analyzed individual factors, age, gender, education, and years in the profession, but found very low correlations. They concluded that burnout affects teachers relatively equally, regardless of these factors (Coulter & Abney, 2008). Maslach and Leiter (1999) hypothesized that personal qualities such as intrinsic motivation and coping skills may play a role in how sensitive teachers are to environmental stressors which may hinder engagement; they suggested this was an area where more research was needed.

Drivers of Engagement

The review of literature on factors influencing teacher engagement included barriers and drivers, though was more extensive with regard to the drivers, or antecedents of teacher engagement. Antecedents that were reported to have a correlation of .20 or greater with some aspect of engagement, or were otherwise noted as important factors by the researchers, are listed in Table 3.

Table 3:

Summary of Empirical Findings: Possible Antecedents of Expatriate Teacher Engagement

Possible Antecedents	Factors
Teachers in Country of Origin	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Positive parent relationships (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2009, 2010)• Autonomy (Fernet et al., 2016; Hakanen et al., 2006; Runhaar et al., 2013; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2009, 2010)• Supervisory support (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2009; Hakanen et al., 2006)• Recognition (Guglielmi et al., 2016; Fernet et al., 2016)• Sense of community, social climate, and interactions with colleagues (Fernet et al., 2016; Guglielmi et al., 2016; Hakanen et al., 2006)• Trust in principal (Chughtai & Buckley, 2009)• Information (Hakanen et al., 2006)• Professional development (Guglielmi et al., 2016)• Innovative climate (Hakanen et al., 2006)• Physical environment (Hakanen et al., 2006)• Perceived meaningfulness of work (Rothmann & Hamukang'andu, 2013)• Experience (Faskhodi & Siyyari, 2018)
Expatriate Teachers in International Schools Outside Country of Origin	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Supportive leadership (Mancuso et al., 2011; Odland & Ruzicka, 2009)• Salary (Mancuso, Roberts, White, Yoshida, & Weston, 2011; Odland & Ruzicka, 2009)• Benefits (Mancuso, Roberts, White, Yoshida et al., 2011)• Professional learning culture (Jurewicz, 2017; Mancuso et al., 2011)• Involvement in decision making (Odland & Ruzicka, 2009)• Autonomy (Jurewicz, 2017)• Social support (Jurewicz, 2017)• Communication between leadership and faculty (Odland & Ruzicka, 2009)
Expatriate Employees in Other Professions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Perceived organizational support (Kraimer, Wayne, & Jaworski, 2001)• Social support (Eriksson et al., 2009; Wilkinson & Singh, 2010)• Perceived meaningfulness of work (Silbiger & Pines, 2014)

Barriers to Engagement

Research specifically on barriers to teacher engagement international schools is very limited, though very recent global study on teacher wellbeing in international schools provides insight. Higgins and Wigford (2018) considered the following to be barriers to staff wellbeing:

- Relationships hampered by difficulties in and lack of communication (including language and cultural barriers)
- Negativity and lack of respect from colleagues and parents
- Organizational challenges at all levels
- Bureaucratic frustrations and curriculum constraints
- Lack of professionalism, leadership and support
- Concerns around students and parents
- Lack of consistency; unnecessary and frequent change (P.17).

Another source for possible barriers to engagement was research on teacher turnover in international schools. Mancuso et al. (2011) investigated the most important reasons teachers gave for leaving a school. Most of the reasons given related to organizational conditions at the school, most notably a lack of supportive leadership, seeking a better teaching assignment, or dissatisfaction with salary and benefits. Other organizational conditions named included lack of professional development and lack of classroom autonomy. One reason several teachers gave which was not associated with organizational conditions was quality of life outside school.

One finding from Mancuso et al. (2011) suggests that there is a drop in teacher engagement after teachers decide to leave a school. In their study of movers and stayers, they noted a surprise finding that movers had “weaker opinions about their reasons for moving than those who wanted to stay” (P. 838). They propose that teachers who are leaving have “begun a process of disengaging from the school” and therefore have less intense feelings about the school (p.838). This would make turnover or teacher transience a possible barrier to teacher engagement.

The Role of Supportive Leadership Through the Lens of Self Determination Theory and the Job-Demands Resources Model

In interviews with expatriate teachers, Jurewicz (2017) noted that the topic of supportive leadership evoked “emphasis and strong emotion” (p. 5). Supportive leadership has been linked to expatriate teacher retention in several studies and may have a strong influence on expatriate teacher engagement (Jurewicz, 2017; Mancuso, Roberts, White, Yoshida et al., 2011; Odland & Ruzicka, 2009). Though supportive leadership is clearly important to teachers, it is experienced in a wide variety of ways by different people. The term “supportive leadership” needs extensive unpacking in order to identify tangible leadership behaviors and understand the theoretical basis for how they might influence teacher engagement.

Supportive leadership is experienced in a variety of ways, sometimes noted generally as supervisory support (Hakanen et al., 2006), or described with greater specificity such as recognition (Fernet et al., 2016), providing information (Hakanen et al., 2006), or innovative climate—presumably influenced by school leadership (Hakanen et al., 2006). Chughtai & Buckley (2009) identified trust in the principal—described as

teachers' belief that the principal was competent, reliable, open, and concerned—as a key correlate of teacher engagement among teachers in Pakistan.

Supportive leaders, in the context of the JD-R model, can influence teacher engagement through their response to job demands, by providing or facilitating the provision of some type of job resource—physical, psychological, or emotional. Job resources have been shown to increase teacher engagement, particularly when demands are high (Bakker et al., 2007). In the JD-R model of teacher engagement, supportive school leadership could be expressed as leadership that modifies physical or psychological resources or demands in a way that optimizes the relationship between demands and resources and increases engagement.

Some organizational leaders have responded to low engagement caused by employee stress by promoting stress management and coping techniques. This may serve as a useful resource; however, this approach has been criticized by occupational health professionals as merely treating a symptom rather than addressing work conditions, which may be the source of the problem (Sinclair, Cheung, & Cox, 2017). Rather, school leaders can consider the wide range of conditions they have influence over and those that may influence teachers' stress, engagement, and performance (McCarthy, Lineback, Fitchett, Lambert, Eyal, & Boyle, 2017; Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008).

Fernet et al. (2016) explained how a school leader may influence teacher engagement through their actions and influence less-tangible resources, such as communication and school climate:

For example, they (principals) can provide a meaningful rationale for the need for or the value of a task. They can also be available to provide teachers with information, clarify role and task ambiguities, respond to questions, and offer

assistance or advice as needed. In addition, principals can increase the presence of job resources by creating a climate that welcomes collaboration, information sharing, and recognition (p. 489).

In the previous example, the principal providing a meaningful rationale may contribute to perceived meaningfulness. Silbiger and Pines (2014) highlighted the importance of perceived work importance. Their sample of expatriate employees exhibited very high stress but low levels of burnout and high perceived work importance. The researchers concluded that work importance as a psychological resource buffers the effect of stress on burnout (Silbiger & Pines, 2014).

Robinson et al. (2008) examined several leadership practices in a meta-analysis of the effects of leadership on learning and found strong effects on student learning when school leaders promoted and participated in teacher learning and development. Similarly, Robinson et al. (2008) found that principals in higher achieving schools were more likely to be involved in formal and informal teacher professional development and more likely to be seen as a source of instructional advice—frequently engaging in discussions of teaching and teaching problems. The development of professional expertise fits as a resource in the JD-R model because teachers can readily use expertise to address the demands of the job. Expertise also fits within SDT as fulfilling the basic need for competence. In this example, supportive leadership (indicated by providing instructional advice) could be seen as a distal factor for teacher engagement, whereas the resulting competence could be seen as a proximal factor, or job resource, which directly influences teacher engagement.

Expectations and goal setting had moderately large effects on learning in the study by Robinson et al. (2008) and goal setting has been described by others as a

significant pathway that leaders impact student achievement (Hallinger, 2011; MacNeil et al., 2009; Zamora & Hernandez, 2016). Goal setting can impact resources in the JD-R model by inspiring people to contribute to a common goal, thereby increasing the number of resources available to meet a particular demand. Goals may also reduce the total load of demands on a teacher by narrowing the focus of activity and helping to prioritize where limited resources will be used (Hallinger, 2011).

Supportive leadership behaviors may lead to trust in the principal, a factor Chughtai and Buckley (2009) found to be related to teacher engagement levels and self-reported in-role performance. As an element of school climate, trust is an important prerequisite to effective communication, collaboration, and overall school effectiveness and efficiency (Walker, Kutsyuruba, & Noonan, 2011). Walker et al. describe trust as a fragile commodity and important issue for principals, who are sometimes charged with brokering or maintaining trust between parents and teachers or between staff members. In an atmosphere of distrust, teachers may disengage due to feelings of anxiety and low morale or because more personal energy is spent on monitoring those who have damaged trust in the past (Walker et al., 2011). In the JD-R model, the additional energy wasted in a low trust environment could be seen as an unnecessary job demand. In the context of SDT, trust is linked to a sense of relatedness, one of the core psychological needs in SDT. Trust in the principal has been associated with principal behaviors such as setting priorities and following through, communicating a clear vision and expectations, supporting and encouraging teachers, understanding teachers' problems, and being open to new ideas (Blömeke & Klein, 2013).

Trust also interacts with the effect of autonomy. Autonomy, or job control, has often been cited as a driver of engagement and seen as a resource in the JD-R model; it is

also considered a basic psychological need in SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2000). In their study of 589 beginning French-Canadian teachers, Fernet et al. (2016) identified job control as a resource that contributes to a sense of autonomous motivation and is negatively associated with emotional exhaustion. Studies of teachers in Norway and Finland contributed to the findings of autonomy or job control as a key resource that can offset the strain of teachers' job demands (Hakanen et al., 2006; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2009). However, Anand, Chhajed, and Delfin (2012) found the positive effects of autonomy, such as commitment to continuous improvement, were negated when there was a low level of trust in the leader, possibly because employees are hesitant to take initiative or take risks in an environment of low trust.

Several studies support the importance of relationships in relation to teacher engagement. A sense of *relatedness* is central to SDT and can be facilitated by supported leadership. Fernet et al. (2016) found that sense of community was positively correlated with occupational commitment among French-Canadian teachers. Hakanen et al. (2006) found social climate to be positively associated with teacher engagement in Finland. Unique to international schools, Jurewicz (2017) found in interviews with expatriate teachers that connections with the host country and a sense of belonging in the local community were important factors in a teachers' decision to stay and that forging relationships with host country nationals alleviated some of the "cultural strain" felt by the expatriate teachers (p. 7). This suggests that host country relationships can serve as a resource to moderate the demands of living in a different country. Similarly, Kraimer et al. (2001) noted that expatriate adjustment, which includes adjustment to the job, the comfort level of interactions with host-country nationals, and general adjustment to living conditions was positively associated with work performance and influenced by

employees' perceptions of organizational support. In this context, organizational support takes on a dimension outside of the workplace to include support with the demands of living in a foreign country. The U.S. State Department has a highly developed system of supports for expatriate families including courses on how to prepare for an overseas post, several publications to aid with adjustment, resources for helping families adjust, and counseling services (Wilkinson & Singh, 2010). At each site, a community liaison officer helps promote social support among state department employees by organizing social events and bringing families together with the goal of moderating the stress of relocation (Wilkinson & Singh, 2010).

A study of humanitarian aid workers with a faith-based organization showed the importance of social support with a strong relationship between social support and personal accomplishment (Eriksson et al., 2009). A surprise finding from this study, which included a measure of "perceived God support," was that "having a healthy network of supportive relationships is possibly more important for maintaining a positive assessment of one's work than either support from the organization or from God, even among faith-based relief workers" (Eriksson et al., 2009, p. 682).

Summary

Researcher and practitioner interest in employee engagement has been very high over the past decade as it potentially provides a cost-effective pathway to better performance and better results in a wide range of occupations. As a scholarly construct, employee engagement is relatively young, still evolving, and does not have a universally accepted definition. However, some constructs, such as work engagement, and the associated measure of work engagement, the UWES, are commonly used for research in this field and have been repeatedly tested. Future development of employee engagement

will likely involve more context-specific definitions and tools such as the Engaged Teacher Scale, developed by Klassen et al. (2013), to measure teacher engagement.

Teacher engagement is important because it may impact teacher retention and absenteeism, organizational citizenship behavior, and student learning through classroom practice and teachers' supportive relationships with students and colleagues. A wide range of possible factors influencing expatriate teacher engagement has been identified through a review of studies on teachers in their country of origin, expatriate teachers in international schools, and other expatriates. Many of these factors support the incorporation of SDT as an overarching theoretical framework. Throughout the literature on teacher engagement, the role of the school leaders appears to be critical to the optimizing the relationship between demands and resources and creating optimal working conditions as a means for fostering teacher engagement.

Chapter Three: Methodology and Methods

The purpose of this study was to determine the factors that influence expatriate teacher engagement in K-12 international schools in China. Chapter three includes a description of the methodology used, the procedures involved in site selection and participant selection, and the procedures for collecting and analyzing data in this study.

Research Questions

1. In what ways do expatriate international-school teachers and administrators describe teacher engagement?
2. In what ways do expatriate international-school teachers exhibit engagement?
3. What are the barriers to expatriate teacher engagement in K-12 international schools?
4. What are the drivers of expatriate teacher engagement in K-12 international schools?

Methodology Selected

The methodology used in this study was exploratory and qualitative, intended to yield data that would help in developing a context-specific understanding of teacher engagement. The importance of context-specific understanding was described by Saks (2017) as essential to fruitfully apply what is known about engagement in the workplace. Both the focus group and individual interviews allowed for the collection of rich qualitative data from a variety of perspectives in order to develop a holistic view of teacher engagement in the international-school setting. Qualitative methods were preferred because they tend to be perceived by the participants as more personal and humanistic than quantitative methods. Also, because the qualitative inquiry is not bound to a particular model, hypothesis, or existing theory, this method allows for exploration of

the uniqueness and complex dynamics of each participant and location (Maxwell, 2013; Patton, 2002).

Quantitative approaches were explored while this study was designed. The UWES is commonly used in quantitative studies on employee engagement but is not context specific (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003). Another metric, the Engaged Teacher Scale, was developed in 2013 and is specific to teaching, but has not yet been widely validated and is not specific to international schools (Klassen et al., 2013). Because there was no well-tested tool developed specifically for exploring teacher engagement in the international-school context, a qualitative methodology offered greater potential to fulfill the purpose of the study.

The Researcher

The researcher has worked alongside many other expatriate teachers and administrators in three different countries outside the United States for the past 19 years. He was trained in qualitative research methods, including focus group interviewing by the faculty in the Leadership for International and Intercultural Education program at the University of Minnesota. As a current school principal, his personal interest in this research has been to deepen his understanding of the influence of school leadership on teacher engagement.

School Selection

Three international schools were selected as study sites on the basis that they were independently governed, as opposed to government-controlled, had international accreditation, and were members of either Association of China and Mongolia International Schools or EARCOS, two regional associations of international schools. The schools also needed to be large enough and have enough expatriate teachers in a

secondary division to recruit participants for the study. A further consideration for school selection was that they could all be accessed by the researcher within a 1-week data collection period with reasonable transportation time and costs. For this reason, the sample can be considered a convenience sample. The profiles of the schools chosen for the study are outlined in Table 4.

Table 4

Profile of Schools

School	Total K-12 Student Population	Profit Orientation	Curriculum Offerings	Graduates Attend College
1	>2000	Non-Profit	US, AP	99%
2	1000-2000	Non-Profit	US, IBDP, AP	98%
3	500-1000	Non-Profit	US, IBDP	100%

Note. US = Curriculum based on U.S. standards, AP = Advanced Placement, IBDP = International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme.

Participant Selection

The participants in the study were school teachers and administrators. The criteria for teacher participants was that they were expatriates currently working in an international school in China, in the secondary division. The definition of *teacher* included anyone who worked with secondary education directly or indirectly through pedagogical leadership. Teacher participants included classroom teachers from a variety of subjects, school counselors, learning specialists, and curriculum leaders and activity leaders. To avoid any conflict of interest, potential participants were excluded if they had any current or prior work-related relationship with the researcher, which may induce any bias. The criteria for administrators was that they were currently working in an international school in China with some responsibility for hiring or evaluating teachers in

the secondary division. Administrator titles included head of school, principal, and assistant principal.

Methods

Data were collected on site via focus group interviews with teachers and individual interviews with teachers and administrators to gather multiple perspectives and develop a holistic picture of teacher work engagement. Interviews were semi-structured with proposed questions written in advance. Using an emergent design, questions were modified as new questions and insights arose (Creswell, 2014). Focus groups were used because they provided multiple perspectives and a range of opinions in each session. Focus groups are effective in part because debate and discussion among members bring to light unique views and participants tend to feel freer to disclose their feelings in the relaxed environment of a focus group (Krueger & Casey, 2015).

Individual interviews were conducted to add greater depth to the teachers' perspectives and to include the perspectives of administrators. Rubin and Rubin (2005) suggested that the complexity of reality is best captured by including overlapping or contradictory perspectives; the inclusion of diverse perspectives adds credibility to the findings. In this study, the inclusion of administrators added diversity to the perspectives on teacher engagement. Focus groups were not used for the administrator interviews because there was a small number of administrators at the school. Also, administrators generally were not included with teachers because the hierarchical relationship could influence responses in a group (Krueger & Casey, 2015). In one case, an administrator was interviewed together with a teacher leader who was perceived as having a similar status.

A total of seven focus groups and 10 individual teacher interviews were conducted; five individual administrator interviews were also conducted. Focus groups were one hour; individual interviews ranged between 20 minutes and one hour. All focus groups and individual interviews were conducted on-site; most were either before school, during the lunch hour, or after school when teachers were free. Most individual teacher interviews took place after the focus group interviews so that participants in individual interviews were already familiar with the topic; one exception was made due to time constraints. Teachers were strategically selected for individual interviews in order to have a broad range of job roles, ages, and experience at the current school represented. All focus group and individual interviews were audio recorded with a digital recorder for later transcription.

Procedures

After securing permission from the head of school to conduct research at the school and approval from the Institutional Review Board, I contacted the secondary principal at each school to arrange suitable dates and times to conduct focus groups when teachers were available such as before school, during lunch, or after school. Once the times were set, I recruited participants approximately 1 month before the study by sending an email request and demographic survey to principals, who forwarded the survey to faculty members. I sent confirmation emails to those who completed the survey and agreed to participate in a focus group. Two weeks before the data collection, I sent a reminder email and request for additional participants, in some cases with additional times offered for focus group interviews in order to attract more participants. One week prior to data collection, I sent a final confirmation and reminder of focus group time and location.

As part of the demographic survey, participants indicated whether they would be willing to participate in a follow-up individual interview. The researcher selected teachers from each school for individual on-site interviews based on their willingness to participate, and in order to have diverse perspectives represented. The pool of individual teachers interviewed was diverse in age, subject taught or area of expertise, and length of time at the school.

All focus group and individual interviews were audio recorded with a digital recorder and sent to Rev.com (n.d.), an online transcription company, for transcription. The audio files were sent within 24 hours of the interview and were returned transcribed within 48 hours.

Data Analysis

Data analysis began analysis at the outset of data collection by keeping a log of field notes, reflections, and ideas as they emerged. The log served as a record of the process to ensure transparency as well as a means to begin analysis of data (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Saldaña (2016) named these initial reflections *analytic memos* and suggested writing and reflecting on themes and connections as they emerge as well as on any problems or dilemmas with the study.

After receiving the interview transcriptions, they were checked for accuracy and corrected as needed. Transcripts were loaded into the software program Quirkos to code ideas, examples, and phrases that offered an answer to a research question (Quirkos Limited, 2019). Because the study was exploratory in nature, there were no pre-existing codes or themes for the analysis; any theme that addressed a research question was derived from the data and coded. The Quirkos software was used to code text in multiple ways and group quotations into related themes. Throughout the process, additional

themes emerged; in some cases, multiple themes were merged into a single overarching theme.

After the transcripts were coded, significant findings were identified through a process of determining criteria for significant finding and reviewing the themes against this criteria. Krueger and Casey (2015) suggested that themes be prioritized based not only on frequency but also on a number of other criteria that may indicate importance in other ways. Quirkos was used to analyze each theme for frequency and extensiveness. A theme frequency was determined by the total number of quotations coded for the theme. Extensiveness was determined in two ways. The first way was by counting the number of different focus groups and individual interviews the theme was mentioned. The second way extensiveness was determined was by counting the number of schools the theme arose in the transcripts. From the coding, I considered a theme to be a significant finding if any of the following conditions were met: (a) the theme was mentioned by at least one participant at each of the three schools; (b) the theme was in the top 50% of most frequently mentioned themes; (c) the theme was in the top 50% of most extensively mentioned themes, regarding the number of interviews and focus groups in which it was mentioned; or (d) the theme was discussed with substantial intensity, specificity, and relevance to one of the research questions.

Chapter Four: Findings

The purpose of this study was to determine the factors that influence expatriate teacher engagement in K-12 international schools in China. In this chapter, I describe the demographics of the participants and the major findings organized by each research question.

Research Questions

1. In what ways do expatriate international-school teachers and administrators describe teacher engagement?
2. In what ways do expatriate international-school teachers exhibit engagement?
3. What are the barriers to expatriate teacher engagement in K-12 international schools?
4. What are the drivers of expatriate teacher engagement in K-12 international schools?

Profile of Participants

A total of 23 teachers and six administrators participated in the study. For the purpose of this study, *teacher* was defined as any member of faculty who works with students or curriculum, including counselors, librarians, learning specialists, and program leaders; *administrator* was defined as any school leader with responsibility for supervision and evaluation of teachers. Administrator roles included head of school, principal, and assistant principal.

The sample group is diverse regarding role in the school; 12 different subject areas or specialties were represented in the teacher group. The majority of the participants had one or more of the following characteristics in common: American, age range 38-53, more than 10 years of experience in international schools, and worked in 2-3

international schools. All participants worked with students at the secondary level, Grades 6-12. Demographic characteristics of participants are displayed in Tables 5 and 6.

Methods

Data were collected on site via focus group interviews with teachers and individual interviews with teachers and administrators to gather multiple perspectives and develop a holistic picture of teacher work engagement. Interviews were semi-structured with proposed questions written in advance. Using an emergent design, questions were modified as new questions and insights arose (Creswell, 2014).

Focus groups were used because they provided multiple perspectives and a range of opinions in each session. Focus groups are effective in part because debate and discussion among members bring to light unique views and participants tend to feel freer to disclose their feelings in the relaxed environment of a focus group (Krueger & Casey, 2015). Individual interviews were conducted to add greater depth to the teachers' perspectives and to include the perspectives of administrators. Rubin and Rubin (2005) suggested that the complexity of reality is best captured by including overlapping or contradictory perspectives and the inclusion of diverse perspectives adds credibility to the findings. In this study, the inclusion of administrators added diversity to the perspectives on teacher engagement. Focus groups were not used for the administrator interviews because there were only a small number of administrators at the school; administrators were not included with teachers because the hierarchical relationship could influence responses in a group (Krueger & Casey, 2015).

Table 5

Participants Demographics

Demographic Factor	Teachers (<i>N</i>)	Administrators (<i>N</i>)
Nationality		
Australia	2	1
Canada	4	1
United States	17	4
Age Range		
Below 30	2	0
30-37	1	0
38-53	17	5
54 or above	3	1
Gender		
Male	5	6
Female	18	0
Years in International Schools		
1-5	3	1
6-10	12	2
More than 10	8	3
Years at Current School		
1	3	1
2-3	10	3
4-5	6	0
More than 5	4	2
Number of Different International Schools Employed in Throughout Career		
1	6	1
2-3	17	4
4 or more	0	1
Grade Level of Students		
Mostly 6-8	5	1
Mostly 9-12	10	2
Mix of 6-12	8	2
Mix of K-12	0	1

Most individual teacher interviews took place after the focus group interviews so that participants in individual interviews were already familiar with the topic; one

exception was made due to time constraints. All focus group and individual interviews were audio recorded with a digital recorder for later transcription.

Table 6

Participants by Subject Area or Role

Subject Area/Role	Teachers (<i>N</i>)	Administrators (<i>N</i>)
Athletics and Activities Director	1	
Curriculum Leader	1	
English	3	
English as a Second Language	2	
Science	2	
Art	2	
Math	2	
Counselor	3	
Learning Specialist	2	
Librarian	1	
Humanities	3	
Music	1	
Head of School		1
Principal		3
Assistant Principal		2
Total	23	6

Data Analysis

Data analysis began at the outset of data collection. The researcher kept a log of field notes, reflections, and ideas as they emerged. The log served as a record of the process to ensure transparency as well as a means to begin analysis of data (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Saldaña (2016) named these initial reflections *analytic memos* and suggested writing and reflecting on themes and connections as they emerge as well as on any problems or dilemmas with the study.

Recorded interviews were transcribed by the online service, Rev.com (n.d.). After receiving the interview transcriptions, they were checked for accuracy and any necessary corrections were made. Transcripts were loaded into the software program Quirkos to code themes that offered an answer to a research question (Quirkos Limited, 2019). Because the study was exploratory in nature, there were no pre-existing codes or themes for the analysis; any theme that addressed a research question was derived from the data and coded.

After the transcripts were coded, significant findings were identified through a process of determining criteria for *major finding* and reviewing the themes against these criteria. Krueger and Casey (2015) suggested themes be prioritized based not only on frequency but also on a number of other criteria that may indicate importance in other ways. For the data in this study, themes were first prioritized based on frequency and extensiveness. The frequency was determined by the number of quotes the theme was mentioned. Extensiveness was determined in two ways. The first way was by counting the number of different focus groups and interviews the theme was mentioned. The second measure of extensiveness was determined by counting the number of schools the theme was mentioned. The researcher considered a theme to be a major finding if one or more of the following conditions were met: (a) the theme was mentioned by at least one participant at each of the three schools; (b) the theme was in the top 50% of most frequently mentioned themes; (c) the theme was in the top 50% of most extensively mentioned themes, regarding the number of interviews and focus groups in which it was mentioned. The final criteria for the major finding was if the theme was discussed with substantial intensity, specificity, and relevance to one of the research questions, even if it was not frequently or extensively mentioned.

Findings

Findings for Research Question 1 illuminated the keywords and phrases teachers and administrators used to describe teacher engagement and highlighted any notable differences between teachers and administrators. The findings for Research Question 2 provided concrete examples and illustrative behaviors that exemplify teacher engagement. Findings for Research Question 3 and Research Question 4 both directly addressed the purpose of the study, which was to determine the factors that influence expatriate teacher engagement in K-12 international schools in China.

Findings for Research Question 1

In what ways do expatriate international-school teachers and administrators describe teacher engagement? Themes on how administrators and teachers described teacher engagement fell into six main themes. Four of these themes emerged from questions asking participants to describe an engaged teacher. Two other themes, “engagement is multi-faceted” and “engagement varies over time,” are included in the discussion because they add to an understanding of the nature of teacher engagement.

Theme 1: Engaged Teachers are Enthusiastic, Energized, and Have a Positive Impact on Others

When asked to describe an engaged teacher, many teachers in focus groups offered descriptions related to enthusiasm and energy as the first thing that came to mind, with comments such as “They’re enthusiastic,” “Passionate about their teaching,” and “Energized.” Teachers in focus groups offered descriptions of what this looks like in the classroom, often mentioning moving around the room as opposed to sitting at the teacher’s desk:

There's a lot of proximity. When students are working individually, or in groups, the teacher has proximity...you often go around or conduct whole group discussion and have proximity. [You might say to a student] "I wanna hear your thoughts more," so you're right there. "That's a really good thought," so you go over to the student to give them help, give them confidence to speak up, you know, "Repeat that, that was a really, really good thought." And then, so, the teacher is moving around the room.

Table 7

Extensiveness and Frequency of Themes for Research Question 1

Theme	Schools	Groups & Interviews	Total Quotes
Engaged Teachers are Enthusiastic, Energized, and Have a Positive Impact on Others	3	8	12
Engaged Teachers Use Discretionary Effort for the Benefit of Students, Colleagues, and the School	3	7	16
Engaged Teachers are Mentally Present and Aware of Others' Needs	3	7	12
Engaged Teachers are Reflective and Continuously Learning	3	9	11
Engagement Varies over Time	3	8	16
Engagement is Multi-Faceted*			

*This theme was not directly coded, but arose from the variety of ways in which participants described engagement

This sense of energy and enthusiasm was affirmed in individual interviews and was also described as getting absorbed in the work of planning and losing track of time:

I find that when I'm planning my lessons, that I get excited, and I anticipate those lessons. And if I don't check myself, I could realize like, 'Oh gosh, it's 8:00, and I'm still here planning my next unit, or my lessons.'

When describing a teacher who is not engaged, teachers in focus groups contrasted with terms such as "burnt out," "apathetic," and "monotone." One teacher in an individual interview, reflecting on her own experience, described being unengaged as "a life-sucking experience...your energy level is so depleted."

Administrators offered similar comments such as, "They are excited by the potential of student learning." Administrators' comments were similar to teachers' comments, though they tended to comment more on the effects on engagement on others, particularly what they would see in terms of the effect on students and colleagues:

I think that I would see and hear conversations about the joy of teaching...engagement does have an emotional attachment to it...it's making them feel good about themselves, and that flows out... If you've got a highly engaged staff, even if the work is hard, you've usually got high morale.

Several administrators described what they would see among students in a classroom with the following comments: "They (the students) are fired up." "They're engaged with each other." "They're taking the content to a little bit of a deeper level." "You can see the energy in the classroom." One teacher-leader who often visited other classrooms gave this counter-example in an individual interview:

Sometimes, when I go into classrooms, I'll see the students are just sitting and receiving and complacent. That, to me, isn't engagement. They're just doing what they're supposed to be doing instead of being engaged with it and actively learning.

Regarding engagement in faculty meetings, the same participant offered this impassioned comment on the effect of disengagement on climate and productivity:

I guess my pet peeve is teachers who aren't really engaged in meetings. So, we've made time to meet or [conduct professional development] or anything that we do and I see them either constantly on their phones or on Facebook or answering emails when we've pulled people together for a specific purpose. And I'm like, "Come on, you can be in the moment and honor the people in the room." And so, that drives me absolutely nuts when I see that. So, to me when I think about engagement, I think, own it. Because we could get stuff done a lot faster if you were actually paying attention.

Theme 2: Engaged Teachers Use Discretionary Energy for the Benefit of Students, Colleagues, and the School

Both teachers and administrators gave examples of teachers using discretionary effort for the benefit of the school as an expression of engagement. This was often described as extra time spent with students outside of class time or being involved with extra-curricular events and activities beyond the required commitment. One teacher in a focus group, describing his own engagement, emphasized that he spends "lots of time with individual students outside of class time." Another teacher gave this example contrasting unengaged vs. engaged teachers in how they might use their discretionary time:

[For example] on a day where kids aren't coming to your literature class because they have a music performance, the unengaged teacher would not go to the music performance, they would stay in their classroom. Whereas...the engaged teacher would be like, "Oh, I could have an extra prep and do a little work time, but gosh,

I really should go see those kids perform. I should see [the performance]...they've been talking about it for weeks. I should go support my colleague.”

One administrator gave a similar comparison of engaged versus unengaged teachers:

During break time or lunch time or after school, not all the time but regularly working with students, [engaged teachers are] offering your time with the students there...a lot of teachers go beyond that with coaching, leading trips...I think there's so much unscheduled, unofficial engagement that goes on. That's the stuff that's gonna be hard to track. [Unengaged teachers] are not open to those conversations [with students outside of class]. Or giving the extra guidance, or spending the extra time with students, or making themselves available at lunch time or after school.

Several administrators referred specifically to engagement as something greater than the contractual expectations. One administrator stated, “The engagement needs to go a little beyond what they agree to on the contract. To have a rich experience at the campus is something that you can't quantify.” A teacher leader, referring to the athletics and activities program, emphasized the importance of going above and beyond in order to have a successful program:

I think in my role...I need those high level engaged staff and teachers because without them nothing happens...you sort of take for granted sometimes that that's just a normal expectation that they go above and beyond all the time. Every now and then I get a reality check and it's like, wow, these staff are amazing because my normal expectation is that they do this, this and this...Most teachers do far more than the basic expectation.

While teachers going above and beyond was a common theme and desired attribute according to many school leaders, one senior administrator offered a cautionary counterpoint against teachers taking on too many extra duties, “They need time to be with their families...They don't need to be working 20 hours at night. If the workload is unmanageable you have to evaluate it and figure out why. What's going on there?”

Theme 3: Engaged Teachers are Mentally Present and Aware of Others' Needs

Teachers in focus groups consistently described engagement as being present in the moment, whether that be in the classroom or in a meeting, with comments such as, “[They are] very aware of their students,” “Being attentive to the moment,” “Knowing students' needs,” and “A teacher that's engaged will be able to recognize...how this student is different from last year's students.” One teacher made specific reference to being aware of cultural differences: “You have to be cognizant of where you are. You know, the multiculturalism that's here in [this city] is different from [Europe and Central America]. You have to think about who your student body is.”

One teacher in an individual interview elaborated on the importance of getting to know students:

Relationships are hugely important. I think that's how slowly one by one I [learn] how do I pull them in and...find out what resonates for them and what's their push button? Why are they there other than [the grade]? Put the [grade] aside. What's the driving force underneath? Is it mom and dad? Is it overwhelming stress for their GPA? What is it that is, not the part that pushes them, but the part that, the carrot that draws them?

Some counter-examples were also raised in the focus groups with teachers describing unengaged teachers as “not willing to listen,” “on their [electronic] devices,”

or unaware of student behavior issues: “They don’t really care what’s happening. They don’t care if the students are doing their work...[or] if someone needs help.”

Theme 4: Engaged Teachers are Reflective and Always Learning

Many teachers in the focus groups described an engaged teacher as someone who is reflective and continuously learning and improving: “They tend to explore not only their subject matter, but also their teaching methods, and experiment and learn about it, talk with other teachers about it, and make it [reflection] a big part of their daily job.” One teacher described reflection as thinking, “How did it go? Okay, how can I change that the next time?” and another as, “having some co-ownership, or initiative about failure. You know, like when someone's failing, having some co-ownership of that and seeing which parts you can own, and which parts you can step forward with [the student], side by side.”

One administrator similarly described engaged teachers as, “Constantly questioning themselves, and their ability to make a difference in the child's life.”

In individual teacher interviews, reflection and continuous learning also were prominently mentioned:

I'm not the sage on the stage, I'm a facilitator of learning. I'm a learner myself.

That's what really, also how I can identify engagement is my ability to learn new things, new concepts, to be, “Oh my gosh, I hadn't thought about that,”...to be open [to new learning].

Theme 5: Engagement is Multi-Faceted

When describing an engaged teacher, most participants commented on the multi-faceted nature of engagement. Teachers and administrators would ask, “do you mean engagement with students or the community?” When asked who or what teachers engage

with, the commonly cited areas of engagement were with students, with colleagues, with parents, in the greater school community, the school, the profession, and the host-country culture. Each of these areas is explored further under research question 2. The point in including this theme is to acknowledge that a teacher's work is too complex to narrowly describe *teacher engagement* in just the classroom, for example.

One school administrator articulated a model of teacher engagement as concentric circles with students and immediate impact in the center, and engagement with the profession and longer-term influence at the outer level:

The engagement that I see at its core level, the one that you want to have most impactful engagement is with the students. You want that to be their prime interest and what drives them most. The evidence that I would see for somebody who is highly engaged is that they're constantly questioning themselves, and their ability to make a difference in the child's life.

Highly engaged with colleagues and the life of the school, I think I would be seeing somebody who is, again, questioning, and contributing to a sense of continuous improvement...That whole mindset, I think, would flow through to you've got easy and regular collaboration that people go out of their way to find the times for those conversations, those collaborations. The third one which is the wider world, is, I think, engagement in the profession. It's hard to be a 9:00 to 5:00 person as a teacher [unless] you're not engaged and committed and wanting to make a difference in the way that everybody does stuff. There you would be seeing that people are taking the opportunity to educate and inform parents, that they're willing and committed to holding workshops, to having conversations one-on-one with parents...It's about committing to their own professional learning and

then sharing it...seeing where the future trends are in society, and helping to prepare my students and their parents for what's beyond getting into Harvard...[asking] "Why are we bothering to do these things?" It's the bigger conversations that people are having. That's the engagement in that third piece. If you get somebody who can do all three of those, then you don't let them go. In terms of impact on the success of the school, I would say they are the concentric rings of influence. There's a longer return on the impact that you are going to get from the outreach to other schools and the wider community. It's much more immediate the stuff that you can do with developing your own school and colleagues...when you're inside the classroom, that's the minute-by-minute, day-by-day engagement.

Theme 6: Engagement Varies Over Time

A final way that both teachers and administrators described teacher engagement is that it varies over time. Two different participants, at different schools, used the phrase “ebbs and flows” to describe the dynamic nature of engagement. One teacher in a focus group described changes in her engagement, also envisioning a concentric-circular model of engagement:

I think about my engagement as like a circle, and it just kind of ebbs and flows. It gets larger and smaller, and I think about as I go in as a teacher, I think I'm a professional and [think about] what's expected of me. And what are the things that I need to do, and how do I prioritize those things? And so, if life circumstances happen, let's say outside, personal circumstances or not seeing the value in something or whatever, like that circle of engagement it decreases. It gets smaller, right? So last year coming in new, I'm learning China and I don't know where to buy milk and all those things, so what do you prioritize? Well you prioritize what's needed to be done, planning lessons for your students, what's gonna get me through those days of making sure I have my needs at home met or whatever those certain things are, you know you sort of...that's the inner part and then as it gets bigger maybe it's colleagues, maybe it's community.

An administrator affirmed the variable nature of engagement:

I think that it can be, definitely, there's varying levels of engagement and also depends on the time of year and energy level of people's collaborative enterprise. Like right now, very low energy. It's a tough time to get anything meaningful accomplished other than “What are we going to wear to the [holiday] party?”
Yeah, it ebbs and flows within the year's structure as well.

All participants who commented on this aspect of engagement agreed that engagement varies over time in some way. Some teachers in focus groups mentioned that the first year in a school is an exciting and highly engaging time, and that engagement may begin to fall after several years at a school. However, this point was contradicted by other participants who described how some new teachers need to adjust to the new job, new school culture, and for many, a move to a new country, before they can fully engage in the life of the school. One administrator described the transition to an international school as a two-year process:

[In the] second year they can start to tweak and adjust things from their first year. Third year is when they start to see the benefits of being at the school for a longer time and they can draw on...they've sorted things out, they know the kids, they know the community, they can be engaged, they know what engagement looks like in the community and they can start to be effective in the third year.

Some teachers and administrators suggested that engagement may wane after more than 5 years at an international school; other teachers, however, strongly objected to that idea and argued that engagement does not necessarily drop over time just because a teacher has been at a particular job for many years.

Findings for Research Question 2

In what ways do expatriate international-school teachers exhibit engagement?

The findings for Research Question 2 differ from those in Question 1 in that they provide specific observable teacher behaviors and address the question, “Who or what are teachers engaged with?” Table 8 shows the extensiveness and frequency of eight major themes that emerged from this question. Of the eight themes, six of them met the

frequency or extensiveness criteria for inclusion as a major finding. Two other themes were included because of their importance or relevance to the research question.

Table 8

Extensiveness and Frequency of Themes for Research Question 2

Theme	Schools	Groups & Interviews	Quotes
Engagement with Students by Facilitating Learning, Assessing Formatively and Responding to Student Needs	3	13	50
Engagement with the Profession by Taking Risks, Challenging the Status Quo, and Being a Lifelong Learner	3	13	36
Engagement with Colleagues by Supporting and Collaborating	3	10	17
Engagement with Parents by Communicating	3	7	17
Engagement with the Greater School Community by Interacting	3	4	11
Engagement with the School by Leading Activities and Initiatives	3	6	9
Engagement with the Host-Country Culture by Interacting and Understanding	2	2	5
Engagement Varies with Context and May Look Different for Different People	1	2	2

Theme 1: Teachers Exhibit Engagement with Students by Facilitating Learning, Assessing Formatively, and Responding to Student Needs

In discussions of how teachers exhibit engagement, interactions with students were, unsurprisingly, the most frequently talked about aspect of teacher engagement and there was strong consistency among participants in how they described the interactions. Teachers in the focus groups described engaged teachers as purposefully interacting with

students in ways that included relationship-building, determining whether or not learning was happening, getting feedback from students, and most importantly, responding in a targeted way to facilitate the child's learning, as opposed to just delivering a scripted lesson. Teachers and administrators at all three schools emphasized the importance to responding to student needs, noting that students are different from year to year and from class to class and that individual students within a class have different needs. Formative assessment was frequently mentioned as an important way that teachers engage with students to determine their needs at the moment:

In my classes, it's constant formative assessment. I do very little in terms of quizzes and tests and things like that. They might have one quiz and one test in a unit with the option to reassess, but within a unit, it's just every single possible opportunity they are working and showing how they understand something, whether it'll be through a Socratic type seminar, where they're describing what they think the answer is, whether it'll be through discussions with a neighbor where they just sit and talk about it for a little while and I'm listening in. Whether it'll be they're working problems by themselves, whether it'll be working group problems on a whiteboard, all of those aren't just practice for the students, it's also a chance for me to assess at every point in time where they're at. And so literally it's constant formative assessment.

Several teachers in focus groups described how teachers respond to individual student needs following formative assessment:

Some students get it right away and they can go off and do their own thing, and they can go off and practice what it is that they either mastered, will practice what it is they're trying to master that you've facilitated with them. But then this group

of kids or maybe this one particular kid doesn't get it, and so you can sit down and work with them in a different way. But if you're just standing back not engaged, you don't notice that that kid is sitting there not working or looking overwhelmed.

One teacher described this type of teacher engagement with students as being “responsive”:

Just another term, as I'm listening to you...was that idea of being responsive. So instead of being unresponsive to our students' needs, or a change in the dynamics, because of the range of skills in the classroom or whatever, you're responsive. If you're engaged, you're gonna be responding, you're gonna try to respond to that in whatever way you can.

Administrators emphasized the importance of building relationships with students and delivering student-centered lessons. One administrator noted:

Throughout the year I ask teachers to take 5 minutes this week, 5 minutes a period, just stop what you're doing, get to know your kids and build those relationships...Our focus has been...around potential. Don't box kids in by telling them what their potential is. But see, open things up for them to see where they can go with it.

Theme 2: Teachers Exhibit Engagement with the Profession by Taking Risks, Challenging the Status Quo, and Being a Lifelong Learner

Most teachers in focus groups made reference to ongoing professional growth and teachers continuously working to “better themselves and better their craft” by reflecting on practice and pushing themselves outside their comfort zones. Teachers engaged with professional development in a variety of ways such as through workshops in the region or within their school and by collaborating with nearby schools and taking online classes.

Although, most often the discussion of continuous improvement was regarding ongoing experimentation in the classroom in order to improve the quality of instruction:

I would say the continuous exploration of their other craft and of their subject and always seeking betterment. I would say the opposite of engagement...would be somebody who opens their dusty old curriculum book year after year and just does the same lessons. Whereas engaged teacher's one who would examine, let the students inform their tasks and make [changes] year after year, day after day.

Teachers also referred to challenging the status quo. One teacher described an engaged teacher as:

Curious about the progress his or her students are making and interested in what's working and what's not working. Constantly tinkering away at the lessons and the materials and the resources and approaches and teaching methodology. Always wanting...never satisfied.

This sentiment was echoed by an administrator who described an engaged teacher as, “somebody who is dissatisfied, not in a negative context, but dissatisfied with the status quo, that has a sense of ‘it ain't broke, but I'd still like to fix it.’”

In individual interviews, teachers spoke about modifying curriculum as something that they enjoyed doing as part of their engagement with the profession, as a way to incorporate their unique experience and skill-set. Some teachers mentioned feeling stifled if they were not afforded some creative control over the curriculum:

I can say...for some of the DP classes, the Diploma Programme, because there are so many requirements associated with it, and many of them are more or less standardized, that's where I personally experienced a little bit of disengagement.

Where you do start to feel like an automaton, who's just ticking boxes to get kids to get a 5, 6, or a 7.

Theme 3: Teachers Exhibit Engagement with Colleagues by Supporting and Collaborating

Teachers and administrators stressed the importance of teachers engaging with colleagues by developing curriculum together, solving problems together, and inspiring and challenging each other. Teachers in focus groups often talked about the importance of supporting each other:

I teach three different classes and I'm part of three different teams and they're all unique in how we work together but it's so supportive. The number of resources [from my team] are just brilliant. It gives you a starting point, it gives you a conversation point and you don't feel alone; you don't feel like you're swimming against the current.

Teachers in individual interviews elaborated on what it's like to engage with supportive colleagues to develop an idea:

You can talk with your colleagues about, "Hey, this is an idea that I'm thinking can you help me develop it?" And then, all of the teachers here are incredibly supportive with that, they jump in and say, "Yeah, that sounds like a great idea, how can I help?" Or, "Let me give you this to help facilitate that." Or, "Can I do that with you?" Even better, "I would like to be a part of that, let's see how we can do this together.

One administrator gave this description of what it looks like when team members engage with each other:

Those that are engaged are attentive, they're leaning inward, they're trying to wrestle ideas from each other, they're asking questions, they're on devices but with purpose, because it's a communal work...they understand the purpose of why they're together. They're looking to promote maybe a collaborative ethos. They're looking to deepen the thinking of their peers, asking questions for their own knowing reflective standpoint of what they're missing.

Theme 4: Teachers Exhibit Engagement with Parents by Communicating Through Email and Social Media and by Interacting at School Events and in the Community

Teacher engagement with parents was emphasized by administrators at all sites, though less frequently and less passionately mentioned by teachers. Several administrators emphasized the importance of building relationships and interacting with parents:

If you get to know them [parents] on a personal level, the caring and the quality and the engagement increases in the classroom because they're more human...We have had a wine and cheese mix, where it's just adults and it's just a time for the parents to come to the school and socialize with the staff over a drink and some cheese. Our [parent-teacher association] does fundraisers for adults. One of them is like a silent auction and we encourage them to attend those events. They don't have to buy anything, but just being there, an opportunity to reach out, connect with them. At [a different international school] we had family softball day...Saturday or Sunday, people would bring their lunch and we'd have games of softball with the family because there was nothing else to do. At that time, there was very little entertainment in the city, so the school was part of that.

Another administrator emphasized the importance of engaging with parents in ways that educate parents.

There you would be seeing that people are taking the opportunity to educate and inform parents, that they're willing and committed to holding workshops, to having conversations one-on-one with parents. It's about the educative piece that you do with your parent group.

In addition to engaging with parents face to face administrators noted the importance of commonly engaging with parents by communicating through emails home or by through social media.

Theme 5: Teachers Exhibit Engagement with the Greater School Community by Developing Learning Opportunities Outside the School and by Welcoming Visitors

Teachers and administrators at all sites commented on the importance of engaging with community members beyond just the parents in the community. These interactions included bringing experts into the school and bringing students on local field trips, as well as welcoming visitors for special events or school tours. One school was looking to hire someone to help teachers build community connections for internships or learning opportunities. One teacher described a new teacher's outreach into the community:

We had a new teacher three years ago or so. But she was also very interested in the marine environment and so, all my connections with the university and different groups and things like that, she found out about them, she went to meetings with me about new developments and stuff and made those connections to herself. So, she asked, went and then went off...continued on her own without me being at everything that she goes to...do you know what I mean? So, she took the initiative...And she made an effort to make those community inserts and

linking so that with sustainability, reduce, reuse, recycle, all that kind of stuff she's passionate about plus the marine environment.

Theme 6: Teachers Exhibit Engagement with the School Beyond the Classroom by Participating in Activities and Initiatives

Several teachers in focus groups, as well as administrators in individual interviews, mentioned engagement as “contributing to the school at large” in various ways outside of classroom teaching. They typically mentioned leading after-school activities, coaching, being involved in decision-making, or “just attending when other people are showcasing things. Showing interest in other things happening in the school. Supporting other teachers and supporting students who are sharing their learning.” Several administrators mentioned that they had contractual expectations for participation in a given number of extracurricular activities and that this was one way teachers exhibited engagement outside the classroom.

Teachers and administrators referred to “buying into” the culture or philosophy of the school as an element of engagement. One teacher in a focus group elaborated on this point, describing an engaged teacher as someone who is actively building school culture:

I'd say that they sort of buy into the culture and goals of the school, but also maybe, be the force creating the culture and goals of the school as well. Well, I guess buying in sounds a bit passive, but somebody who's also helping to create that culture...maybe the school will voice what they want the culture to be. The engaged teacher would be actively creating that through role modeling.

Other examples of engagement with the school included serving on hiring committees or other advisory committees.

Theme 7: Teachers Exhibit Engagement with the Host-Country Culture by Learning the Language, Learning Local Customs, and Being Open to Multiple Perspectives and the Complexities of Culture

Engagement with the host-country culture was not mentioned by many participants, but those that did mention it emphasized the importance. Several teachers in focus groups commented on the importance of considering the local perspective when teaching world events. One teacher stated, “You also have to think about who your student body is. How thinking about, say, World War II, is really interesting, but my perception of World War II is from a different part of the world.” Only one participant mentioned learning Chinese and said:

I think learning how to speak Chinese really helped me engage with the culture here...I learned all of these different, I guess slang words that they use in Chinese to better understand their culture, and to also better understand our kids.

Some participants voiced concern about the lack of engagement with host-country culture as in this comment from an administrator:

I think traditionally international schools have almost held as a badge of honor that we are a bubble of civility and modernity in the craziness of the international setting that we're in. Dangerous thoughts, I think. Certainly well-suited to the 19th and 20th century, but dangerous thoughts for the 21st century, where we're increasingly interconnected.

And this comment from an individual teacher interview:

I do think sometimes we are too quick to make judgements, or make statements like, “Oh that's what the [local] people expect,” or, “That's what [local] parents want,” or, “That's what Asian parents want,” or, “It's because they're Asian,”

when it can be so much more complicated once you go beyond just that surface level.

Theme 8: Engagement Varies with Context and May Look Different for Different People

In answer to Research Question 2, the findings are that engaged teachers exhibit engagement with students, the profession, colleagues, parents, the greater community, the school, and the host culture in a wide variety of ways. Teachers and administrators indicated that it is desirable and expected for teachers to engage in all of these areas, emphasizing engagement with students. However, several teachers stressed the complex and multi-faceted nature of engagement, stressing that it may look different for different people. Some people may thrive on engagement with colleagues, for example, whereas others may engage extensively with students, but less so with colleagues as an expression of their needs, values, or personality. One teacher, in a focus group, described her colleague who engaged *quietly*:

There are different levels of engagement in different personalities, like extroverted, introverted...Some people can engage, but quietly, so it's not so obvious, like [my colleague]. He's always engaged, but it's not in your face. He may not look like he's listening, or engaged, but usually he is.

Other teachers made mention of individuals who were less socially active with colleagues and community members, but nonetheless outstanding educators who were highly engaged with the profession and with students. On more than one occasion, participants spoke highly of certain individuals who engaged in unique ways as if they wanted to be sure the researcher did not define engagement too narrowly or as needing to

be highly engaged with every aspect of engagement in order to be perceived as a valued educator.

Findings for Research Question 3

What are the barriers to teacher engagement? Throughout the focus group and individual interviews, teachers alluded to, or explicitly stated, a wide range of factors they felt influenced expatriate teacher engagement in some way. Findings for Research Question 3 and Research Question 4 both directly addressed the purpose of the study, which was to determine the factors that influence expatriate teacher engagement in K-12 international schools in China. The findings for Research Question 3 related to the challenges and demands that may act as barriers to teacher engagement. A total of 18 themes were identified in the interview transcripts; 13 of those, listed in Table 9, were considered major findings.

Theme 1: Teacher Transience

The transient nature of expatriate international-school teachers was the most frequently mentioned and extensively discussed topics when asked about barriers to engagement. The effects of this transience on engagement are related to the stressors experienced by teachers when they enter or leave a school; the effects are also felt on other teachers who are affected by those who are coming and going.

Teachers in focus groups reported on a wide range of stressors when beginning at a new international school: steep learning curves, jet lag, financial burdens, cultural differences, difficulty supporting family members with their transition, and difficulty forming relationships, all coupled with the lack of an existing support network. One administrator noted the unique challenge for expatriate international-school teachers: “More than teachers back home, the separation from support structures is a real

challenge. I don't think you can overemphasize the emotional strength that is brought by having established friendship networks, support networks, and familiarity.”

Table 9

Extensiveness and Frequency of Themes for Research Question 3

Theme	Schools	Groups & Interviews	Quotes
Teacher Transience	3	16	55
Feeling Overwhelmed	3	12	32
Interpersonal Conflict	3	10	31
Cultural Differences	3	10	20
Feeling Micromanaged	3	7	11
Receiving Criticism	3	6	11
Isolation from Colleagues	3	6	8
Lack of Training	3	5	10
Difficulty with Health or Family Needs	2	5	12
Lack of Support	3	4	7
Mismatch Between Personal and Organization Values	3	4	6
Wasting Time/Not Enough Time	1	4	16

These comments were echoed by an administrator at another school who said, “The hardest thing is moving schools, because you start all over with relationships and trying to get to know people.” Some teachers in focus groups shared stories of their own difficult transitions:

The transition to [this city] is so expensive because housing is so expensive. Your first year, you're broker than broke and just understanding that you have to put

down a [large] down payment when you first get here to get an apartment [is difficult]. [This city] is a beautiful place to live and it's fairly easy compared to some other places so you can get here and [you're told], "Okay, great. Welcome. Here you go." And you're like, "But I don't even know how to get a [taxi] from my apartment. I don't know how to do anything".

Other teachers in individual interviews told stories of their own or colleagues' difficult transitions. Some could not adjust and decided to quit within the first year; others eventually adjusted to their new schools and positions after a time of struggling in a new environment:

A new guy came in, he wasn't meshing well and it took him till about January to realize oh, okay, I can do this and these people are not crazy. [We learned later] he had felt completely marginalized and not part of the team and [thought he] was just expected to be obedient and follow along [but] he didn't see or understand that were really just trying to show him the ropes and not overwhelm him by having to make all these...decisions when he was brand new and had never been overseas before.

When discussing transitions, focus group participants mainly referred to entering a school, but some also described a drop-in engagement as teachers prepare to leave a school. One teacher described what she had experienced with colleagues:

I also feel like you feel as friends or staff, or colleagues of those people [who are leaving], you can feel them pulling away as well. They're not wanting to say goodbye, so they slowly break the ties so they don't, so it's easier for them to...move on to the next place.

In individual interviews, teachers told contrasting stories of their departures from previous schools. One teacher candidly described her own withdrawal from engagement with the school after deciding to leave a school after just a few months. She described difficulty adjusting to the culture and felt that overall her family's needs were not being met, despite earning a good salary:

Once we had that in place [our plans to move] I didn't really invest or engage at that point because I knew we were leaving. And so it was more of just go in, do your job...January to June it really was just, "Okay, how many school days are left?"

Another teacher had a different experience:

I was involved in a lot of projects and such outside of my teaching. I wanted to make sure I finished those strong and I feel I did that, which was nice. I felt like when I finished on that last day...I really felt like it was good. I loved my boss there.

The theme of differences in the ways teachers engage when they leave a school was also noted in a focus group discussion: “

When you get a job at the next place, some people can let go and be like, “Oh, I don't have to look for a job and I can fully engage.” And then other people already have one foot out the door.

For the teachers working at a school while other teachers and school leaders come and go, transience presents other difficulties, which were discussed in focus groups:

There're some long-termers in any location, and they've seen people come and go. And they just shut down, “You know what, I have enough friends. I have seen friends come and go; I'm just not going to engage.” And that can put up...and

then it can be social, and it can come across in the actual school day as well ...every year there's a new teacher that I'm expected to teach and train, and then they just leave in two years.

One administrator described how a teacher's capacity for engagement can be affected by teacher transiency:

...related to that is the transiency. To build those strong bonds of trust when there's always 10%, or 15%, or 20% of the people are going through the grieving process for their friends who are leaving, or that they are leaving, and then the rebuilding of friendships...that takes a lot of emotional energy, and those things, your head's only got a certain number of spaces that it can fill. If one or two of them are on trying to understand what's happening in the country, and another one's that "I'm grieving for my friend who's about to go," you've only got two or three left to be engaged in those professional spaces.

Theme 2: Feeling Overwhelmed

Being overwhelmed was frequently cited as a barrier to engagement. There were many conditions described in teacher focus groups that caused or potentially led to feelings of being overwhelmed. These included the transition into a new job, having a heavy assigned workload, volunteering for too many additional duties, or feeling the need to do others' jobs because they were not reliably fulfilling their duties.

One administrator voiced concern about the risk of overwhelm when teachers first go overseas: “

Unfortunately, I think by not preparing our people at every level well for that first step into the international world, we lose a lot of really good people because they are unprepared for it. They are overwhelmed and they leave.

And one experienced international-school teacher described in a focus group discussion how the move to a new school is always overwhelming:

It's definitely a steep learning curve. Coming in new, even coming from another [similar school] in another country to this school, there is a steep, steep learning curve. That you come in, and you wanna do your best, but you hit a saturation point. You hit a point of overwhelm and...Like I remember in the first few months of this school year just sitting in meetings, just being like, "Well I'm here." The meeting ended, I have no idea what they talked about. Was there anything important? What do we have to do? Right? Just hitting that saturation point of I just can't stuff in any more new knowledge in, I don't even know what question to ask. I know, I know nothing, but I don't know what to ask.

Several participants discussed teacher workload as a possible concern and source of being overwhelmed. Regarding classroom teaching, this was sometimes in reference to the number of different classes teachers had in international schools. One teacher in a focus group noted, "for someone who has five [different classes], it's really hard to ever feel like you're really getting anything accomplished." Other teachers commented on the relatively heavy workload and time pressures associated with teaching college-preparatory classes such as Advanced Placement (AP) or International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma courses. Some teachers mentioned the challenges of working with large class sizes, though they were typically referring to their home-country public schools and not the private international schools in which they worked.

Workload challenges in international schools were also described in terms of the number of additional duties or activities teachers were involved in, or certain times of the

year that were intensely busy. At the time of interviewing, one school was in the middle of a busy time:

We've just had a bunch of...we've had a week without walls. We've had reporting cycles, we've had drama productions, we've got the orchestra [concert]. We've had another thing [a large event] just now put on us by the government. And so, there's all this extra stuff going on from what I see. But, that is also [on top of] what's happening in the classrooms.

Teachers and administrators cautioned against teachers doing too much. One teacher suggested how experienced teachers should guide new teachers in this regard:

I think people with this kind of experience can help newer teachers from burning out so you're not going in full bore because you can kill yourself here and they [the administration] will happily let you do it...[by] taking on too much.

Several teachers across all sites expressed similar cautions in the focus groups. One teacher related how his current administrator guarded against the tendency to take on too much in the first year at the school:

They [my administrator] said "Don't do anything else. If anyone asks you to do anything, say no." It was such a contrast to the school previously who was like "Oh, so you're gonna be a university counselor, you're gonna be head of the baseball team and you're gonna do debates and we're gonna need you on Saturdays." And I'm like, "I just wanna teach English."

A final point expressed by some teachers regarding overwhelm was the importance of being able to rely on other members of a team, lest they feel that they had to take on additional work themselves in order to accomplish a task or goal:

It's like that when you're in a good place of employment, when the people you are following have got this [under control], you can relax, you know? I think that's really important as well. Where if they don't, then you're kind of looking, going, "Wait. Do I have to step in here? Is this going to fall?" So I think that's a very big part of it, too.

Theme 3: Interpersonal Conflict

Several teachers in focus groups described situations of interpersonal conflict with students, parents, or colleagues, in ways that suggested this caused a significant drain on their emotional energy and resulted in a reluctance to further engage with these individuals or associated initiatives or projects. One teacher in an individual interview referred to situations where teachers felt disrespected and became reluctant to engage with the student or with a learning specialist, who may be able to support advise the teacher on how to work with the student: "Resistance comes from personal hurt when they feel that the child's disrespected them...some of the other teachers will sometimes draw up the wall and be like, 'No, they have to change, not me.'"

Tension with parents was described as situations where parents were demanding, sometimes pressuring for high grades, or not supportive of a teacher's suggestions. One teacher described the kind of interactions that make it difficult to engage with parents:

To be honest, the parents that I think frustrate me the most are the parents who come in and they push really hard and say, "I want these things. I want these things. I want these things." You're like "Okay, okay," and you make this plan, and all right, so "I'm going to do this at school. Your child's agreeing to do this. You're going to do these things at home, like provide a quiet workplace, make sure they have time." They're "Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. We'll sign off on this."

You take all this time and you do all this and then that parent doesn't follow through with what their things are, with what they've agreed to. That I find the most troubling.

Conflict with colleagues was described in situations where colleagues were perceived as overly negative, undermining, arrogant, or incompetent. One teacher in a focus group described the influence of what she referred to as “bad teachers” versus engaged teachers:

I feel like they're a very big pull on the engagement. So, like in the professional learning culture, when you work with teachers that are engaged and keen and eager in what they're doing and wanna work on their own time and get things done and do other things on their own time and just are really interesting, keen for the students and really just engaged teachers, it's so fun, and work is so full. And you can go in and bounce ideas, and they're like, “What are you working on? Working on this one, working on this. Hey, do you wanna work on...?” You don't even have to be forced to collaborate because you just want to do it and it just does that. And we have quite a few teachers like that on staff, but there's always, in every school...[teachers who are]...just not willing to do extra. Just doing the bare minimum. All of those kinds of things. And just one or two or three, in one school, they just stick out and you're just like, “Why is this still here? Why're you [here]...?” 'Cause you have to work with them and you have to...So, then it ruins your engagement because you're forever, either doing their work for them, or pulling them up or teaching them or it's just that, “Oh my god, I have to work with you?” kind of thing.

In an individual interview, another teacher also mentioned the effect that negative individuals can have on others:

When I do get a lot of resistance [to a school improvement initiative], I generally will throw a flag up if there's a person that continuously is negative about stuff. You know, because then that starts to impede the learning of other people, especially if I'm running professional development and I see them continuously be the negative person and throwing us off kilter.

Theme 4: Cultural Differences

Administrators and teachers in focus groups commented on cultural and linguistic differences inhibiting engagement, particularly between teachers and parents. One administrator described the difficulties faced by teachers:

Teachers aren't as engaged with parents as many of them would like to be because of the language barrier, whether it's Chinese or Korean or Polish or whatever it is. The language barrier...rules out picking up the phone and making a quick phone call or having a back and forth conversation by email. The teachers might be able to get a message out, the parent gets it translated and that's where it stops. The parents because of language, they don't wanna write back. That's a barrier to engagement.

Cultural differences, often combined with language barriers, were also mentioned as a barrier to engagement with parents. One teacher described the difficulty of discussing special learning needs with parents in China:

I feel frazzled with...It's very hard in China because a lot of families feel that having learning needs or additional learning needs, it's about [saving] face...I find in parent conversations you have to do a lot of work with parents to sort of say

“This is not about labeling your child, no one's going to find out, this is confidential, this is about us getting more understanding of [your child] so that we can understand what's going on with him as a learner and assess any strengths and challenges to help him grow. And I might have to have that conversation with the same family four or five times before they will finally agree to go for an educational assessment to give us information. That's probably the hardest part [of my job]. Parents will sit there and say, “Yes, yes, yes, yes” [agreeing to psycho-educational testing] for their child and then a tea set arrives [as a gift] and [they say] “We've decided no.” [I want to tell them], “I don't want the tea set, I wanna have your kid [tested so we can better support him].” So yeah, that's hard. And it's hard, too, because it's all just about parental education, right? So we do parent coffees and parent education sessions to try, what is lending support to try and make them feel calmer about that but then you go into this language barrier too. I only speak English and so I'm trying to do this presentation, we started with all the translation tools, we translate handouts, but at the end of the day what I'm saying and the nuances of the language get lost. And so people will walk out of the room saying, “How can you say he has a brain disorder?” We are not saying that your child has a brain disorder.

Several teachers in focus groups mentioned being ill-prepared for the cultural differences they encountered. This was echoed by an administrator who noted, “People [teachers] are coming in wholly unprepared for the cultural integration they have to make, the accommodations that they have to make with work and life.” This comment was further reinforced by some teachers who described feeling uncomfortably underprepared for the cultural differences they would encounter in international settings.

One teacher described what happened the first time she greeted parents in a middle-eastern country and attempted to shake hands:

I was new and I was trying to engage with the parents as the teacher, and I'm not aware of their cultural norms yet, 'cause I was two days off the plane. That was a real quick eye-opener. 'Cause here you're thinking, "Oh, I'm doing a nice thing by a simple handshake." And it was, you know [in response], "Put that hand away." Particularly as a woman, too, I wasn't aware that that was just a no-no. "Okay, sorry. My bad."

Another teacher in this focus group agreed and added, "We don't even know what questions to ask as we move forward to new destinations, new cities, new cultures. You just kind of go and bumble through it."

Theme 5: Feeling Micromanaged

Several teachers in focus groups mentioned micromanagement as a barrier to engagement. They described micromanagement as having to "follow a script" or a series of prescribed requirements on what resources to use, how to teach, and how to assess students. Experiences with micromanagement tended to be, but were not limited to, schools in the United States. One teacher described the micromanagement she had experienced in the U.S. and cited this as the reason for wanting to quit teaching in the United States:

We left the United States because we were in a Title 1 school but you know reading was getting to where it was a scripted lesson and you had to be on this thing, vocabulary was 7 minutes and if your administrator walked in and you weren't teaching vocabulary at your vocabulary time, you know, all these [rules] there was no autonomy anymore. I left California before and then was

somewhere else in the U.S....but for the same reason like an administrator said, “Things are going well when I can walk out of your first grade classroom into her first grade classroom and into his first grade classroom and the lesson flows as I move from room to room.” As if our little students are robots that we're just shoving data into...If I have to move back [to the United States] I will not teach.

Teachers who had experienced micromanagement expressed they felt a lack of trust from school administration and a stifling of creativity in how they engaged with curriculum to design lessons: “For somebody like me who's creative and wants to try new things, if the administrator is saying, “You have to do it this way,” then I'm limited in not being able to try those new things. Teachers perceived these constraints as limiting the extent to which they could apply their creative energy to engage with the curriculum and with their students.

Theme 6: Receiving Criticism

Criticism from superiors was mentioned by a few teachers as something that has a negative impact on engagement. One teacher in an individual interview talked about teachers she had worked with in the United States who had received repeated criticism for their work and felt their energy was depleted:

They got the message [that they were ineffective]. You hear that for 10, 15, 20 years, you believe it, and you can't get out of it. I would say, "You have such great strategies, you're an amazing teacher." [They would say] "No I'm not, I'm terrible. I got a terrible review last year, and I've not gotten any positive feedback from administrators in 10 years." So their self-efficacy was virtually non-existent. It was terrible. It was a terrible experience.

When teachers discussed criticism, they often commented on how they were not experiencing this in their current schools. Likewise, administrators interviewed talked about how they avoid criticism. One administrator described his classroom observation process:

So through a formal observation, I tell them ahead of time, "I will not say anything bad about your formal observation...This is a safe one for me to come in, see your craft. It's an art. Teach and then we're just gonna talk about it." And through that follow-up conversation, it's open-ended questions...I always say, "So, what do you need from me to be a better teacher?" And as soon as that trust has been built up, you know they realize "Oh, you didn't criticize me after this." And then all of a sudden, they share what their needs are.

In an individual interview, one highly experienced teacher described the detrimental effect of a negative performance review in the United States:

She [my supervisor] just said, “You're not doing your job.” When I had my mid-year review, and I had a portfolio of things I had created for teachers, and documentation of what I had done with teachers, she went through the notebook and she goes, “You did this? You did this? I can't believe you were capable of doing this.” The lowest performance evaluation I have ever received in my career was my last year there. It was either meets standards or doesn't meet standard, and out of 25 standards, I only got 12 meets standards. I mean, above standards. I didn't get above standards for knowledge of instructional methods. Are you serious? It didn't matter, I was coming here. But it was demoralizing, really truly demoralizing to me. It was depressing, it was demoralizing, I questioned myself...

Theme 7: Isolation from Colleagues

Teachers in focus groups and individual interviews at all schools mentioned isolation as a barrier to engagement. In every case, teachers gave the example of teachers who were singletons in that they were the only teacher of a particular course and grade level. This seemed to present a practical barrier to engagement because they did not have a sense of being part of a teaching team. One teacher described her situation in an individual interview:

I'm like a little island. I'm the only teacher [for my subject and grade], so I have no one on my team. I never know really what [the other teachers] are doing and if there would be opportunities for us to combine things because we are separated, and I don't necessarily like that. On one hand I'm like, all right, I can do just whatever I want, and no one is telling me differently. But it can be lonely too,

because I'll think that I'm being creative and inventive and cutting edge, [but] maybe I'm not, and I'm not staying up on things because it's just me.

Another teacher in an individual interview said about singleton teachers: “They close their doors. They're very nice people, very *very* [emphasis original] good teachers, but they don't see a need to meet because they're singletons. One teacher described his situation as a singleton teacher and the nature of the resulting engagement, which was high with students, but not with colleagues:

I don't share any classes with anybody, all of my classes are singletons...five different higher-level classes...I'm the only one teaches those classes. Most people, if you ask, they say, “He spends most of the day in his room.” And I do, I spend most of the day inside the classroom because I'm always either grading or creating something or because I'm teaching classes, I have lots of students...that are in that class with lots of extra time. And I spend lots of time with individual students outside of class time. And so to be honest, I probably don't engage with colleagues as much as many of the other people do at this school. I do some of it, just because we have faculty meetings so we do some of that vertical alignment in the science department and things like that, talking about what do we want things to look at it as we go up, but I think it's actually pretty minimal.

A curriculum leader, in an individual interview, also described the problem of isolation for singletons or specialists, noting they sometimes do not get the training and professional development larger departments or teams get:

You concentrate in math, science, English, social studies. Those are easy ones. Then you get Mandarin. It's easy. But thinking about one of those courses that's totally off on their own, they kind of fall through the cracks and that's not fair.

Theme 8: Lack of Training

Several teachers gave examples of hesitation or resistance to engagement with various aspects of teaching due to a lack of confidence, which they ascribed to a lack of training or familiarity. Examples where teachers were hesitant to engage included the use of new technology, developing curriculum, working with students who needed additional support, or leading an activity or sport which they had not done before. Examples under this theme typically came from teacher leaders who had some responsibility for facilitating the engagement of other teachers. One teacher leader, in an individual interview, told a story about an older teacher who was given a new laptop but didn't know how to use it, and was afraid to ask:

At the end of the year, that MacBook was still in the box with the wrapper. He had not opened it. He was so scared, because he thought he was supposed to know how to do everything on a laptop, that he didn't want to ask...he just needed, it was just his, he was uncomfortable. And we didn't realize it. And that's kind of our fault too. We should have, there's stuff changing all the time and we need to help teachers stay up to date with stuff.

Another teacher leader discussed hesitation to leading new or unfamiliar activities:

And I guess there's maybe some disconnect sometimes when I ask, you know, when I need a coach for something, a specific sport. They'll start thinking, "Oh I'm not quite good enough to do that." I go, "It's middle school volleyball. You watch, you can coach them." So, there's a lot of conversations like that where they're like, they want to start, want to be engaged, but they disengage because they don't think they have enough to pass on. They don't always know is it quite

on their skill level. And they do [have the skill], you just sort of point them in the right direction or find that avenue.

More than one learning specialist interviewed commented on some teachers' hesitation to work with students who needed additional learning support in the classroom because they felt they lacked training and didn't know how to help the students.

Theme 9: Difficulty with Health or Family Needs

Some teachers in focus groups talked about the effects of health issues or family members' well-being and the impact on engagement:

...I've seen, if you have a health problem or your spouse has a health problem or there's a death in the family, that often shakes people a lot more internationally than it does if you were in your home country because you have that guilt about being away as well. I've seen that in a lot of different circumstances.

For some, the death of family members back home caused them to withdraw from engagement with colleagues. For others, an injury prevented them from engaging in some school activities. Teachers' own children's needs were mentioned as vitally important to teachers. In an individual interview, one teacher indicated her decision to leave a school was driven primarily by ensuring her own child's needs were met. Another situation mentioned was that sometimes for teaching couples, especially when one is hired for a leadership position, there can be discord between the couple if one feels like the primary hire, but the spouse feels undervalued or taken for granted.

Theme 10: Lack of Support

The general theme of "lack of support" did not arise extensively, though it did come up in teacher focus groups or individual teacher interviews at each of the three

schools. When probed on what this meant to participants, teachers in focus groups often described lack of support as a “lack of understanding” or “not being heard”:

Yeah, you're not being heard. If you have a concern or you have an initiative or something and you've been expressing it...but it's just not being heard by anyone who can make a change, or anyone who can listen, then it can pretty quickly cause disengagement.

Another example of lack of support was given by a teacher in an individual interview with reference to parents who go to the principal with a complaint or concern about a teacher. In this scenario, the teacher felt a lack of support if the administrator sided with the parent without having any dialogue with the teacher. One administrator also commented this type of scenario, saying, “I think our job as a high school leadership team has to first be there to have their backs when there are questions that come up about grading, or assessment, or when students have concerns, or parents have concerns.”

Theme 11: Mismatch Between Personal and Organization Values

A mismatch between personal and organization values was not mentioned frequently, but when it was mentioned, it was described as a force strong enough to cause a teacher to quit a job, or for administration to counsel a teacher out of a school. One teacher noted:

The tough conversation has to happen that, perhaps maybe we're not moving in the same direction. And that they might need to find a school that's moving in the same direction that they want to go, because we've already decided that we're doing something. And those are the tough conversations you have to have.

Teachers in focus groups referred to certain aspects of the teaching and learning philosophy of the school, and the need to “buy in” in order to effectively engage with the curriculum. One learning specialist said:

Explicit teaching has become uncool, and so some teachers, they kind of don't value that as a strategy for those kids who don't respond to inferential teaching. We're all problem based and design thinking and all these wonderful, fantastic things, but there's some kids who just can't do that or they need more scaffolding to be able to do that. And so they've got to do some explicit instruction to get them to be there. And I think that sometimes we run into philosophical differences about scaffolding and explicit instruction.

One teacher talked more about the importance of aligning with the school mission and values of the school leader: “I do have to believe in the person leading and the mission of what we're doing because I left my last school because I just couldn't be part of what they stood for.”

Theme 12: Wasting Time and Not Enough Time

Many teachers spoke about time as if it was their most precious resource. One teacher simply stated, “Time is all we have to get our job done.” Teachers indicated in the focus groups time-related issues may affect engagement in two ways. The first was when teachers felt their time was being squandered—often in the context of a faculty meeting. The second way is when there is not enough time for the work that needs to be done. One teacher in a focus group summed up how teachers have a special relationship with time:

I feel like teachers have a very unique perception of time, [more so] than many other careers. Because we look at we've got 5 minutes, “I can do this, this and

this in that 5 minutes”. Do you know what I mean? So 5 minutes is a significant portion of time [to a teacher]. Any other job in the entire world almost 5 minutes is next to nothing to them, right? Like, “Oh I’ll just get a cup of coffee and go to the bathroom.”

Another teacher in a focus group talked about how she “zones out” when her time is wasted:

I zone out completely, although I just sit there and look like I’m engaged, but I’ve totally gone. When in a meeting, a faculty meeting, if it’s already been sent in an email...I read it. I don’t want 45 minutes of it being reiterated. That is a complete, I feel, disrespect for my time as a professional, who is very busy. And so, what I do, is I zone out during those times. I’m very disengaged during those times.

Participants described a variety of scenarios where it seemed there was not enough time to accomplish their goals: (a) teaching an IB class in less than the recommended number of hours; (b) various activities such as drama, music, and sports competing for after-school time; and (c) “crunch” times of the year where there is too much happening at once. All of these things contributed to a frustrating sense of not having enough time.

Findings for Research Question 4

What are the drivers of teacher engagement in K-12 international schools?

Research Question 4 was about exploring the drivers of teacher engagement. These factors, along with the barriers to engagement identified in Question 3, complete the picture of factors that influence teacher engagement. In the initial coding of themes around drivers of teacher engagement, 27 themes emerged; 15 of them met the criteria for

a major finding. Within those 15 themes, six are sub-themes of supportive leadership. As a driver of teacher engagement, supportive leadership was the most frequently mentioned and most extensively discussed factor. The aspects of leadership that emerged most prominently from the discussions on leadership were the following: establishing open two-way communication, developing trust and giving autonomy, providing direction, and capacity building. The sub-themes have been listed separately rather than merged into one theme of supportive leadership because this topic was so extensively discussed and explored that each sub-theme had substantial findings. All 15 major themes are listed in Table 10.

Theme 1.1: Supportive Leadership by Establishing Open Two-Way Communication

Communication between teachers and administrators or other school leaders was the most frequently cited factor related to leadership. When describing communication that promoted engagement, teachers in focus groups used words and phrases such as trust, open-door policy, confidential, transparent, listening, understanding, and consistent. Phrases such as clear expectations and non-judgmental emphasized the communication needs to be an open exchange between leadership and faculty, as opposed to just receiving information from administrators.

Table 10

Extensiveness and Frequency of Themes for Research Question 4

Theme	Schools	Groups & Interviews	Quotes
Supportive Leadership (Total)	3	19	161
Supportive Leadership Sub Theme: Communication	3	16	49

Supportive Leadership Sub Theme: Developing Trust and Giving Autonomy	3	11	41
Supportive Leadership Sub Theme: Providing Direction	3	8	24
Supportive Leadership Sub Theme: Capacity Building	3	10	21
Supportive Colleagues, Teams, and Opportunities to Interact	3	18	46
Perceived Meaningfulness of Work	3	15	45
Professional Learning Culture	2	12	27
Internal Factors	3	11	27
Salary, Benefits, and Quality of Life	3	10	20
Having Resources/ Processes in Place	3	8	17
Social Support	2	8	15
Receiving Recognition/ Appreciation	2	7	11
Involvement in Decisions	3	5	13
Being New to a School or Role	3	4	6
Having Cultural Competence or a Cultural Mentor	3	4	15

In focus group discussion, being heard was a common theme:

I think that having really good channels for communication is really important.

Everybody needs to feel like their voice is valued and their concerns are recognized. A meeting that's setup like a round table, where everybody's on the same level, for me is a lot more engaging, than when say there's an administrator or somebody at the front, delivering something. Yeah, it's really challenging.

And when you feel like your concerns aren't being heard, it's really frustrating.

Both teachers and administrators emphasized the importance of being straightforward and honest with communication. One teacher in an individual interview described the importance of open communication with administration:

I like to feel I can trust that [administrator]. I don't like to feel I'm playing any games. I worked for an administrator for a while that...that you had to play this game of like if you want that to be done or if you need that for your classroom, you can't go in and tell them you need that or you want that done. You have to somehow let him come around to the idea that this is what you need...the thought of working for somebody like that long-term, that would be something that zapped my energy.

Another teacher in an individual interview commented on how she utilized listening skills when coaching other teachers on how to engage with challenging students:

I think listening, for me listening is the biggest part of my job, is like I'll go in and I'll just ask questions and just listen and listen and listen, often in these sort of scenarios, I don't try and give anything back at that point in time, I will just listen. Yes, I hear you, yes, I understand, yes something needs to change, yes, yes, yes, and then give it time, like 24 hours and then follow up and go in and say, okay, I've be thinking about what we talked about and you've said this, this and this and I've got this idea, why don't we try this?

Theme 1.2: Supportive Leadership by Developing Trust and Giving Autonomy

The words “trust” and “autonomy” came up together in many discussions with both administrators and teachers as a complement to high expectations and direction, sometimes described as the opposite of micromanagement. One teacher in a focus group described the balance of direction and autonomy regarding curriculum and pedagogy:

[The administration says] “Here’s what you have to teach, here's your standards, here's your units, your objectives... but *how* [emphasis added] you do that looks different. So how [this teacher] does it in her math class might look different than how I do it my math class and that's the beauty of it, that professionalism.

Several administrators talked about the importance of building trusting relationships, empowering others, and encouraging an environment in which it’s safe to experiment and take risks. One administrator stated a relationship of trust is the foundation of a positive professional relationship:

One of the things that we all work real hard at is building up more of the trust and that relationship, so that it's not an us and them, teachers and admin. I think at the foundation of everything is again, back to that building a relationship of trust...it's hard for teachers, I think to feel supported until that relational piece, that strong foundation of trust is built. Once that's there, I think our job as a high school leadership team has to first be there to have their backs when there are questions that come up about grading, or assessment, or when students have concerns, or parents have concerns...We'll take some of those arrows for you so to speak.

Other administrators stressed the importance of developing an environment in which it was safe to take risks. One administrator described the need to “formalize processes whereby change is allowable and supported and encouraged through a sensible trust, verify, implement sort of process” as this would encourage continuous improvement and innovation. Several teachers in focus groups stated they appreciated feeling trusted and being allowed to try new ideas. One teacher describe a supportive leader as, “someone who would support you taking a risk in your classroom, they would have your back and encourage you.” This theme came up in an individual interview as

well, when a teacher described an engaging work experience: “I had just complete autonomy in the classroom, administration trusted me to go out on a limb and to be out there, if you will, and they were extremely supportive.”

Theme 1.3: Supportive Leadership by Providing Direction and Accountability

Several teachers and administrators commented on the importance of setting clear expectations, providing direction, and holding people accountable. Administrators gave examples such as, “We have an expectation that they’re involved in two after-school activities a year.” Or “They need to meet once every eight days.” Administrators also emphasized the importance of communicating a rationale:

It's something that if you're going to make a change or you're going to have a conversation around, you need to start with the why every time. Try to be really clear with communication. I do a weekly newsletter, and as much as it's a lot of work to do it, I've been doing it for years, my expectations and things that are happening, and articles that we want people to read, are in it. It's regular, it comes every Sunday night.

Administrators and teachers in focus groups talked about the importance of holding people accountable to expectations, providing oversight, and addressing any performance-related issues. One teacher identified the school principal as vital to monitoring and ensuring teacher engagement:

I think the principal to a degree has a responsibility to watch over their teachers and make sure that their teachers are being able to be engaged and perform to the best of their ability and I think there's...I don't want to say that it's all the responsibility of the principal because obviously it's not...the principal is responsible for making sure that the students are getting everything that they can.

If the teacher is not engaged, the students aren't getting what they could be getting. On the other end if the teacher is doing too much, I think that the principal also has a piece in recognizing that and saying, "Hey, you've got a lot on your plate right now and actually it's starting to hurt some areas, because you're doing so many things and maybe it would be a good idea for you to step back. Maybe [someone else] can cover now.

Another focus group participant expressed expectations of administrators with regard to oversight of teaches:

There's absolutely no reason in an international school, to have teachers who are incompetent or toxic, or don't do their jobs, don't contribute positively to the environment, or kids are being harmed. I don't mean physically, of course, but either, sometimes emotionally, or neglecting what they need to learn, okay? That can all be documented. And so, you document, you put the teacher on an improvement plan, and say, "This needs to improve by this date, and I'm gonna check in here, and I'm gonna check in here, I'm going to check in here, and you just go ...". And either you provide the support for the teacher to improve, and they do, then fine. Then everybody wins. If not, boom, go. So it does lead to administration, in my opinion...documenting, supporting, making a decision, evaluating.

A teacher in an individual interview affirmed what she felt as the engaging effect of high expectations in a supportive environment:

You know it's going to be challenging. You know that you're going to be having to bring your A game and if you don't have an A game yet, they're going to support you to find it but you're going to be challenged. You can tell that right

out of the gate. They're telling you straight away, "We have high expectations." Straight out of the interview gate they're telling you, "Well, we have an assessment process, an appraisal process and you've got to be comfortable with people discussing your pedagogy"...I am. I love that. Right away, within the first couple of weeks, I had people in my room already to make me feel like this isn't something you have to be stressed about. This is very supportive.

Teachers in focus groups gave several examples of how administrators provide direction in ways they felt were supportive. One way was in making hard decisions in meetings:

I can't stand useless meetings or meetings where no one will make a decision. I value leadership and strong leadership. I want someone to make a decision...Carry it forward and sometimes that's not always apparent and that drives me crazy...we keep having the same discussion again and again and again [without a decision]...It's okay to make hard decisions. But then, own it and make it and then go forward.

Another way teachers felt administrators provided supportive direction was in a situation where they needed to mediate between various stakeholder groups, such as parents, students, and teachers. Teachers expressed the desire to be heard, while acknowledging the administrator was charged with the difficult task of "making everyone happy", and if necessary, ultimately had to be the one to make a decision.

Theme 1.4: Supportive Leadership by Capacity Building

Teachers and administrators noted leaders show support through coaching and helping to build the capacity of faculty members. This was sometimes through schoolwide professional development sessions, but the scenarios described by people

who felt they helped someone engage more deeply or more effectively were of one to one supportive conversations or ongoing mentoring relationships. Several similar stories arose in the individual interviews. One learning specialist said this was a regular part of her support of other teachers:

There's a lot of misconceptions about kids with needs. I feel that a lot of teachers kind of feel like because there is a learning support teacher [at the school] or special needs training that [they think of themselves:] "I'm not qualified in that area so I can't help." And so they suddenly think that I have some magic wand. And so quite often that's the first thing is working with the teachers, [I say] "I don't have a magic wand for this, all we're going to do is...And building up that efficacy is one of the main parts is like, [convincing them], "You can do this" and "This is how you might try it, this is how I might go about it and let's try this and I'm going to come in and do it with you and we'll try this and see if the kid responds to what we're trying that's new." And usually then the teachers will be like, "Oh yeah, that's great." I was co-teaching with [a new] teacher for a long time earlier this year and it was nothing, I didn't do anything exciting. But she felt really empowered by the end that she suddenly had all these special needs training that wasn't really...it was just evidence-based practice in my opinion, that's what it was.

Another teacher spoke about her approach to instructional coaching:

I had the teacher observe me so that they would see a strategy and go, "Oh, what's that poetry strategy? Can I have a copy of that?" Or things like, "You look like you're frazzled. I'll make, how many copies do you need..." or "I'll start the class. Why don't you go make your 30 copies and then come back." Then I'd be in the

middle of a strategy, and it would be like the teacher would stand there and look and go, “Can you show me that again? I couldn't believe how the kids were settled down in this strategy.” I had to really work hard, but I have a really strong ability to...I don't know if it's intuition or emotional intelligence or whatever, but to read people and where they're at, and also a lot of flexibility with a wide range of toolkit, of this is how I can help build the teachers.

An administrator described a similar approach to supporting department heads: Trying to make sure that they feel safe in that, when those heads are struggling with a colleague, sitting down and trying to help them coach through that, but not taking the monkey away. Coaching them through it and knowing that if it still isn't fixed, then sure, then we'll pull it together, but giving them that power to help them out. Again, it takes the time, right? It's sitting down for a half hour saying, “Okay, let's work through this together. I'll give you what you need and [you] go try it. If it doesn't work out, it doesn't work out and we'll work it out.”

Theme 2: Teams, Supportive Colleagues, and Opportunities to Interact

Teachers in the focus groups spoke with great fondness and appreciation for supportive colleagues in individual interactions and when working as part of a team, particularly when they needed help or tackled challenges together. Several teachers mentioned the importance of being with a good team and showed their gratitude with comments such as, “I'm fortunate to be on an English team that is amazing, just amazing. It's made all the difference in the world for me.”

In individual interviews teachers elaborated on examples where their engagement with students or parents was promoted through interacting with supportive colleagues.

One teacher described a time when she was brought a grade-level team together to solve the problem of a particular group of students not completing their homework:

I was meeting with kids every morning, the counselor was meeting, the assistant principal was meeting and we just weren't getting anywhere, we were spot firing. And so we came together as [a grade-level team], I asked the teachers to meet in a lunchtime, bring your lunch, let's just brainstorm this out. So we just put all the data up on the board, this is the amount of forms we had this year, this is the total number of kids, this is the amount of kids the forms are coming for, we're not just talking about a small amount here, we're talking about a significant proportion of the kids across the grade level. What are we going to do as a team because we need to come at this together? And so that was awesome. All the data was there and everybody just sat there like okay, well let's get advisories, we're going to do this, and we planned the five of us an advisory program that I then created and pushed out to everybody. We had a parent session where all the advisors came along and they talked about setting some boundaries that we're all going to agree to, like "What time is bedtime for a kid in grade seven? Where should [electronic] devices be at 8:00 at night?" And set boundaries as a community and that was really cool, because everybody just came together.

Another teacher affirmed the importance of team members when feeling stuck or needing professional advice:

Sometimes it's hard, like sometimes I leave, and I'm like, "I don't know what else to do. I've taught that three different ways, and they're still not getting it and I don't know what to do." That's when having the team outside is helpful.

Administrators affirmed the importance of supportive colleagues. They noted teaching can be isolating and as administrators, and they must be intentional about creating opportunities for colleagues to interact in both professional and social contexts: “Making sure that there are times for conversation, that it's formalized, that you bring the school together and you ask high-level questions.” Administrators facilitated professional conversations with various mechanisms such as building department or team meetings into the weekly schedule, organizing regular “learning walks” where a group of teachers would visit another teacher’s class to observe and debrief the experience with an administrator, and organizing other meetings specifically to discuss student learning.

Administrators further commented on the importance of building faculty relationships through social interactions:

With teachers, I feel like it's a piece that you have to really be thoughtful about.

At times, you can get caught up in doing the goals and what you're trying to do in pushing the education or the professional development forward, but there's also

times where you just need to stop and you need to have a social, or to do something different. I work really hard to try to build some camaraderie between

departments here. When I first got here I was told, “We're just a really busy school. We're just a really busy school.” I said, “Every school is really busy.”

But it doesn't mean that we can't build some things together where we can be together, our families can be a part of things, whether it's events or other things.

Another administrator affirmed the importance of building relationships between administrators and teachers:

Just being human. I think there's something to be said with going and having a

beer with people. And I think we have the luxury in a nonunion type of setting to

be able to have a little bit more of that relational social piece. I think it's important. It has certainly changed the demeanor. In fact, people [who have been here a long time] will say that quite often. They said we just feel we can relate. We can walk in [the administrator's office] and talk and not feel like we're being judged or evaluated all the time.

Theme 3: Meaningful Work

Many teachers and administrators identified meaningful work as an extremely important driver of engagement, and even antidote to engagement barriers. One administrator stated, "people will take on more work, up to a point that's not killing them, if it's meaningful and they feel they're growing from it." This same point came up in a teacher focus group: "Yes workload sucks but my autonomy and my meaningful work gives me enough energy to keep working at it." Another administrator commented on the importance of tapping into teachers' passions when developing an activities program, particularly when trying to involve reluctant teachers.

Beyond just increasing a teacher's tolerance for workload, teachers commented on the personal value of meaningful collaborative work:

I didn't move here wanting a new social life. I didn't expect to find friends, that wasn't my goal but because of all the support and all the meaningful work that we do together I feel like genuine friendships have been created and will be cultivated moving forward.

Teachers expressed frustration when they did not see the value or purpose in work. For one highly experienced teacher, meaningful work meant utilizing her expertise:

It was not that I was unhappy, but [my role] turned into putting in 2,000 benchmarks [into a database]. Last year I spent 50 hours doing that last spring, and it was like are you serious? What a waste of my time. It was ridiculous. Then when they hired a new assistant principal who has expertise in curriculum, it was like okay, we're not going to have that anymore, and I was super relieved. And now I'm full-time teaching, and I'm much happier. Another teacher with specialized expertise had a similar sentiment: I actually don't feel like my job is very meaningful right now at all. I absolutely don't like it. I feel like it's...I feel like I'm covering a lot of people's butts but I'm not able to actually do what I got hired to do. Super frustrating.

Theme 4: Professional Learning Culture

After leadership and meaningful work, having a professional learning culture in the school stood out as a major influencing factor. The nature of a professional learning culture was described in a variety of ways by teachers and administrators, including a culture of ongoing experimentation and inquiry, regularly working in teams, having a commitment to data, sharing of best practice within the school and regular opportunities to learn outside the school. One teacher felt very positive about her current school culture and noted, “we are having the kinds of conversations professionals in a professional learning community should have because we're talking about curriculum and instruction and assessment and kids.” Several administrators mentioned the importance of building time into the school day for professional learning: “Making sure that there are times for conversation, that it's formalized, that you bring the school together and you ask high-level questions.”

Teachers focus groups described the positive influence of a professional learning culture:

...in the professional learning culture, when you work with teachers that are engaged and keen and eager in what they're doing and wanna work on their own time and get things done and do other things on their own time and just are really interesting, keen for the students and really just engaged teachers, it's so fun, and work is so full. And you can go in and bounce ideas, and they're like, "What are you working on? Working on this one, working on this. Hey, do you wanna work on...?" You don't even have to be forced to collaborate because you just want to do it and it just does that. And we have quite a few teachers like that on staff...

Another teacher compared the importance of salary versus professional growth: "I've taught at schools where I made much less and I was very engaged. So let's say for me it's not so much the salary. It's the feeling that you can grow in the role that you're in."

When participants discussed a professional learning culture at the school, they referred mostly to regular practices within the school, as opposed to regular opportunities to go to external workshops and conferences. Some teachers talked about visiting other classrooms on "learning walks" as a particularly valuable part of their culture: "Some of the stuff that we saw [in other classrooms], it engages you to want to try new stuff in the class rather than just going 'Oh better stick to the script.'"

Theme 5: Internal Factors

Most of the factors discussed in the interviews were external factors, but in several instances, teachers in focus groups were hesitant to ascribe too much importance to an external factor and instead said it depends on the individual and cited differences in

attitude, perspective, values, personality, and skill, that may influence the degree to which a teacher engages in a particular situation. One example was in how teachers engage when they know they are leaving a school:

It happens to some when you get a job at the next place, some people can let go and be like, “Oh, I don't have to look for a job and I can fully engage.” And then other people already have one foot out the door. I think...They could go either way. I know people where it's been, I know some that get super involved, they're like, “Hey, it's my last 6 months here, I'm going to do everything I can and, and build the best relationships I can with these kids,” and others that are like, “Well, you know what? I'm not going to foster these relationships because I'm just going to leave.” I've experienced both.

Teachers in this focus group agreed there are variations in how teachers engage when they are leaving a school and that this varied with personality and with teachers' purpose, or their “why”:

I would say also why you're doing what you're doing, are you doing it for yourself or are you doing it for the kids that you teach? I think if your focus is always on the students, then it's a lot easier to say, “Hey, I've got 6 months left, let me do a good job of this.” Versus, “I'm not going to see these kids next year, what do I care?”

An administrator also commented on teacher values and motivations. He referred to teachers who move around the world a lot and tend to spend only 2 years at each school (the typical first contract length), as “tourist teachers” and felt that if teachers' primary reason for working in an international school was travel and tourism, they would be less engaged in various dimension of school life.

A related discussion on internal factors came up more than once in focus groups around the question of whether engagement wanes after a teacher has been at a school for many years. In both cases, participants in the focus group mentioned the importance of being a lifelong learner as an internal factor that promoted engagement, regardless of time at a school:

I think as individuals, even if they're here long-term, the idea is, "Are you a lifelong learner? Do you feel like you've arrived or do you feel like you always need to be...that you're open to always learning, right?" So, that's an attitude whether you've been there 2 years or you've been there a long time.

Theme 6: Salary, Benefits, and Quality of Life

Salary and benefits were topics of impassioned discussion and debate in the teacher focus groups. Some argued salary was a motivating factor that would increase engagement. One teacher in a focus group defended his position:

I do feel like it is a profession that I studied a long time to do well, I spent a lot of hours as well. That does mean something to me. And also got two kids that gotta go through college someday. Why can't [salary] be as meaningful and validating and something that would motivate me to work as any other profession that would use that as standard?

Another teacher described how perceived injustice related to salary may lead to disengagement:

It sounds petty, but it does make sense in a way because again, there's something akin to respect with salary. It's not saying I need a huge salary or I'm not gonna be an engaged teacher. It's more saying, the salary is supposed to reflect what you

believe my skill level to be, my engagement to be, my abilities to be. And if you're shortchanging me on that, my only recourse is to shortchange you. I think.

Several others wanted to make clear that while they did not see it as a salient driver of engagement, they did want to be sure the researcher knew it was a very important issue to them:

I've also worked places where I was paid much less, but to the point where it affected my personal life, where I was stressed about money. And so I think that's what I'm talking about. A professional salary, teachers get varying degrees across the globe as you know. And in the [United] States, they get pity mostly if you tell someone you're a teacher. And the salary reflects that. So it's not to say, the more money I make, the more engaged I will be. It's more to say that it's a gesture of respect to the profession that you're paid a professional salary, that can support a household fairly well and not that sort of secondary salary that it's often considered to be in the [United] States.

Administrators tended to agree salary is not necessarily a driver of engagement, but when financial constraints hinder lifestyle choices or quality of life, those stressors can be a pull against engagement:

Lifestyle is important. I think it allows people to be more tolerant of irritations. There are irritations anywhere you work. There's something you don't like about it. If your lifestyle is good, it becomes less irritable. I think you can manage it a little better, and then if you live in a place where it's a little harder, I think that those little irritants become bigger deals. At least that's what I've seen here. I've been working in [two countries], I feel like at times people are a little bit more tolerant because they like their lifestyle. [In another country] we were having to

beef up lifestyle, whether it's salary, benefits, something, housing, to try and help the lifestyle so that things, little irritants didn't become big irritants.

Some particular benefits were cited as being more strategic drivers of engagement. Most notably, professional development was seen by teachers as a very desirable benefit and one that would help them engage with students, colleagues, and the profession better. For some, this benefit was in the form of visiting consultants and workshop leaders; others referred to attending regional conferences:

We have a very, we have a great [professional learning] package. We're allowed to...The school gives us money to go and attend conferences and attend professional learning, professional development, at any time of year. Obviously, there's some caps on that, you know...but more than any school I've been in. There's a real financial and administrative support for learning.

Another notable benefit—a shipping allowance—was mentioned by just one administrator, but had a strategic link to engagement by helping teachers settle in their new location:

I've always felt that, you know, they talk about the 6-week honeymoon phase...and all that sort of stuff. For me, it's always the first significant holiday that people go away [that helps people settle]. They come back home because they've got their pictures and their whatever it is around their house, but they come back into their home that has got their *own* [emphasis added] stuff in it. It's that first time you've gone away on a holiday and then come back home that settles people. The sooner you can have one of those in your calendar, the better off you are...Everybody go away for a holiday and then come back..., “That's my [new]home. I'm settling in here.” It's that sense of coming back home, and the

nesting instinct...If that's the art part of things, the science thing flows through it.

“Well, how much money do I allocate to shipping? Do I make sure that they bring that sort of stuff with them so that it's ready straight away?” versus, “I'll save myself 500 bucks by not giving them enough to do some excess baggage.”

Those sort of questions are where you can make a difference if you've got that mindset.

In individual teacher interviews, salary and benefits did not come up frequently, however, one teacher talked about a situation where although she made “a ton of money,” she was not highly engaged and left the school after 1 year because other aspects of the job were not meeting her own family's needs. She noted some teachers did thrive at that school, in her opinion, because they did not have their own children in the school and were more motivated by the salary, for example, an older couple who were saving for retirement.

Theme 7: Resources

The importance of resources was mentioned in a few of the teacher focus groups, where *resources* included classroom supplies, teaching materials, rooms, and staffing. For the most part, teachers spoke with an appreciation for the availability of resources and budgets in comparison to schools in the United States and sometimes in reference to other international schools: “The first time I've had a budget in [over 30 years] of teaching, is here. I never had any money. I've always had to create something from nothing.” Teachers described how they could teach with limited resources, but there was strong agreement that, “it tires you out.” As one teacher described, in a previous school “I focused so much on finding...resources and creating those resources that I think it pulled from my energy.” One learning support teacher commented on how, because the

school has ample staffing as a resource, she had time to engage more with other teachers and support them.

One teacher, in a follow-up interview, recalled her strong emotional reaction to her first impression in a classroom that was lacking basic resources. The items were low cost, but their absence was very frustrating and hindered her productivity:

I remember my first day in this classroom and it was a complete disaster. The teacher before me left it in absolute, excuse my language, [expletive] and I couldn't find a pen that worked. I never want a teacher to come on to this campus, brand new and not feel welcome and not have what they need. So I started the welcome bags and so every year, I make a list, what do teachers need when they arrive? A stapler, pens, pencils, erasers, dry erasers, magnets and we put these little gift bags together and have them all lined up in here and when they arrive.

Theme 8: Social Support

Teachers in focus groups, as well as administrators, talked about the importance of social support and feeling they are part of a community, especially when faced with personal challenges such as health issues, a death in the family, or other situations that require emotional support while away from their families:

I think one of the things that helps maybe teacher engagement is feeling like you're part of a community, especially in this kind of situation or international school situation where you aren't at home, you come to a new country, you're in a new place, you are building like a pseudo family situation. Because you support one another more than maybe you would have your colleagues back home because you don't have your family here or you don't have your long-term friends here maybe. I think...encouraging a feeling of community is really important,

and that might be through...relationship building things or community building activities, or really trying to build morale, I think. And if you feel like you're working together as a team or working alongside other people who are feeling happy to be here or happy to be a part of what is happening, I think that's a big thing.

One administrator talked about how, through careful recruiting, he tries to foster a sense of community:

To the limited extent that you can, I think your recruiting practice is you try to build a community within the school, well, I do. I try to build something that reflects the broader community. I want to have people who have the same age, interests, and demographics, and I want to have people who are different so that there's a sense that, "I've got a brother or a sister here. I've got an uncle or an aunt here. I've got a mom or a dad here, and potentially I've got a grandparent sort of person around." I think that recreates the sort of structure that right from the village times has been a useful support mechanism. Sometimes it's good to talk to people who can empathize with you because they are in your shoes, and sometimes it's good to talk to people who have got a very different perspective...I don't think you can overemphasize the emotional strength that is brought by having established friendship networks, support networks, and familiarity.

These thoughts were reinforced in individual teacher interviews:

And then health problems, like I've seen, if you have a health problem or your spouse has a health problem or there's a death in the family, that often shakes people a lot more internationally than it does if you were in your home country because you have that guilt about being away as well. I've seen that in a lot of

different circumstances. I think that people tend to really, really pull together [in international schools] because they think they notice “It could've been me” or “I would be in the same situation,” so I think people really have an incredible amount of energy to give to other people but they have to know about it and not everybody is as upfront about it as other people. I think it comes down, partly, to how much you feel you can trust other people or that you are open to saying this is really difficult for me and then for other people it might be more private and they don't know how to reach out. There could be a personal skill level on that.

Theme 9: Recognition and Appreciation

Both teachers and administrators mentioned the importance of recognition and appreciation. Some cited recognition from administration, others mentioned the importance of appreciation and recognition colleagues, parents, and students. One teacher in a focus group discussed recognition in relation to autonomy, emphasizing the importance of having freedom, but also being recognized and not ignored:

I do think that everybody likes a little sugar in their bowl. Everybody likes a little praise, a little recognition. So while the freedom is good, and it is wonderful to be trusted, I think it helps also to have successes recognized. And to have...liberty is one thing, that's great. But if it's just sort of, “Yeah do whatever you want whether you do well or do poorly, whatever you've got the freedom,” some people [might] do really well, some people might not. I don't know exactly how the method would be, but I do think a recognition of successes is important for teacher engagement. Just like for kids.

These comments were affirmed by an administrator:

I'm beginning to understand that as a huge motivational factor for teachers to just feel that acknowledgment. Because they're putting in this energy. Putting in the work as coach, and they're putting in the energy in the classroom. You can demotivate quickly by just not acknowledging them doing, not really supporting them and celebrating some of the great things that they're putting into it.

Another teacher described recognition, especially from students and parents, as a source of meaningfulness:

I think that meaningfulness of work, for me, comes from students and parents more. When I get thank you notes from students or for doing something or they even just a Christmas card or something saying, "You've been a great teacher for me." Because my class, I've pushed them a lot. There's a big push. There's a big, steep learning curve in what I'm asking them to do. So, when they actually say "thank you for caring enough that I can't write for beans and you're trying to help me learn how to write" [it's meaningful].

One teacher in an individual interview mentioned a different form of recognition from students. As opposed to thank-you letters, this teacher felt appreciated when students were responding well to her lessons: "When they're energetic and responsive, or when I have taken the time to craft a series of lessons or a unit or something, and I see them being successful with it, applying that knowledge in new ways. All of those types of things energize me..."

Theme 10: Involvement in Decisions

Teachers in focus groups and individual interviews expressed some appreciation for being involved in decisions and some frustration for being left out of decision-making processes or feeling uninformed about decision-making processes and rationales.

Examples, where teachers felt that they were involved in decisions, included serving on hiring committees for prospective teachers, serving on an advisory council for the head of school, having a choice in which extra-curricular activities to lead, and having input on how budgets were spent. One teacher in a focus group described how being involved with managing a budget was one way she engaged with the program:

I think having a choice of how a certain budget of money is spent is part of being an engaged teacher...I feel like it because it makes me be really thoughtful and reflective about how to spend that money, [and consider] what are the best tools to purchase that are gonna have the biggest impact on some individuals' learning?

Teachers expressed frustration around decision-making where they felt they were either not involved at all in a decision, felt their input was ignored, or did not agree with the decision. One example given in an individual interview was the school decision to purchase SMART boards and implement their use. The teacher resisted implementation partly because she did not have training, but also because she was not involved in the decision and felt she had higher instructional priorities. Another instance of frustration around decision making was when teachers felt the administration's invitation for input was not genuine. One teacher in a focus group stated:

If there's a problem posed to us, and I know there's no way they're [administration] gonna take suggestions...I mean seriously, from the teachers' [perspective] it's, "We're posing this to you, and we want your opinion, but it's really not gonna matter overall." That breeds discontent. Why bother [offering input]? So, I'm gonna engage in something else during that [meeting], or not [at all].

One administrator commented on a related point regarding the importance of communication on how decisions are made:

I've tried to be open—as open and honest and transparent as possible. It seems like such a cliché and like administration 101, but I've been in places where it's not transparent and it's not open, and you don't know where decisions came from. And as soon as we started communicating that more...being very clear with groups [about whether they are] making a decision or advising us or...And letting people know...I think we've been much clearer with that, which has led to even stronger, better relationships between all of us.

The administrator and teacher comments on decision-making suggested this theme is closely tied to the supportive leadership sub-theme of establishing open two-way communication, in this case, communication around what decisions are made and how they are made.

Theme 12: Being New to a Role or School

Somewhat paradoxically, teacher transience appears on both sides of the engagement equation with many aspects of transience acting as a barrier to engagement, but with some participants describing the energizing nature of being new. A few participants talked about the invigorating effect of starting at a new school, which for many, also means settling in a new country. Some referred to the first few months as the “honeymoon” phase. One teacher in a focus group described what it’s like in the first few months of starting a new international-school teaching job:

...you are brand new to the school, brand new to the country. You might be super engaged in the beginning because everything is new, and you are trying to figure out all the pieces, and you wanna be active in learning about the kids, learning

about the culture, learning about the school norms. You are attending meetings, you are going to the workshops, you're getting a lay of the land.

Another teacher, in an individual interview, described how she felt energized after taking on a new role that was somewhat unfamiliar to her, saying “I really love that I'm learning something new. I'm expanding my repertoire.”

One administrator noted new teachers tend to be enthusiastic upon joining the school, and the beginning the year is an important time for getting to know new teachers and enculturating them, “developing a sense of what the school is all about.”

Theme 13: Cultural Competence or Having a Cultural Mentor

Several teachers in focus groups commented on the importance of developing an understanding of how things work in the host country to help them engage with the host country culture and be prepared to manage difficulties that might interfere with their ability to engage in their work—especially basic needs related to money, transportation, housing, and health care:

In Korea, we had part of the business office was a team of people whose sole job was just to work with the expatriate teachers. And to be able to help them to navigate Korea. So like if you had banking problems, that's where you went. If you had utilities problems that where you went. You know just all the other parts of life. Because this is your life, it's not just your job. So having that...really made you able to just engage in your job as a teacher.

This sentiment was reinforced by an administrator:

A school that rejects or pushes to one side the local culture versus one that embraces and embeds it is going to make a huge difference on the capacity of the individual in the school to transition easily between work and home life.

Teachers sometimes studied cultural norms before arriving or learned some as part of orientation to the job, but the most significant learning came from having a “close relationship with a local person”—often a colleague in the school, or nanny. Teachers elaborated on cultural understanding and transitions in the individual interviews:

In my old school, I had a paraprofessional [from the host country]. And having a close relationship with a local person, I learned a lot about their culture through her. And we had a nanny, my kids were younger, they both spoke...their English was great, so they taught me a lot. Where here, I don't have a close relationship with a Chinese person, so I don't think I've learned probably as much as I learned there with those relationships I had. I've read, you know, you read blogs and you read things and you learn as you go...but I definitely knew more about that culture than I know here. I think just from friends and people.

Another teacher talked about the importance of personal growth and acceptance as part of the acculturation process, also suggesting engagement with the host culture leads to better engagement at school:

I think you just have to really be willing to do things maybe you're not comfortable doing, seek out opportunities to do things. Also, not just teaching, but the new culture and the new life. I've seen people who are, “It's dirty here. I'm not going to go. People spit on the street. I'm not going there.” Just be willing to accept the culture and try new things and try to get to meet new people. I think that really helps in school, if people are happy in their life. I don't know how to explain it. But I feel like if you're a teacher, you're going to be engaged if you have, if other things around you are, I hate to say your needs are met, but if you're satisfied in other areas of your life, then professionally you can do your job

and do well with it. Where if you're struggling to walk to the store to buy food because it's disgusting to you, then you're probably, when you come to school, not focused on school.

Summary of Findings

Research Question 1

In what ways do expatriate international-school teachers and administrators describe teacher engagement? Participants in this study overwhelmingly described teacher engagement in positive terms, describing engaged teachers as enthusiastic, energized, and positively impacting others in the school community. Engaged teachers were further described as going above and beyond contractual expectations, being present and aware of others' needs, and using discretionary effort for the benefit of others. Reflection and life-long learning were seen as hallmarks of engaged teachers. Engagement was seen as multifaceted, with teachers potentially engaging with a wide range of different people, ideas, or activities; it was seen as a state that varies over time in scope and depth in response to personal and environmental factors.

Research Question 2

In what ways do expatriate international-school teachers exhibit engagement. Expatriate international-school teachers exhibit engagement in several different areas: with students, the profession, colleagues, parents, the greater school community, the school, and with the host-country culture. How they engage differs with each area, but a sense of being open to new learning and responding to others' needs is a constant thread through all areas of engagement. While there are common themes in the ways teachers exhibit engagement, engagement may vary with context and looks different for different individuals, depending on their role, personality, or other factors. Because of the

complex and multi-faceted nature of teacher engagement, there is no generic picture of what teacher engagement looks like, though the most important aspect of teacher engagement discussed by participants was engagement with students by facilitating learning, assessing formatively, and responding to student needs.

Research Question 3

What are the barriers to teacher engagement in K-12 international schools? A total of 13 major themes arose as barriers to teacher engagement, with teacher transience being the most frequently and extensively discussed theme. Many of the themes, such as feeling overwhelmed or lacking training, were related to the teaching profession regardless of context, while some of the themes were specific to the international-school context. The data indicated teacher transience, cultural differences, and difficulty with health or family needs may be more pronounced for expatriate teachers in international schools than teachers in other contexts. In contrast, comments related to feeling micromanaged or receiving criticism were mostly in reference to schools in the United States, and not prominent concerns in the participants' current international schools.

Research Question 4

What are the drivers of teacher engagement in K-12 international schools?

Fifteen major drivers of teacher engagement were identified, with supportive leadership being the most extensively discussed factor. Sub-themes of supportive leadership related to communication, developing trust, giving autonomy, providing direction, and capacity building accounted for four of the 15 major themes; of these, establishing open, two-way communication was the most frequently and extensively discussed theme. Internal factors such as personal motivation were mentioned by a few participants, though the majority of promoting factors, or drivers of teacher engagement, discussed were external factors related to leadership actions, school culture, and relationships.

Chapter Five: Discussion

The purpose of this study was to determine the factors that influence expatriate teacher engagement in K-12 international schools in China. In this chapter, findings are summarized and analyzed by research question in relation to the scholarly literature. Implications for theory and practice are presented, as are limitations and suggestions for future research.

Summary and Analysis of Findings

Research Question 1

In what ways do expatriate international-school teachers and administrators describe teacher engagement?

Participants in this study described teacher engagement in positive terms, describing engaged teachers as enthusiastic, energized, and positively impacting others in the school community. Engaged teachers were further described as going above and beyond contractual expectations, being present and aware of others' needs and using discretionary effort for the benefit of others. Reflective teaching and life-long learning were seen as hallmarks of engaged teachers. Engagement was seen as multifaceted, with teachers potentially engaging with a wide range of different people, ideas, or activities; it was seen as a state that varies over time in scope and depth in response to personal and environmental factors.

The ways in which participants described teacher engagement largely align with Kahn's definition of what he called *personal engagement*, "the simultaneous employment and expression of a person's 'preferred self' in task behaviors that promote connections to work and to others, personal presence (physical, cognitive, and emotional), and active full role performances" (Kahn, 1990, p. 700). Participant descriptions also align with the

definition of *work engagement* from Schaufeli et al. (2002), which is described as “a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption” (p. 74). The themes emerging from participant descriptions of engaged teachers also generally aligned with elements of emotional, cognitive, and social engagement with teaching as presented in the Engaged Teacher Scale developed by Klassen et al. (2013).

When teachers described the discretionary effort given by engaged teachers, they talked about “doing something extra” or “going above and beyond”. Often these were simple gestures of support such as watching a colleague’s students perform or attending school events. These acts can be considered organizational citizenship behaviors. Organizational citizenship behavior, as described by Runhaar et al. (2013), “is beneficial to the organization, is discretionary...and in aggregate contributes to the effective functioning of the organization” (P.199).

Some of the participants’ descriptions of teacher engagement could be generically applied to any occupation, however, two themes from this study, reflection and continuous learning, stood out as central to teacher engagement and closely linked to student learning. According to Danielson (2013), when teachers reflect on their teaching, they are considering their impact on students. Moreover, they are considering how they might adjust their instructional technique in order to improve student learning. Instruction improves through an ongoing cycle of implementation, monitoring results, reflecting, and adjusting (Danielson, 2013). Similarly, continuous learning on the part of the teacher can have a powerful impact on learning, but only when the new learning is applied in the classroom (Danielson, 2013).

Research Question 2

In what ways do expatriate international-school teachers exhibit engagement?

Expatriate international-school teachers exhibit engagement in several different areas: with students, with the profession, with colleagues, with parents, with the greater school community, with the school, and with the host-country culture. How they engage differs with each area, but a sense of being open to new learning and responding to others' needs is a constant thread through all these areas of engagement. Engagement may look different for different individuals, depending on their role, personality, or other factors and teachers may engage in different ways at different times.

Further elaboration on teacher engagement in the findings from Research Question 2 helped to define the various referents of teacher engagement, or roles and tasks in which teachers engage. These are essential to understanding, assessing, and promoting teacher engagement because engagement is role specific and likely to vary from role to role (Saks, 2017). Participants in this study described some variations in engagement according to role: for example, several teachers described teachers who may be highly engaged with students, but less so with colleagues.

Seven different areas of engagement as described by participants in this study are displayed in Figure 2, with students closest to the teacher, representing the teacher's core role and direct influence on learning. Outer circles represent other areas of engagement with an indirect influence on learning. This diagram was created as a visual representation of the themes that emerged from participant interviews.

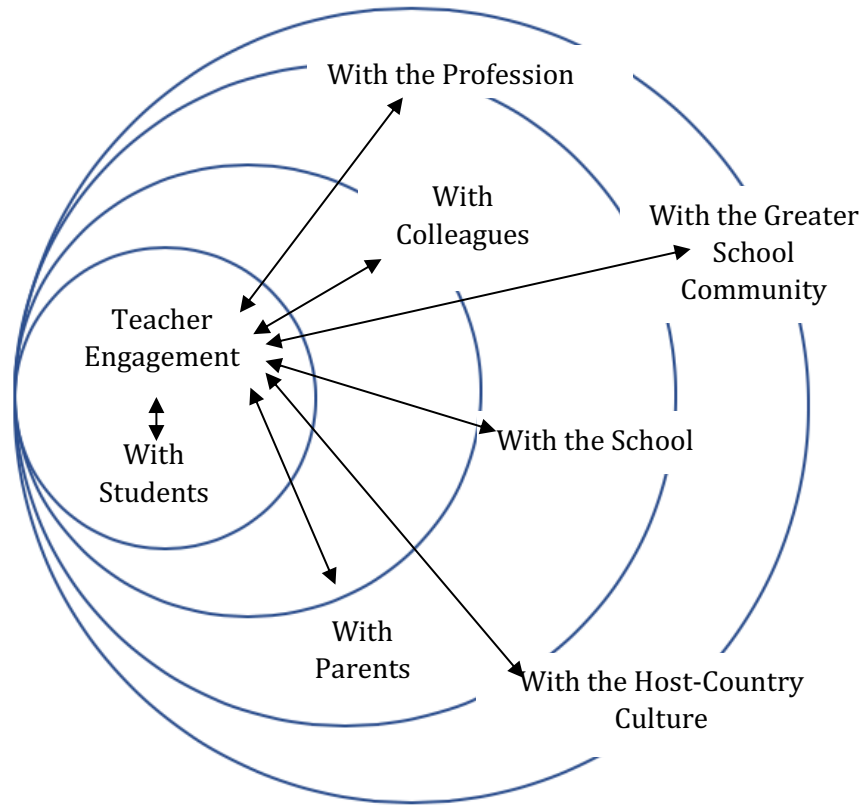


Figure 2: Areas of Teacher Engagement.

Many of the descriptions of teacher engagement from participants in this study aligned closely with elements of the Danielson Framework for Teaching, a set of teaching domains and indicators based on methods that have been empirically demonstrated to promote student learning (Danielson, 2013). This supports the position that teacher engagement promotes student learning. Of Danielson's (2013) four domains and 22 components, 11 components are supported as indicators of teacher engagement by the results in this study. A sample of the supported components and illustrative quotations are shown in Table 1.

Table 11

Alignment of Study Findings with Danielson Framework for Teaching

Danielson Indicator	Sub-Indicators	Illustrative Quotations from Participants
Domain 1: Planning and Preparation	1b Demonstrating Knowledge of Students	“So, when your students inform practice, it's listening to their voices, it's looking at their formative assessments and really tailoring what they need to know...how to take them from where they're at to where they need to be.”
Domain 2: Classroom Environment	2d Managing Student Behavior	“There's a lot of proximity. When students are working individually, or in groups, the teacher has proximity... so you go over to the student to give them help, give them confidence to speak up, you know, ‘Repeat that, that was a really, really good thought.’”
Domain 3: Instruction	3e Demonstrating Flexibility and Responsiveness	“Some students get it right away and they can go off and do their own thing, and they can go off and practice...but then this group of kids or maybe this one particular kid doesn't get it, and so you can sit down and work with them in a different way.”
Domain 4: Professional Responsibilities	4a Reflecting on Teaching	“They're constantly questioning themselves, and their ability to make a difference in the child's life.” “When I'm coming around and doing those assessments every few minutes... I take into consideration that not everybody's going to be able to do this...I have to adjust my approach to helping steer them at least to be successful in certain aspects of this. And that assessment does happen every moment.”
	4e Growing and Developing Professionally	“...actively engaging in bettering themselves ... whether that's personal development or professional development...seeking to better themselves and better their craft.”

Note. (Danielson, 2013).

In relation to reflection on teaching and responsiveness, teachers in this study emphasized that when highly engaged teachers see something is not working, they have a bias toward action, such as trying a new or different strategy in response to observed student learning needs. Some described teachers who implemented reflection cycles on an ongoing basis, often within a single class period; these teachers monitored and

adjusted instructional techniques as needed to enhance student learning. This tendency to adjust and try different techniques may be an indicator of teacher self-efficacy. Collective teacher efficacy, teachers' collective belief that they can make a difference in student learning, has been shown to have a strong influence on student learning (Eells, 2011). Engagement has been shown to mediate the relationship between self-efficacy and performance in other contexts and may mediate the relationship between teacher self-efficacy and student learning as well (Kim, 2013).

The findings regarding teacher engagement with colleagues align strongly with the literature. Engagement with colleagues was seen as both an indicator of engagement as a source of energy, ideas, and support. Engagement with colleagues in the form of reflective dialog can support student learning (Lim and Eo, 2014). Teachers in this study described seeking help from colleagues when they were having difficulty with a student learning and getting additional resources or ideas to implement. In some cases, this was on an individual basis, in other cases, teachers referred to the strength of their team. Meaningful collaboration in the form of *Professional Learning Communities* as described by Dufour, Dufour, Eaker, & Many (2010) includes assessment, reflection, and goal setting at the team level which "will lead to better results for their students, for their team, and for their school" p.12.

The findings from Research Question 2 build on the Engaged Teacher Scale, developed by Klassen et al. (2013), which includes engagement with classroom teaching and with students and colleagues, but does not include the other areas identified in this study: parents, the profession, the school, the greater school community, and the host-county culture.

Findings for Research Questions 1 and 2 are summarized in Table 12.

Table 12

Summary of Findings for Research Questions 1 and 2

Research Question	Findings
1. In what ways do expatriate international-school teachers and administrators describe teacher engagement?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engaged teachers are enthusiastic, energized, and have a positive impact on others • Engaged teachers use discretionary effort for the benefit of students, colleagues, and the school • Engaged teachers are mentally present and aware of others' needs • Engaged teachers are reflective and continuously learning • Engagement varies over time • Engagement is multi-faceted
2. In what ways do expatriate international-school teachers exhibit engagement?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engagement with Students by Facilitating Learning, Assessing Formatively and Responding to Student Needs • Engagement with the Profession by Taking Risks, Challenging the Status Quo, and Being a Lifelong Learner • Engagement with Colleagues by Supporting and Collaborating • Engagement with Parents by Communicating • Engagement with the Greater School Community by Interacting • Engagement with the School by Leading Activities and Initiatives • Engagement with the Host-Country Culture by Interacting and Understanding • Engagement May Look Different for Different People

Research Questions 3 and 4 inquire into the barriers to and drivers of engagement, two sides of the same question: what are the factors that influence expatriate teacher engagement in K-12 international schools? The findings for each question are summarized and listed in Table 13.

Table 13

Factors Influencing Teacher Engagement in K-12 International Schools

Research Question	Factors
3. What are the barriers to teacher engagement?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Teacher Transience• Feeling Overwhelmed• Interpersonal Conflict• Cultural Differences• Feeling Micromanaged• Receiving Criticism• Isolation from Colleagues• Lack of Training• Difficulty with Health or Family Needs• Lack of Support• Mismatch Between Personal and Organization Values• Not Enough Time
4. What are the drivers of teacher engagement in K-12 international schools?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Supportive Leadership: Communication• Supportive Leadership: Developing Trust and Giving Autonomy• Supportive Leadership: Providing Direction• Supportive Leadership: Capacity Building• Supportive Colleagues, Teams, and Opportunities to Interact• Perceived Meaningfulness of Work• Professional Learning Culture• Internal Factors Such as Motivation or Values• Salary, Benefits, and Quality of Life• Having Resources/ Processes in Place• Social Support• Receiving Recognition/ Appreciation• Involvement in Decisions• New to a School or New Role• Having Cultural Competence or a Cultural Mentor

Research Question 3

What are the barriers to teacher engagement in K-12 international schools? A total of 13 major themes arose as barriers to teacher engagement, with teacher transience being

the most frequently and extensively discussed theme. Many of the themes such as feeling overwhelmed or lacking training, were related to the teaching profession regardless of context, while some of the themes were specific to the international-school context. The data indicated teacher transience, cultural differences, and difficulty with health or family needs may be more especially pronounced for expatriate teachers in international schools. When other factors such as criticism and micromanagement were mentioned, it was typically in reference to jobs that teachers had left in their countries of origin, such as the United States.

There is some alignment to the existing literature on international schools with regard to the key findings. In their study on teacher wellbeing in international schools, Higgins and Wigford (2018) identified several barriers to wellbeing which were also considered barriers to engagement in this study: language and cultural barriers, lack of respect from colleagues and parents (interpersonal conflict) and lack leadership and support. In a study on why teachers leave international schools, Mancuso et al. (2011) found lack of supportive leadership to be the most prominent factor. While a lack of supportive leadership did not clearly emerge as a barrier to engagement in this study, supportive leadership as a driver of engagement did; this suggests a positive relationship with engagement. Another finding in common with the literature is the importance of meeting family needs. Mancuso et al. (2011) noted that family needs was an important factor influencing some teachers' decisions to leave an international school.

One interesting and seemingly contradictory finding was although teacher transience was perceived as a major barrier to engagement, being new to a school was seen as a driver of engagement. This indicated the nature of teacher transience in

international schools should not be oversimplified and classified as only a negative aspect of the international-school context. One explanation for transience appearing as both a barrier and driver of engagement may be in whether the given stressor related to transience is experienced as a hindrance or a challenge (Cavanaugh, Boswell, Roehling, & Boudreau, 2000). Cavanaugh et al. (2000) described hindrance-related stressors as “work-related demands or circumstances that tend to constrain or interfere with an individual's work achievement and that do not tend to be associated with potential gains for the individual,” and challenge stressors as “work-related demands or circumstances that, although potentially stressful, have associated potential gains for individuals” (p. 68). In their study of managers’ work-related stress, Cavanaugh et al. (2000) found hindrance-related stress to be negatively associated with job satisfaction and positively associated with job-searching behaviors, while challenge-related stress had the opposite relationship with job satisfaction and job searching.

Whether teacher transience is viewed as a challenge or a hindrance is partially related to whether the individual is someone who is joining a school, leaving a school, or staying at a school, while others come and go. Participants in this study tended to view teacher transience as an engaging challenge for the new individual when they join a school, but somewhat of a hindrance for returning faculty and staff, possibly because it impedes their progress on goals, weakens their sense of relatedness, or drains energy and other resources because the new individuals require mentoring.

Ronfeldt et al. (2013) noted that excessive turnover has a negative impact on student learning because it burdens the staying-teachers and disrupts student-teacher relationships, staff cohesion, and program coherence. Furthermore, Mancuso et al. (2011) hypothesized that leaving teachers begin to disengage with the school from the

moment they decide to leave. In an international school, due to contract cycles, the decision to leave could be as much as a full school year before the teacher actually leaves the school. The disengagement of leaving teachers was partially supported by the findings in this study, but also countered with examples of teachers who were highly engaged until they left the school.

Research Question 4

What are the drivers of teacher engagement in K-12 international schools?

Fifteen important drivers of teacher engagement were identified, with supportive leadership being the most extensively discussed factor. Sub-themes of supportive leadership related to communication, developing trust, giving autonomy, providing direction, and capacity building accounted for four of the 15 major themes.

Various aspects of supportive leadership as a key driver of teacher engagement have been supported in studies of teacher in their countries of origin, in international schools, and among expatriate employees in other types of work (Hakanen et al., 2006; Kraimer, Wayne, & Jaworski, 2001; Mancuso et al., 2011; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2009; Odland & Ruzicka, 2009). The findings from this study reinforce the literature on the importance of leadership.

The leadership behaviors identified as drivers of teacher engagement in this study align most strongly with transformational leadership, which includes idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Bass & Avolio, 1994). In schools, idealized influence and inspirational motivation through actions such as developing a shared vision can be a means of providing direction and meaningfulness, important drivers of engagement. The development of a shared vision is also highlighted in the Kouzes and Poser model (Northouse, 2013). Through the process

of developing a shared vision, “leaders listen to the dreams of others and show them how their dreams can be realized” (Northouse, 2013, p. 198). Intellectual stimulation can come through the development and support of a professional learning culture and providing autonomy, allowing teachers to take risks and innovate (Northouse, 2013). Similarly, Kouzes and Posner suggested that transformational leaders “enable others to act” by building trust, promoting collaboration, and support the decisions of others (Northouse, 2013, p. 199). Individualized consideration involves listening carefully and identifying the unique needs of followers (Bass & Avolio, 1994). This links strongly to the most prominent driver of teacher engagement among the findings in this study: communication between leadership and faculty. Individualized consideration within the context of the JD-R model can be seen as listening carefully to followers to identify barriers to and drivers of engagement at the individual level.

Recent empirical research also supports the influence of transformational leadership behaviors on teacher engagement. Breevaart and Bakker (2018) studied the effects of transformational leadership behaviors on teacher engagement using the JD-R model as a conceptual framework and found that when teachers’ workload and cognitive demands were high, engagement was also high on days when teachers reported that the school principal exhibited transformational leadership behaviors such as and providing intellectual challenge, inspiration, and support for teachers’ needs.

Internal factors, such as personal motivation, were mentioned by a few participants, and could make an important difference in engagement levels. For example there may be individual differences that influence whether a teacher experiences a move to a new school as an engaging challenge or mostly as a hindrance. Some teachers in this study reported being very excited and engaged in the first few months at a new school;

others reported being overwhelmed with the change and unable to engage in their work to a high degree. A notable case of different perspectives is when a teaching couple is hired at the same school, with one member of the couple hired for a key leadership position and the spouse hired for a less prestigious position. Participants in this study did not report on personal experience with this, though some shared stories of others' experience, where one member of a couple experienced the job change as an engaging challenge, while the other did not.

Implications for Practice

With all that has been written on leadership, theorists are still inquiring into how leaders influence follower outcomes (Breevaart et al., 2014). The findings from this study, in connection to transformational leadership, the Job-Demands Resources Model, and Self-Determination Theory, provide an explanation for how leadership influences engagement, which can be used to inform practical applications.

Job-Demands Resources Model

The JD-R model is commonly used to study employee engagement as a response to the interaction between job demands and resources. Job demands include the physical, cognitive, and emotional workload and job resources include the physical, cognitive, or emotional resources from the job such as tools to use, emotional support, or supervisory coaching. The JD-R model also includes personal resources that include personal attributes or attitudes such as optimism and resilience, which individuals may call upon in the course of their work (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008).

Overall, the JD-R model acts somewhat like a seesaw, with demands on one side and resources on the other side. Personal and job resources are hypothesized to buffer the

impact of job demands and “start a motivational process that leads to engagement” (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008, p. 218).

The interactions of particular demands and resources were not deeply explored in this study, however, some examples provided by participants illustrated how the two can interact and support the JD-R hypothesis that job resources can buffer the impact of job demands. One administrator noted, “Workload you can overcome, up to a point that you’re not killing somebody, but people will take on more work if they feel it’s meaningful and they’re growing from it.” This idea was supported by a teacher at a different school who said, “Yes, workload sucks but my autonomy and my meaningful work gives me enough energy to keep working at it.” In this example, high workload is a demand, yet autonomy and perceived meaningfulness appear to be acting as psychological resources to buffer the strain of the workload and drive engagement.

Self-Determination Theory

SDT provides a way to analyze the psychological basis for the effect of various factors on teacher engagement. SDT has been proposed as an overarching theory of employee engagement and can be used to examine the various factors related to how they help teachers meet the basic psychological needs of competence, autonomy, and relatedness (Meyer & Gagn, 2008; Ryan & Deci, 2000). The findings of this study support SDT as an explanation for many of the factors.

All three of the psychological needs proposed in SDT appeared prominently in the findings of factors influencing teacher engagement. Feelings of competence can be fueled by capacity building, a professional learning culture, supportive colleagues who share resources and ideas, and recognition. Likewise, criticism can be a threat to feelings of competence. Autonomy was regarded as a very strong driver of engagement and

micromanagement, the opposite of autonomy, was seen as a barrier. The importance of relatedness can be seen in isolation and cultural differences as barriers, and social support, supportive colleagues, and cultural mentoring as drivers.

SDT as a theoretical framework can be used to consider how any given factor might be related to psychological needs. Teacher transience, for example, was the most frequently mentioned barrier to teacher engagement in international schools. New teachers experiencing strain may have feelings of reduced competence because there is so much to learn in a new international environment, both in terms of job skills and adapting to a new culture and lifestyle. They may have also left a position in which they were highly experienced and regarded as an expert, causing a sense of reduced competence. In addition, relatedness for new teachers is almost certainly low because the teacher enters with few or no established relationships or sense of community. Through the lens of SDT, engagement drivers to address this would be targeted at increasing feelings of competence and relatedness.

Practical strategies to address potential barriers to engagement related to transience might include a comprehensive orientation program with professional development and orientation to the local culture and school culture, deliberate relationship-building activities, opportunities to interact with colleagues, a designated mentor, and placement on a department team where the new teacher can both learn from colleagues and share expertise, simultaneously building feelings of competence and relatedness. Returning teachers in an environment of high turnover would also benefit from a comprehensive orientation program such as this to buffer against the emotional and cognitive impact of the disruption caused by the turnover.

Developing a Teacher Engagement Strategy

The findings from this study could be used by school leaders for the development of a teacher-engagement strategy at international schools, which would help guide leadership decisions and actions toward the promotion of teacher engagement and improved student learning. The process outlined below is based on a stage model proposed by Saks (2017) intended to help practitioners put into action what is known about engagement.

Stage 1: define teacher engagement for the school. Saks suggests either choosing or adapting a definition that works for the organization. At present, I am not aware of any published definition of teacher engagement, but the findings of this study offer a starting point; engaged teachers are energetic, reflective, and responsive.

Stage 2: choose an area, or referent of engagement, to focus on. This study identified seven possible areas of teacher engagement: students, parents, colleagues, the profession, the school, the greater school community, and the local culture, shown above in figure 2. An attempt to measure a teacher's overall engagement across all areas may not yield usable data; different areas, and even different tasks should be analyzed separately in order to get a clear picture of the extent of engagement and of the associated barriers and drivers (Saks, 2017).

Stage 3: choose or adapt a teacher engagement scale and adjust for the give area of engagement and align it to the organization's definition of engagement. For example, if the focus area is teacher engagement with students and the definition includes reflecting and responding to student needs, this would need to be part of the measure. The Danielson Framework (Danielson, 2013) and the Engaged Teacher Scale (Klassen et al. 2013) could be adapted for this purpose.

Stage 4: identify all relevant job demands and resources that may act as engagement barriers and drivers and decide which ones to assess. For example, if parent relationships are considered a barrier to engagement, assess the extent to which teachers experience this in order to understand the nuances of the barrier.

Stage 5: support all teachers by embedding important engagement drivers into the culture of the school on an organizational level and an individual level. Based on the findings from this study, implementing a transformational leadership style with an emphasis on developing a shared vision, a strong professional learning culture, and strong relationships throughout the school community would be an important starting point for any school.

Limitations

This study was limited to three schools in China which offer an American curriculum and findings may not be generalizable to other settings. Potential bias could be reduced by having additional researchers analyze the data. As the researcher is a school leader and was the only analyst in this study, this may have introduced bias. The population of teachers who participated were mostly female and the administrators interviewed were all male. There may be some gender differences which were not explored in this study. It is also worth noting that there was no member-checking following the analysis of results.

Recommendations for Research

This study presents a model of teacher engagement which could be further explored and articulated. For example, among the areas of teacher engagement such as engagement with parents, host-country culture, and community, which of these have the greatest impact on student learning and why? Also, do the identified drivers and barriers

to engagement act similarly across all areas of engagement, or does each area have a unique profile of barriers and drivers?

Issues around the nature of expatriate teacher transience in international schools were at the forefront of discussions on barriers to teacher engagement. While many school leaders make a concerted effort to retain teachers longer, transience will likely always be an issue for expatriate teachers and will need to be factored into the way schools work to build and maintain a sense of community and positive relationships among teachers as well as between teachers, students, parents, and other community members. More research could be done specifically on ways to buffer the negative effects of teacher transience while maximizing the benefits of bringing new people into the organization.

Another area that may be of particular concern for international schools is teacher engagement with the host-country culture. Very few participants mentioned ways that expatriate teachers engaged with the local culture, yet many participants named cultural and linguistic differences as a barrier to engagement. This suggests more attention could be given to developing teachers' capacity to understand and interact with the host-country culture in some way, especially as international schools around the world increasingly serving host-country nationals as opposed to expatriate students (Brummitt, 2016).

One of the administrators interviewed articulated this concern in his description of the international schools related to their host countries and the changing nature of globalization:

A school that rejects or pushes to one side the local culture versus one that embraces and embeds it is going to make a huge difference on the capacity of the individual in the school to transition easily between work and home life...I think

traditionally international schools have almost held as a badge of honor that we are a bubble of civility and modernity in the craziness of the international setting that we're in. Dangerous thoughts, I think. Certainly, well-suited to the 19th and 20th century, but dangerous thoughts for the 21st century, where we're increasingly interconnected.

The impact of cultural competence and engagement with the host culture on student learning in international schools deserves more attention and will become a bigger issue as international schools continue to grow and enroll more host-country nationals who will be taught by expatriate teachers.

Finally, this study brought to light a few examples of situations that, while highly challenging, were also highly engaging. The world of international education is full of complications, difficulties, and obstacles; people who embrace these difficult situations as exciting challenges rather than only as annoying hindrances are needed to fill those roles. The challenge stressor-hindrancer stressor framework (Breevaart et al, 2014) in combination with the JD-R model suggests that challenges can be highly engaging under the right conditions, especially with the right leadership. More research in this area would be helpful, especially in particularly challenging locations.

Conclusion

“Great leaders are stewards of organizational energy” (Loehr & Schwartz, 2003, p. 5). Teacher engagement is a positive state that yields positive outcomes for the individual teacher, students served, colleagues, and the organization as a whole. The primary focus of teacher engagement is with students, though teachers also engage with colleagues, parents, the profession, the school, the greater school community, and the local culture. These other areas of engagement may indirectly support teacher

engagement with students and students learning. Engagement may be influenced by some personal traits or dispositions, though the majority of findings from this study point to a wide range of external factors that can either hinder or promote engagement, with supportive leadership as the most prominent driver of teacher engagement. The findings from this study indicate that transformational leadership behaviors are likely to promote teacher engagement. School leaders can apply a transformational leadership approach in combination with an understanding of the JD-R model and SDT to develop a teacher engagement strategy to develop and sustain high levels of energy and engagement among teachers in their schools.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Informed Consent Form

Expatriate Teacher Engagement Study Consent Form

You are invited to participate in a research study on expatriate teacher engagement. Please read this form carefully and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to take part in this study.

What this study is about: The purpose of this study is to learn about teacher and administrator perspectives on factors that influence expatriate teacher engagement in international schools in China. You must be an expatriate teacher currently working at an international school in China in order to participate in this study.

Procedures for Teachers: If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to

- Participate in a 1-hour focus-group discussion with other teachers
- Complete a short demographic questionnaire online
- Some teachers may be asked to participate in a voluntary individual interview in person or by Skype for 30-45 minutes.

Procedures for Administrators: If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to

- Participate in a 30-minute interview in person or by Skype

Voluntary Nature of the Study: This study is completely voluntary. You may withdraw at any time.

Risks and Benefits: There are no anticipated risks of participating in this study other than the normal risks associated with your job duties, and there are no anticipated benefits to participating in this study.

Compensation: This study is completely voluntary. There is no payment for participation, however, participants in the focus groups will be given a coffee-shop gift card as a thank you for participating.

Privacy: Any information you provide will be kept confidential. The researcher will not use your personal information for any purpose other than this research study. Quotations from interviews may be used in the study but will be anonymous. Data will be kept secure by password protection and encryption on the researcher's computer and external hard drive for a period of at least 1 year.

Contacts and Questions: You may contact the student researcher, Peter Burnside, at any time by email at burn0254@umn.edu. You may contact the researcher's advisor, Dr. Deanne Magnusson at the University of Minnesota at magnu002@umn.edu. If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher(s),

you are encouraged to contact the Research Participants' Advocate Line, (612) 625-1650 or go to <https://research.umn.edu/units/hrpp/research-participants/questions-concerns>.

Statement of Consent

Consent to Participate in Research Study on Expatriate Teacher Work Engagement in International Schools in China

- I understand that even if I agree to participate now, I can withdraw at any time or refuse to answer any question without any consequences of any kind.
 - I understand that I can withdraw permission to use data from my interview within two weeks after the interview, in which case the material will be deleted.
 - I have had the purpose and nature of the study explained to me and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study.
 - I understand that participation involves sharing my views on teacher engagement.
 - I understand that I will not benefit directly from participating in this research.
 - I agree to my interview being audio-recorded.
 - I understand that all information I provide for this study will be treated confidentially.
 - I understand that in any report on the results of this research my identity will remain anonymous.
 - I understand that disguised extracts from my interview may be quoted in the dissertation.
 - I understand that signed consent forms and original audio recordings will be retained on the researcher's computer and backed up and will be kept for a period of one year.
 - I understand that under freedom of information legalisation I am entitled to access the information I have provided at any time while it is in storage as specified above.
 - Eligibility: I am neither a former employee of Peter Burnside nor currently applying to work at Xiamen International School
- I have read the above information and feel that I understand the study well enough to make a decision about my involvement. (Signatures will be obtained on site)**

Name of Participant: _____

Signature of participant

Date

I believe the participant is giving informed consent to participate in this study.

Signature of researcher

Date

Appendix B

Semi-Structured Interview Questions

Teacher Focus Group

1. When we use the term *teacher engagement* what does that mean to you?
2. Visualize an engaged teacher. This teacher might be one you have met, a colleague or one of your own teachers. What are the characteristics of this teacher?
3. Describe the characteristics of a teacher who is not engaged.
4. In what specific ways do international school expatriate teachers exhibit engagement?
5. What do you think fosters or promotes teacher engagement in an international school?
6. If you were a principal or a head of school, what could you do to promote teacher engagement in your school?
7. Think about a time when it was difficult for you to be engaged as a teacher. With that in mind, what do you see as the barriers or challenges to teacher engagement in international schools?
8. These are some factors that may be involved in teacher engagement. Is there anything that you would add to this list?
 - A. Supportive leadership
 - B. Salary
 - C. Benefits
 - D. Professional learning culture
 - E. Involvement in decision making
 - F. Autonomy
 - G. Social support from colleagues or friends
 - H. Communication between leadership and faculty
 - I. Perceived meaningfulness of work
 - J. Positive parent relationships
 - K. Recognition
9. From the list in the previous question, what would you say are the top 3 factors influencing teacher engagement?
10. What is the most important idea or thought relating to teacher engagement that we have talked about today?

Teacher Individual Interview

1. When we use the term *teacher engagement* what does that mean to you?
2. Visualize an engaged teacher. This teacher might be one you have met, a colleague or one of your own teachers. What are the characteristics of this teacher?
3. Describe the characteristics of a teacher who is not engaged.
4. In what specific ways do international school expatriate teachers exhibit engagement?
5. What do you think fosters or promotes teacher engagement in an international school?
6. If you were a principal or a head of school, what could you do to promote teacher engagement in your school?
7. Think about a time when it was difficult for you to be engaged as a teacher. With that in mind, what do you see as the barriers or challenges to teacher engagement in international schools?
7. 5 Think about a time when you felt very engaged as a teacher. What was that like? What do think contributed to a sense of engagement?
8. These are some factors that may be involved in teacher engagement. Is there anything that you would add to this list?
 - A. Supportive leadership
 - B. Salary
 - C. Benefits
 - D. Professional learning culture
 - E. Involvement in decision making
 - F. Autonomy
 - G. Social support from colleagues or friends
 - H. Communication between leadership and faculty
 - I. Perceived meaningfulness of work
 - J. Positive parent relationships
 - K. Recognition
9. From the list in the previous question, what would you say are the top 3 factors influencing teacher engagement?
10. What is the most important idea or thought relating to teacher engagement that we have talked about today?

Administrator Interview

1. When we use the term *teacher engagement* what does that mean to you?
2. Visualize an engaged teacher. This teacher might be one you have met, a colleague or one of your own teachers. What are the characteristics of this teacher?
3. Describe the characteristics of a teacher who is not engaged.
4. In what specific ways do international school expatriate teachers exhibit engagement?
5. What do you think fosters or promotes teacher engagement in an international school?
6. What do you think principals and heads of school can do to promote teacher engagement?
7. Think about a time when you observed an expatriate teacher who was not engaged. With that in mind, what do you see as the barriers or challenges to expatriate teacher engagement in international schools?
8. These are some factors that may be involved in teacher engagement. Is there anything that you would add to this list?
 - A. Supportive leadership
 - B. Salary
 - C. Benefits
 - D. Professional learning culture
 - E. Involvement in decision making
 - F. Autonomy
 - G. Social support from colleagues or friends
 - H. Communication between leadership and faculty
 - I. Perceived meaningfulness of work
 - J. Positive parent relationships
 - K. Recognition
9. From the list in the previous question, what would you say are the top 3 factors influencing teacher engagement?
10. What is the most important idea or thought relating to teacher engagement that we have talked about today?