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ENGAGEMENT IS EVERYTHING:
PRINCIPALS' PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR ROLE IN TEACHER ENGAGEMENT
A QUALITATIVE STUDY

by

Jennifer K. Hellbusch

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of
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In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements
For the Degree of Doctor of Education

Major: Educational Administration
Under the Supervision of Professor Nicholas J. Pace

Lincoln, Nebraska

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Jennifer K. Hellbusch, Ed.D.

University of Nebraska, 2022

Advisor: Dr. Nicholas Pace

The effects of student engagement on academic achievement are studied by and large, leaving a lack of emphasis on teacher engagement. In seeking out research and literature on “engagement” and “education,” scholars focus on the importance of student engagement. Numerous studies examine the relationship between student engagement and learning (Carini, et al., 2006). Conversely, exploring teacher engagement and how principals view themselves as responsible for promoting that engagement is a topic that is understudied and will provide recommendations for principals as well as district level leaders.

Defined, teacher engagement not only includes the behavior of teachers, but also encompasses “a psychological state” of the teacher (Rutter & Jacobson, 1986, p. 5). Available research concentrating on teacher engagement reveals the impacts it can have on students (Williams, 1996). According to Williams, “teacher engagement is a prerequisite for student engagement” and “teacher’s work and student’s work are linked...” (p. 125). Tim Hodges, senior consultant for the Gallup Organization, contends that teacher engagement is “a key driver of student engagement” (2018, para 4). Teachers influence students. Principals influence teachers. Yet, current literature centered on

teacher engagement and the principal's perception of their responsibility in promoting teacher engagement remains narrow.

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the extent to which principals view themselves as responsible for promoting teacher engagement and the actions they take to support it. This study further explores the extent to which principals feel they impact teacher engagement as well as how engagement is maintained. The beliefs and perceptions revealed by building principals will lead to exploration of the behaviors and practices principals put into place to promote and support positive teacher engagement. The proposed study will invite six elementary principals and three secondary principals serving a growing Midwest district to interview and share their perceptions on what they believe their level of responsibility is in promoting teacher engagement as well as actions they take related to it.

DEDICATION

For as long as I can remember, education has always been valued and supported in my family. Throughout my educational journey and career in education, thank you to my grandma, Kate Schaffler, my parents, John and Sue Oddo, and sister, Sarah Gearhart. Thank you for loving me, supporting me, and cheering me on all along the way. From the beginning, you planted seeds to grow my love of and for learning. What is more, you have provided me with the resources to further my education, beyond a high school diploma, bachelor's, and master's degree. You have instilled the value of education in me that I, too, hope to instill in my children. Without you, this journey would not have been possible.

To my husband, Matt, thank you for believing in me and giving me the time and grace to focus on my studies and writing. Your unwavering understanding and ultimate blessing in the pursuit of this degree has led me to wholly and successfully fulfill my doctoral dreams. Further, you have rooted the importance of education for our children, Ellie and Henry. I love you and thank you for that.

Ellie and Henry, thank you for being my cheerleaders. You have remained by my side as I have studied and embarked on this dissertation journey. You both inspire me, spark my curiosities, and encourage me to persevere in not only my education, but also in life. Thank you for your unwavering love and constant support.

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As I entered the field of education and continued my studies, there have been so many educational leaders that have impacted my path in education and pursuit of my

doctoral degree. First, I would like to thank my advisor, Dr. Nicholas Pace and Dissertation Committee. You have provided invaluable feedback to challenge and aid in my growth as a student, researcher, and leader.

The first time I considered pursuing an advanced degree, my first principal, Dr. Nila Nielsen, shared that I was a “rising star.” This encouraged me to shoot for the stars and dream big dreams. After working with Dr. Nielsen, Dr. Melissa Poloncic and Dr. Tara Cooper became my principals. Both knew I was destined for principalship. They supported my practicum and coursework as I engaged in the Educational Specialist degree while also providing me with leadership opportunities. Thereafter, I received further guidance and continued leadership support from Mrs. Colleen Ballard.

Then, fully immersed in the program, Superintendent of Gretna Public Schools, Dr. Richard Beran, along with the district level administration team, including Mr. Travis Lightle, Dr. Rex Anderson, and Dr. Violet Glasshoff inspired and supported this dissertation work. This administration team has provided me with check-ins, encouragement, and have even read draft versions of the study. Thank you for believing in me and supporting my education!

Last, but not least, thank you to the incredible group of administrators and colleagues that I get to call my team! Thank you for your mentorship, providing an ear to listen, and offering words of affirmation throughout my transition into principalship and as I engaged in my studies.

Thank you all for your continued love and support.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The introduction of this proposed study first reviews educational history and current educational climate to provide a background understanding of the topic. To further set the stage, I reveal my personal interest and connection to teacher engagement from both a teaching and administrative perspective. Discussion is also centered on the study's purpose in exploring principals' perceptions of their responsibility of teacher engagement and actions they take to promote it. I provide details related to the invited participants and selected school district. The study embeds William Kahn's theory of engagement by applying cognitive, emotional, and physical dimensions of engagement to the study. Research questions, assumptions, definition of terms, delimitations, and limitations are examined to provide a comprehensive grasp of the study. The introduction concludes with an explanation of the study's significance, specifically identifying how it will positively impact stakeholders working in and outside of education.

In the era of high stakes testing and accountability, ensuring students' achievement and growth has been at the forefront of educational legislation. From 2002-2015, teachers and administrators followed the general education law, "No Child Left Behind" (NCLB) enacted to ensure students were learning and achieving. This landmark federal legislation required states to test students in English Language Arts and math once each year in third through eighth grade, and once in high school. Testing in science took place once in elementary, middle, and high school. The principle of the legislation

was centered around accountability; school districts disseminated the testing data of minority subgroups to ensure progress.

The “Every Student Successes Act” (ESSA) replaced NCLB and modified legislation to allow more flexibility to the states. With ESSA, states create accountability plans and submit them to the U.S. Department of Education. However, many states still use testing to measure student progress and achievement. With such an emphasis on student achievement, attention revolved around research-based, most effective instructional practices as well as student learning and engagement. Perhaps overlooked during this time, studies concentrating on teacher engagement were few. Now with the COVID-19 Pandemic, educators and the public are concerned with teacher shortages and teacher burnout. Teacher engagement focuses on positively engaging teachers to prevent burnout and promote retention. Positively engaged teachers have the power to publically promote the overall perceptions of the profession as well.

Nearly 18 years after the enactment of NCLB, teacher engagement is now becoming more of an educational buzzword. Historically, researchers have explored the impacts and factors that lead to positive or negative teacher engagement (Rutter & Jacobson, 1986). Present research delves into the relationships of teacher engagement and meaningful work (Van Wingarden & Poell, 2019) and research has shown that increased job demands have had a negative direct impact on teachers’ work behavior (Choochom, 2016).

Several studies have addressed the issue of teacher engagement, the factors that build engagement, and its importance. In “Facilitating Teacher Engagement” Rutter and

Jacobson (1986) identified school site variables that facilitate higher levels of teacher engagement. These site variables include individual teacher characteristics, demographics of the school, and organizational features of the school. Other studies have explored engagement in terms of empowerment; Rinehart, Short, Short, and Eckley (1998) explored administrators' influence and the processes to take in empowering teachers.

Though many studies and literature examine teacher engagement, there is a lack of research from the principal's perspective. Exploring the principal's perceptions of promoting positive teacher engagement has the potential to yield progressive insights related to teacher engagement for principals seeking to increase levels of teacher engagement. In addition, studying the principal's perception of teacher engagement will provide a more complete understanding of how principals can support positive teacher engagement.

Personal Interest in Teacher Engagement

I selected the topic of teacher engagement and the perceptions of the principal's responsibility in promoting engagement because of personal connections I have had as a former classroom teacher and current building principal. While teaching, I had the opportunity to open a new building with a veteran principal, who five years later, retired. Following that retirement, the district hired an experienced principal; however, that principal resigned after two years. To replace that principal, a new principal took the job and now remains in the building. Some teaching staff had three different building principals within a four-year period!

As a classroom teacher, I observed other teachers engage differently in their work.

Similarly, the actions each principal took in promoting teacher engagement were vastly different and each leader's efforts yielded different results in terms of teacher engagement. In my experiences, students shared with me the teachers that were excited to teach and enjoyed teaching. Students would also identify teachers that they did not want to be assigned to. Even as a student myself, I can identify teachers that are unhappy and disengaged. This led me to consider which classroom I would rather enroll in. These observations and questions first sparked my interest in studying this topic.

Serving as a building principal, I recognize from a practical standpoint that the impact of teacher engagement is significant. Promoting teacher positive engagement personally interests me because I not only want my teaching staff to be happy at work, but also feel a sense of satisfaction in their work. An engaged staff results in positive impacts for students and teachers (Bakker & Bal, 2010; Klassen, Yerdelen, & Durksen, 2013). With this research, I believe the findings of this study will increase my effectiveness as a leader of a learning community.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this dissertation research is to better understand principals' perceptions of their responsibility in promoting teacher engagement, and actions they take to support teacher engagement. Principals in the proposed study serve in a growing Midwestern school district. Since the 1997-98 school year, enrollment has more than quadrupled, with much of the growth occurring between 2005 and 2021. Between 2015-2020, the district grew by an average of 364 students per year. District-wide, this is

an average increase of 8.7%. This rapid enrollment growth makes for a unique environment.

The proposed qualitative study will explore elementary and secondary principals' perceptions of their responsibility in promoting teacher engagement and actions they take to support teacher engagement. Building upon the literature review and theoretical framework of William Kahn's Theory of Engagement, the research questions formed will seek detailed insight to the views of principals.

Additionally, this dissertation research will add to the scant body of research into principals' perspectives of their level of responsibility to teacher engagement and how they promote teacher engagement. The research may create additional understanding of perspectives and actions school administrators hold and can engage in to promote and support teacher engagement. The themes imparted by this study may be applicable for pre-service principals, assistant principals, and principals across the nation.

Superintendents and district-level leaders may also utilize the findings to create staff development on how administrators build engagement in teachers. These understandings connect to principal effectiveness. Beyond the building and district level leadership, this research can be useful for school leadership organizations such as the Nebraska Council for School Administrators (NCSA), Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD), as well as the United States Department of Education and the state level departments of education policy makers.

Theoretical Framework

The concept of employee engagement appeared in William Kahn's 1990 ethnographic study of "Psychological Conditions of Personal Engagement and Disengagement at Work." Kahn's study developed a grounded theoretical framework to show how psychological experiences of work and work context shape the process of how employees bring themselves (self-in-role) in and out of tasks (Kahn, 1990, pp. 692-694).

The study entailed interviews of summer camp counselors and architectural firm members focused on their experiences of either engagement or disengagement while working. While studying summer camp counselors," Kahn collected data using observation, document analysis, self-reflection, and in-depth interviews. While studying at the architecture firm, Kahn engaged in meetings and telephone conversations to gain consent. From there, Kahn completed in-depth structured interviews that were then analyzed using the dimensions of cognitive, emotional, and physical engagement (Kahn, 1990, pp. 698-699).

Kahn (1990), dubbed the "Father of Engagement," found that the extent to which employees were engaged (or disengaged) was a result of their psychological meaningfulness, safety, and ability. According to Kahn, meaningfulness is the "sense of return on investments of self in role performances" (p. 705). Safety, then, is a sense of being able to be oneself without the fear of negative consequences (p. 705) availability is the sense that one possesses the physical, emotional, and psychological resources necessary for investing into role (p. 705). Therefore, employees experiencing greater

psychological meaningfulness, safety, and/or ability are engaged to a greater degree in their work.

Kahn's Theory conceptualized work engagement as the "harnessing of organizational members' selves to their work roles . . ." (1990, p. 694). Kahn then asserted that work role performance and connection to dimensions of employees' drive led "personal energies into physical, cognitive, and emotional labors" (1990, p. 700). Educational researchers support the three components found within this theory of engagement (Burch, Heller, Burch, Freed, & Steed, 2015). Cognitive engagement is displayed during the execution of the work whereas emotional engagement becomes established through a positive state of mind. Devotion and energy to physical work tasks are the hallmarks of physical engagement (Burch, et al., 2015).

Kahn's Theory of Engagement guides this research for several reasons. Not only is Kahn's Theory of Engagement widely accepted by educators (Burch, et al, 2015), but also supports the types of teacher engagement present in K-12 schools (see Figure 1). This theory provides a consistent framework for design, data collection, and data analysis. Through the application of this theory, the concept of teacher engagement and interpretations of it are also more uniform. The uniformity of teacher engagement will offer a basis of common understanding on how principals perceive their role and actions they take to promote positive teacher engagement.

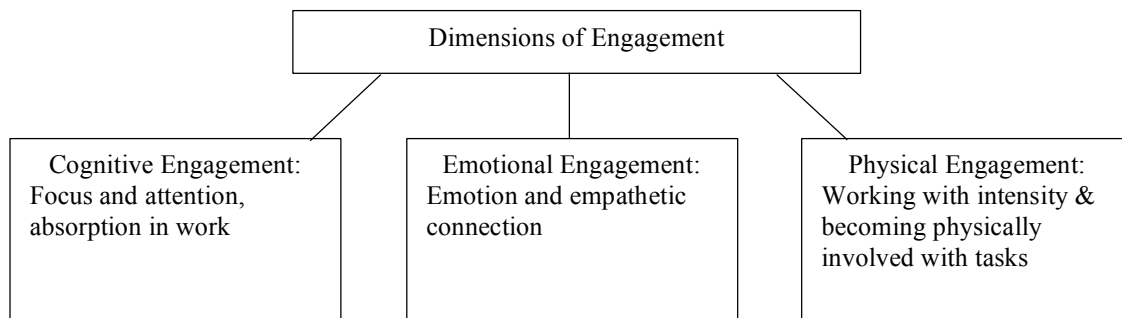


Figure 1. Kahn's theory of engagement (Kahn, 1990, p. 700).

Throughout the proposed study, the principals' perception of their responsibility for promoting teacher engagement are rooted within the design, data collection, and data analysis of this dissertation. First, the primary and secondary questions as well as all sub-questions interpret teacher engagement according to Kahn's theory of engagement and explore engagement cognitively, emotionally, and physically.

Kahn's theory will also be embedded within the data collection process. Just as Kahn's theory utilizes qualitative measures, this dissertation study will also consist of a series of interviews with questions divided according to Kahn's dimensions of teacher's work engagement, including cognitive, emotional, and physical. Prior to posing any questions to principals, a scripted definition of each dimension of engagement according to Kahn will be provided to each principal interviewee. These definitions will ensure valid results and limit the principals' interpretation of engagement as a concept.

Finally, data analysis will employ Kahn's theory as coded results of principals' perceptions of their responsibilities as related to the cognitive, emotional and physical engagement of the teacher. Secondly, the actions principals take to promote positive engagement will be categorized cognitively, emotionally, and physically.

Research Questions

The research questions of this dissertation study are based on Kahn's Theory of Engagement (1990). Kahn's theory classifies engagement into three dimensions: cognitive, emotional, and physical. Kahn asserts that individuals may demonstrate and/or be at diverse levels of engagement within each dimension, and these levels can affect their experiences of work and work performance. Questions developed from this theory allow for a better understanding of teacher engagement when principals are reviewing and discussing questions posed within the study. This also allows differentiation between cognitive, emotional, and physical teacher engagement. Cognitive engagement centers on focus and attention, and absorption in work, while emotional engagement implies emotion and empathetic connection (Kahn, 1990, p. 700). Kahn (1990) describes physical engagement as working with intensity and becoming physically involved in tasks (p. 700).

Building on prior literature and studies, the primary question of the study asks:

1. How do principals perceive their responsibility of promoting teacher engagement? Sub-questions will clarify the engagement. These include:
 - A. How do principals perceive their responsibility of promoting teacher cognitive engagement?
 - B. How do principals perceive their responsibility of promoting teacher emotional engagement?
 - C. How do principals perceive their responsibility of promoting teacher physical engagement?

After exploring the primary question related to perceptions, a secondary question will follow:

2. How do principals determine what actions to take to support positive engagement?

This secondary question is a precursor to sub-questions:

- A. What actions do principals take to support positive cognitive engagement?
- B. What actions do principals take to support positive emotional engagement?
- C. What actions do principals take to support positive physical engagement?

Embedded within each sub-question is Kahn's Theory of Engagement, supporting the primary and secondary questions.

Exploration of these research questions and sub-questions occur through a qualitative study of nine principals serving a growing Midwestern community; six principals serve the elementary schools, two serve middle schools, and one high school principal. The research resulting from this dissertation is designed to be presented to the district and serve as a support to new principals fostering engaged teachers in the growing district. Further, the research will be helpful to pre-service principals, assistant principals, principals, superintendents and school boards, as well as other organizations.

Assumptions

The primary assumption made prior to the research is that principals interviewed will answer honestly during the interview. To ensure honesty in the interviews, I will emphasize that the study is qualitative and based on their experiences; there are no

“right” or “wrong” answers. Assurances will also be provided to principals, including anonymity and confidentiality of their involvement in the study. In addition, the answers provided by each principal remain confidential with no discussion of the answers with the other principals involved in the study. To certify confidentiality and anonymity, pseudonyms will replace each principal’s name. The recruitment letter and consent form outline these safeguards as well. No identifying characteristics will be used or revealed in the reporting of findings.

Along with honesty, the understanding of each term according to principals remains an assumption. To assure understanding, the recruitment letter and consent forms will contain the definition of teacher engagement according to Kahn’s theory. Further, a scripted statement of the definitions of cognitive, emotional, and physical engagement is included within the interview script and protocol.

Definition of Terms

Before beginning any research, a collective understanding of work engagement and teacher engagement is a prerequisite. Utilizing Kahn’s theory of engagement, teacher engagement defined cognitively, emotionally, and physically provides an established collective understanding for not only principals interviewed, but also researchers. Often associated with teacher engagement are the terms: job satisfaction, teacher self-efficacy, and teacher empowerment. Identifying and maintaining a common grasp of these terms’ aids in the research of engagement according to Kahn’s theory.

Work engagement—Just as one would assume, work engagement is the engagement that occurs within the workplace. Schaufeli, Salanova, González-Romá, and

Bakker (2002), define work engagement as a positive work-related state of mind. They identify three components including: vigor, dedication, absorption (p. 74). This dissertation study is exploring work engagement as related to the teacher. This includes teaching students, lesson planning, participating in staff development, presenting curriculum, committee work, attending school events, among many other duties.

Employee engagement—First defined by Kahn, employee engagement is referred to as “the harnessing of organization’s members’ selves to their work roles; in engagement people employee and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during the role performance (Kahn, 1990, p. 694). More recently, Shuck and Wollard (2010) defined employee engagement as “an individual employs cognitive, emotional, and behavioral state directed toward designed organizational outcome.” When studying employee engagement, this dissertation study centers on teachers as the employee.

Teacher engagement—This dissertation study focuses on teacher engagement in terms of teacher’s work engagement. Thus, this teacher engagement targets work implemented by teachers in classrooms and schools (Klassen et al., 2013, p. 49). Just as in Kahn’s definition of employee and work engagement, this dissertation study applies the three dimensions of engagement, including: cognitive, emotional, and physical engagement when studying teacher engagement. Hanover Research (2018) describes a positively engaged teacher as one who prioritizes quality instructional delivery, seeks out latest ideas and best practices, frequently monitors student progress and provides feedback, as well modifies their instruction to meet the needs of their students. To include

the emotional dimension of teacher engagement, engaged teachers demonstrate happiness at work as well.

Cognitive teacher engagement—When applying Kahn’s theory of engagement (1990), cognitive teacher engagement centers on focus and attention. With cognitive teacher engagement, teachers demonstrate “cognitively vigilant” behaviors and absorption in their work (p. 700).

Emotional teacher engagement—Just as the term implies, emotion and feelings shape emotional teacher engagement. Teachers demonstrating enthusiasm, interest, and pride hold positive emotional teacher engagement. Within Kahn’s theory of engagement, teacher’s emotional engagement reveals in empathetic connection (1990, p. 700).

Physical teacher engagement—Physical engagement associates with energy employee’s must exert to complete his or her job. Related to teachers, this engagement is the physical dimension exercised in the school or classroom. Hakanen, Bakker, and Schaufeli (2006), in alignment with Kahn (1990), defined physical engagement as vigor and energy expelled at work. Expanding this concept further, Kahn (1990) describes physical engagement as working with intensity and becoming physically involved in tasks (p. 700).

Job Satisfaction—Most definitions of job satisfaction emphasize the degree to which an employee enjoys his or her job. Likewise, an employee’s personal attitude to his or her job explains the concept of job satisfaction; it is more specifically described as the set of positive desires or positive feelings that employees have toward their jobs and

employment by their organization (Hamidi, Saberi, & Safari, 2014; Islam, Mohajan, & Datta, 2012).

Teacher self-efficacy—According to Bandura (1977), self-efficacy relates to an individuals' belief in their ability to perform tasks successfully. For the purpose of this dissertation study, the same definition applies with “individual's” translating to “teachers.” Bandura and Locke (2003) later found that self-efficacy is an antecedent of motivation and performance. Thus, teachers with high self-efficacy exert more task-related effort and persist longer in the face of obstacles. Hirschi (2012) considers self-efficacy as a correlation of work engagement. Further, employees (teachers) with high self-efficacy are intrinsically motivated to pursue their goals and believe that they are capable of meeting job demands, which triggers high engagement in their work (Luthans & Youssef, 2007).

Teacher empowerment—According to researcher Paula Short, “empowerment has been defined as a process whereby school participants develop the competence to take charge of their own growth and resolve their own problems” (1994, p. 488). Empowered teachers believe they have the skills and knowledge to act on a situation and improve it (Short, 1994, p. 488). Further research on teacher empowerment has revealed four facets including: involvement in decision making, teacher impact, teacher status, autonomy, opportunities for professional development, and teacher self-efficacy (Short, 1994, p. 489).

Delimitations

This dissertation concentrates on principals' perceptions of their responsibility in promoting teacher engagement, and actions they take to support teacher engagement. Previously defined, teacher engagement includes both the teacher's psychological state and behaviors. To provide a scope and narrow the concept, for this study, teacher engagement refers to the cognitive, emotional, and physical engagement teachers express in the classroom and at school. Participation for the study will be sought from administrators in a growing Midwest district. Six elementary principals, two middle school principals, and one high school principal will be invited to participate. To maintain consistency within the study, no assistant principals will be invited to participate.

The topic and interest in teacher engagement as related to education has steadily increased over time. This study is not interpreting the result of teacher engagement surveys or attending to the teacher's perception of engagement. Though student engagement also connects to teacher engagement, this dissertation does not aim at exploring this relationship or impacts on students. Finally, though this study involves administrators, teacher engagement remains the subject matter. This study does not investigate the topic of principal engagement.

Limitations

This qualitative research explores principal perceptions of teacher engagement in a growing Midwestern district. This study aims to garner understandings around perceptions of teacher engagement and actions administrators take to build teacher

engagement in a single district in a particular this area of the United States; however, this will not necessarily yield insights to either the northern, eastern, southern, or western, parts of the United States or other countries.

Just as with location, the demographics of teachers and the students they serve vary. The administrators interviewed serve students that are primarily White and of the middle-class. With slight variances, a limited number of English language learners also attend the schools served. Teachers within the building are predominately White and identify as female, and range in number of years of teaching experience. Thus, generalizations cannot apply due to the demographics of students and teachers.

The study occurs following the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020-2021. Principals interviewed in the study will have experienced the school in-person shut down of March 2020 and subsequent shift to distance learning, also referred to as remote or online education. During this time, teachers within the district reported to schools and taught via the Zoom videoconferencing application.

When schools reopened in 2020-21 school year, the district had COVID--19 protocols in place and optional remote education. For teachers teaching in person-, impactful protocols included a face covering/mask mandate, increased sanitation measures, restrictive seating charts to provide physical distancing, and a halt to some extracurricular and club activities. At the elementary level, select teachers were reassigned to deliver distance learning teachers while middle and high school teachers taught both remote and in-person students concurrently. This provides important context as with this new reality, as teacher engagement had likely been impacted. Furthermore,

the perceptions of the principal's responsibility will have been impacted. Despite the unique circumstance, it is an even more opportune time to study engagement. With all the stress, many teachers may have become overloaded with additional stress while principals have had to work harder to maintain teachers' engagement.

Like student and teacher demographics, the demographic of principals has limits. The principals invited to participate in this study range in age and years of administrative experience. Predominately White, the invited principals' ethnicity also mirrors those of the majority of students and teachers. Of the invited principal participants, four identify as male and four identify as female. Tools do not measure the levels of teacher engagement within the building, rather the levels described are according to the perceptions of the principals. Since the study is based on principal perceptions, verifying the levels of teacher engagement is not necessary.

The school district itself also has its limitations. Since the school district is located in the Midwest, the perspectives of those interviewed may reflect the culture of the region. Thus, the perspectives of regions, including the northern, eastern, southern, and western parts of the United States will not reflect within the study.

Significance of the Study

This dissertation has several implications for teachers, students, principals, and the school district. This will be significant to each, as principals leading in buildings with perceived high levels of teacher engagement will want to maintain and support that engagement, while principals that perceive low levels of teacher engagement may learn novel ways to promote engagement. Teacher engagement positively impacts students'

engagement as well as achievement (Bakker & Bal, 2010; Klassen et al. (2013). In addition, organizations such as the Nebraska Council of School Administrators (NCSA), the Nebraska State Education Association (NSEA), and Nebraska Department of Education (NDE) may apply the study's findings and share with administrators at a national and state level. This further applies to universities in administration preparation programs.

This study's importance is rooted in the relationship between teacher engagement and student engagement. Bakker and Bal (2010) found that engaged teachers were more effective teachers. Additionally, Klassen et al. (2013) discovered that engaged teachers resulted in student engagement. Lei, Cui, and Zhou found that high overall student engagement was associated with higher academic achievement (2018, pp. 524-525).

This dissertation study may benefit principals in many respects. Through interviews, principals will share how responsible they believe they are for promoting teacher engagement, and themes will be disseminated. The portion of the dissertation study that reveals action steps principals take to build engagement will allow for other principals to reflect on and implement new ideas. Overall, if approved, this study would identify perceptual themes and practices principals used to promote teacher engagement and that can positively influence the effectiveness as a principal with positive impacts for students and staff alike.

The results of this study may also be of use to school districts seeking to bolster teacher engagement. Understanding how principals perceive teacher engagement and the actions principals take to promote engagement provides school districts with insight in

their efforts to support principals, teachers, and that relationship. At a district level, this may include opportunities for principal training and mentorship as well as the principal onboarding processes. Beyond identifying current engagement practices, illuminating principal's perceptions and action steps taken to enhance teacher engagement may aid districts in the selection of principal candidates. This will help districts identify, hire, and retain principals who share the district's view of the importance of engagement and the principal's role in promoting it.

Besides the implications for students, teachers, principals, and the school district, this study may strengthen understandings of teacher engagement and the connection to Kahn's Theory of Engagement. The overall study of engagement has begun to increase in momentum in recent years; however, with no collective studies examining the principal's perceptions of their responsibility of teacher engagement and actions they take to promote it, this leaves space for further study. By applying Kahn's Theory of Engagement to teacher work engagement, the concept organizes into cognitive, emotional, and physical aspects of teacher engagement. This perspective provides a more concise definition, leaving less room for interpretation of the concept.

Along with an increased understanding of Kahn's Theory of Engagement as applied to principals' perspective of their level of responsibility in promoting teacher engagement, this study also fosters audience's understanding of the principal's actions related to teacher engagement. This qualitative study seeks to explore principals' perceptions of their responsibility in promoting teacher engagement and actions they take to promote and support that engagement. Exploring principal beliefs and disseminating

the common themes of those beliefs in teacher engagement provides a background understanding and a sense of how to approach this concept with principals for further follow up.

Finally, this study assembles the actions principals take to build positive cognitive, emotional, and physical teacher engagement. By coding the actions taken in each dimension of engagement, the derived themes may aid in explaining the climate and culture of the whole district. Further examination of actions taken can serve as a springboard for the types of engagement strategies applied in schools. Although this dissertations study does not measure the effectiveness of the engagement strategies identified, it provides a basis for future studies.

Studying principals' perceptions of their role in teacher engagement and the actions principals take to promote teacher engagement apply to a variety of stakeholders. Specifically, implications identified for school administrators, including principals, assistant principals, administrative supervisors, and superintendents provide opportunities to increase the effectivity of school administrators and promote positive teacher engagement. The ramifications of developing positive to teacher engagement positively impact teachers and students.

Summary

This chapter serves as an introduction to the proposed dissertation study, providing background information on the general topic of teacher engagement and job satisfaction followed up by exploration of the perceptions of the principal. It situates my

personal connections and interest in the topic as I have experienced various leadership styles and varying levels of teacher engagement in different buildings.

This introduction also states the purpose of the study; to explore how principals perceive themselves as responsible for promoting teacher engagement followed up with how principals support engagement. The chapter also introduces the theoretical framework of William Kahn, with the dissertation study applying this framework to all aspects of the research. The chapter concludes with significance for teachers, students, principals as well as school districts, NSEA, NEA, as well as colleges and universities that prepare principals.

Chapter Two of this dissertation presents a summary and analysis of bodies of research focused on teacher engagement. A synthesis of topics concentrates on teacher engagement and empowerment, research on factors influencing teacher engagement, measures of teacher engagement, teacher burnout, and the principal's role in teacher engagement.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The concept of teacher work engagement and how principals perceive their responsibility of promoting that engagement connects to several different literature studies. Studies reviewed often attached teacher engagement with another concept associated with engagement or focus on the principal's leadership role. These concepts are either studied in isolation or with different concepts, but never together. The proposed dissertation study would seek to explore the principals' perceptions of their responsibility related to teacher engagement.

Thus, this literature review examines the topics of teacher work engagement as connected to empowerment, factors influencing teacher work engagement, measures of teacher engagement, teacher burnout, and the principal's role in teacher engagement as a factor (rather than perception). Each topic synthesized includes related articles, discussion papers, and research studies. These topics serve as a framework for this review of the literature (see Figure 2).

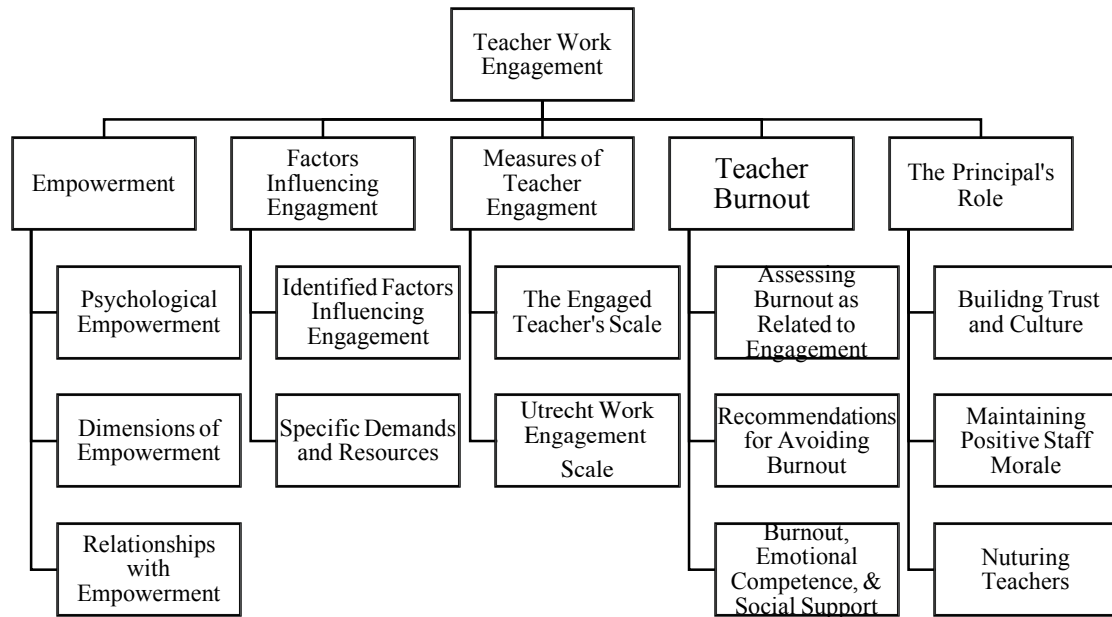


Figure 2. Literature review topic map.

This literature review utilizes implicative argumentation, a logical interpretation of evidence, in the form of population to sample, as the literature identified is representative of the educators sampled. Implicative argumentation applies to qualitative research. According to Machi and McEvoy (2022), implicative reasoning is a “logical interpretation of evidence that produces propositions that signal a specific conclusion” (p. 112). With several variations of implicative argumentation, the population to sample type applies to this literature review as the research question seeks to describe a sample of principals’ perceptions of how they see themselves as responsible for promoting teacher engagement. This sample then applies to the general population of principals.

With many variables connected to teacher engagement, engagement has serious direct student impacts and powerful effects on teacher job retention. Researchers Klassen et al. (2013) assert that effective teaching is dependent on teachers who are fully engaged in their work. Understanding and exploring the topic of teacher engagement and the perceived responsibility of principals in promoting teacher engagement adds value and clarification in generating and sustaining positive teacher engagement. With many uncontrollable factors influencing teacher engagement, this study seeks to discover how principals perceive themselves as responsible for promoting engagement and the actions principals take to support engagement. This literature review provides readers with a background and understanding of the topics studied within this dissertation study.

This review summarizes and synthesizes literature that explores teacher engagement and empowerment followed by factors that influence teacher engagement. Following these studies, bodies of research focus on measuring teacher engagement, teacher burnout, and the principal's role in teacher engagement. Within each topic, several studies, journals, and articles connect with one another and further substantiate the importance of teacher engagement and this dissertation.

Teacher Work Engagement and Empowerment

Psychological empowerment. MacTavish and Kolb (2006) discuss teacher empowerment by drawing on Spreitzer's studies psychological empowerment. Spreitzer's work on psychological empowerment in 1992, 1995, and 1996 found participation in a decision-making process by staff is "correlated to individual cognitions of empowerment which, in turn, is positively correlated to increased satisfaction, greater motivation and

engagement, and more innovative and creative behavior” (MacTavish & Kolb, 2006, p. 1380). The “participation in decision making” translates to collaboration within the discussion.

MacTavish and Kolb (2006) state that in order to promote empowerment, principals should maintain teacher’s collaboration and participation in decision making. Collaboration should not only be between teachers, but also between teachers and administration (p. 1378). MacTavish and Kolb highlight the importance of process and authenticity as a part of the discussion paper, arguing that collaboration paired with authentic leadership leads to psychological empowerment. This, they state, results in satisfaction, engagement, and innovation.

MacTavish and Kolb (2006) present teacher empowerment from a collaborative perspective. Authentic leadership, relationships, environment, and mission are highlighted hallmarks of the collaborative perspective. MacTavish and Kolb (2006) share that collaboration leads to empowerment and engagement (see Figure 3).

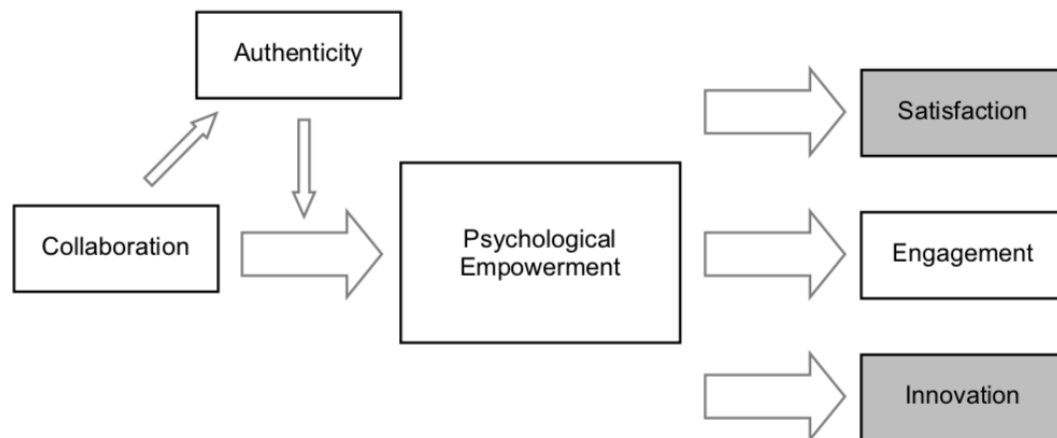


Figure 3. Empirical relationships between collaboration, authenticity, perceptions of psychological empowerment, and satisfaction, engaged an innovative teacher leader (MacTavish & Kolb, 2006, p. 1382).

Dimensions of engagement. Continued study on empowerment reveals six dimensions of empowerment identified by Short (1994). Short cites “empowerment occurs when environments provide choice and autonomy to demonstrate personal competency” (p. 488). Short (1994) introduced the dimensions of empowerment: involvement in decision making, teacher impact, teacher status, autonomy, opportunities for professional development, and teacher self-efficacy. While Short (1994) does not explicitly discuss teacher engagement as related to empowerment, many of the topics discussed connected to and were even used synonymously with teacher engagement.

Short (1994) cited research within each core dimension and “empirical” observations. The observations and dimensions of empowerment recognize the worthwhile implications for educators and human resource department leaders. It specifically recognized educators and human resource department leaders who increase staff involvement in decision making, teacher impact, teacher status, autonomy, opportunities for professional development, and teacher self-efficacy to create

empowerment. Short's discussion could transform into a qualitative study seeking to define empowerment, in fact, each dimension of empowerment recognized by Short has the depth for individual study.

Short's (1994) discussion is like that of MacTavish and Kolb in that both draw on other researcher's findings to discuss empowerment. The most obvious and distinct difference between the two pieces is that MacTavish and Kolb focus on an approach to build engagement while Short's article seeks to define it.

Relationships with empowerment. Rinehart et al. (1998) discussed empowerment as "the opportunities a person has for autonomy, responsibility choice and authority" (p. 634). They recognized that some professionals characterize teacher empowerment as involvement in organizational decision making. This might include processes whereby school participants develop the competence to take charge of their own growth and resolve their own problems (p. 634). These enabling experiences provided within the organization (or school) then foster authority, choice, and responsibility while allowing the individual to demonstrate learned knowledge and skills. The study further discussed the associations between empowerment and job satisfaction, climate, conflict, commitment, and program structure (p. 635).

Rinehart et al. (1998) revealed a strong relationship between participant empowerment and social influence theory. They concluded that the relationship between the principal and teacher is an important one. They also concluded that observations between the principal's trustworthiness, social attractiveness, and expertness influence perceptions of empowerment (p. 645).

This study connected the relationship between principals and teachers from the teacher perspective. It also tied in empowerment, though the study did not overtly key into how empowerment relates to teacher engagement. In terms of the results revealed within this study, it is important to highlight that since Rinehart et al studied perceptions, perceptions may change. Thus, if this study were to repeat, it may yield different results from individual participants. Further, researchers stated that the results of this study were only from a subset of the teacher population, and thus, results do not apply to the national or world-wide population.

Factors Influencing Teacher Work Engagement

Identified factors influencing engagement. In 1986, Rutter and Jacobson identified 11 factors of direct effects on teacher engagement in a study of public secondary teachers (p. 18). These factors include gender, years teaching experience, sense of community and collaboration, school size, urbanicity, student ability, orderly school environment, manageable teaching task, encouragement of innovation, and teacher input into decision-making (see Table 1).

Table 1 Factors Influencing Teacher Engagement

Factors Influencing Teacher Engagement	
1. Gender	7. Student Ability
2. Years Teaching Experience	8. Orderly School Environment
3. Sense of Community	9. Manageable Teaching Task
4. Collaboration	10. Encouragement of Innovation
5. School Size	11. Teacher Input into Decision Making
6. Urbanicity	

The first factor identified by Rutter and Jacobson (1986) was gender. This revealed that women had high levels of satisfaction in the field of teaching (Rutter and

Jacobson, 1986, p. 18). They recognized that part of this engagement may attribute to how women define their career. This definition may explain why teaching is a greater source of satisfaction for women. The question emerges, how does a school leader then support men in the field?

The second factor Rutter and Jacobson (1986) identified was the years of teaching experience. The more years of teaching experience, the more likely the teacher is engaged in his or her work (p. 18-19). Rutter and Jacobson credited this to the idea that teachers may feel more a part of the community or have a longer investment in the field.

The next factors identified were community and collaboration. Rutter and Jacobson (1986) recommend that community relationships are built upon honest communication and trust. This allows colleagues to acquire perspective, motivate one another, and accept constructive criticism. It calls for effort beyond providing simple support; rather, the value becomes contributing to the success of the group. The methodology employed by principal's shape community and culture; yet the methodology may vary.

Following community, Rutter and Jacobson (1986) identified school size as the fifth factor and urbanicity as the sixth factor; these factors may be interrelated (though unexpectedly). They found negative impacts on teacher engagement in urban schools, though the larger the school size, engagement became more positively influenced. Once controlled, larger schools offer more conveniences that facilitate engagement (Rutter & Jacobson, 1986, p. 17). The larger conveniences, such as resources and community partnerships, rely on the leadership and support from the principal.

The seventh factor impacting teacher engagement identified by Rutter and Jacobson (1986) was student ability. The composition of the student body and the teacher's perceptions of the students' abilities can positively or negatively influence the teacher's engagement. Rutter and Jacobson emphasized that many teachers believe that their competence ties to the students they teach and that "the best students (and their parents) demand and get the 'best' teachers" (pp. 17-18).

Teachers have identified significant rewards from successful interactions with students. Interactions facilitated by principals or assistant principals may help coach a teacher through interactions to ensure success. According to the literature, principals should also be mindful of the classroom composition. Rutter and Jacobson identify later in their study the importance of a "manageable teaching assignment."

The eighth factor of an orderly school environment is within the control of the principal and has the largest effect on teacher engagement (Rutter & Jacobson, 1986, p. 20). This refers to the factor of manageable teaching tasks. To remain engaged, teachers need to have the ability to teach with minimal disruption. Many believe school principals should manage behavior beyond classroom discipline so that teaching and learning remains a top priority. Though not mentioned by Rutter and Jacobson, through my experience and observations, many principals now utilize counselors, school psychologists, and outside agencies to aid them in teaching behavior skills. Similarly, schoolwide and districtwide adoptions to behavior programs have also advanced.

Rutter and Jacobson (1986) also found that, innovation, tenth factor contributes to positive teacher engagement. Allowing teachers to problem-solve and develop complex

solutions builds positive engagement. Just like students, teachers benefit from success and failure; thus, principals who encourage innovation build engagement. With innovation and principal support, the failures become regarded as an opportunity for growth.

Finally, teacher input into decision making equates to empowerment as the final and eleventh factor identified by Rutter and Jacobson (1986). Teachers are a “rich storehouse of information which can be underutilized by administration” and teachers should receive treatment like professionals (p. 22). By synthesizing this study, building administrators can build teacher engagement by seeking teacher input and following up with teacher feedback.

Some factors impacting teacher engagement found by Rutter and Jacobson (1986) if manipulated, can increase teacher engagement. There are some characteristics (such as school demographics or individual teacher characteristics) that are less likely to change than some organizational characteristics of the school. Rutter and Jacobson did find several indirect factors that tied with direct factors including staff recognition, collaboration, teaching support, teacher in-services, responding specific to needs, staff development time, principal leadership, and responsiveness.

When synthesizing, and critiquing this research, some of the identified factors are not within control of the building administrator. Rutter and Jacobson might consider addressing how or if administrators acknowledge those factors. The factors provided are insightful for administrations. When creating, and building positive teacher engagement, several identified apply to building administrators, including community, orderly school

environment, manageable teaching task, encouragement of innovation, and teacher input into decisions.

Specific demands and resources influencing engagement. Klusmann, Kunter, Trautwein, Lüdtke, and Baumert (2008) present other factors that influence engagement, specifically the association between school specific demands and resources. To implement this study, Klusmann et al. (2008) used a multilevel analysis to study the differences of engagement and emotional exhaustion between schools. The second research question addressed “whether and how school-related demands and resources predict teachers' engagement and exhaustion, over and above individual teacher characteristics” (p. 144).

Klusmann et al. (2008) maintained that there are many school-specific and teacher-specific features that can impact teacher engagement. Divided, these factors include job demands and job resources. Job demands are “physical, social or organizational aspects of the job that require sustain physical and or psychological effort” (p. 130). These demands have the potential to increase teacher burnout and/or decrease teacher engagement, depending upon the perspective taken.

Conversely, job resources are aspects of the work that enhance motivation and performance (Klusmann et al., 2008, p. 130). Predictors of engagement within the study included; individual workload – hours number of classes taught, social support of family and friends, students' discipline, student ability, students' social background (SES), teacher's cooperation and morale, as well as the principal's support. To obtain data for the study, Klusmann et al. surveyed not only teachers, but also principals and students.

From this study, Klusmann et al. (2008) found that controlled individual teacher characteristics led to, “schools with a more supportive principal had more engaged teachers” (p. 146). Concerning individual characteristics, findings concluded that age and gender of teachers were the biggest predictors of engagement and no student characteristics were related to engagement. Rather, consideration relates to the study of exhaustion. Klusmann et. al concluded their results were in alignment with the job demands-resources model, “which states that resources are more strongly related to employee engagement, whereas demands are more strongly related to employee exhaustion . . .” (p. 146). Thus, the more resources available, the more likely the employee is engaged. The higher the demand, the more likely the employee is not engaged.

Klusmann et al. (2008) explored both engagement and exhaustion; and per their own recommendations, engagement and exhaustion study should remain separately. Each topic has its own idiosyncrasies and facets, which they felt were much too deep to study in conjunction with one another.

Measuring Teacher Engagement

The engaged teachers scale. There are various tools available to measure work engagement, however, there are few research-based tools available focused on measuring solely teacher engagement. Klassen et al. (2013) have developed the Engaged Teacher Scale (ETS). This is a 16 item, 4-factor scale designed to measure teacher engagement. To first develop the scale, Klassen et al. (2013) applied the research of Rich et al. (2010),

Kahn (1990, 1992), and Schaufeli et al. (2006). Applying various theories, Klassen et al. determined 5 dimensions of engagement to measure, presented in Figure 4 (2013, p. 36).

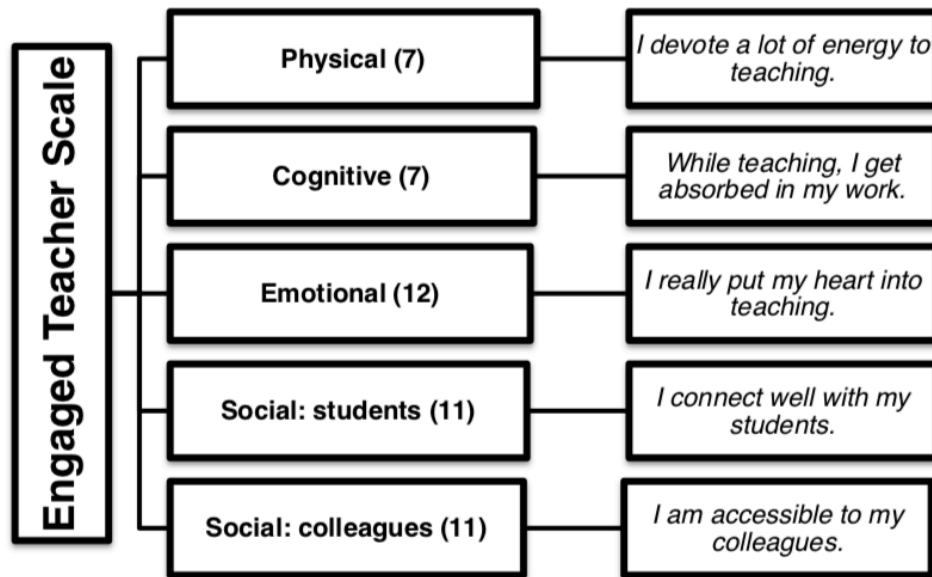


Figure 4. "Dimensions of Engagement" (Klassen et al., 2013, p. 36).

Klassen et al. (2013) analyzed the data using principal components analysis (PCA) to reduce the item numbers on the scale (p. 37). In doing so, they found the "ETS factors are discrete, reliable, and valid" (Klassen et al., 2013, p. 47). Besides testing the validity of the tool, Klassen et al. found teachers' attitudes and motivation transmit to students.

This tool utilizes a psychological perspective; effective teaching is dependent on teachers who are fully engaged in their work; not just cognitively and emotionally, but also socially (Klassen et al., 2013, p. 48). There are still many levels of interpretation of teacher behavior and further study will identify the individual and the collective group and change over time. Further, Klassen et al. state the work of teaching involves a level

of domain for social engagement rarely found in other professions. According to Klassen et al., measuring teacher's work engagement without capturing social engagement with students ignores an important aspect of teacher engagement (2013, p. 48).

Klassen et al. (2013) created and validated a scale to measure teacher engagement. Other studies can utilize this scale to compare different teaching populations and the factors utilized within the scale to discuss the results of factors influencing teacher engagement.

Klassen et al. (2013) admit that “More work is needed to understand how engagement is fostered in teachers, and especially how the specific dimensions – emotional, cognitive, social and perhaps physical engagement – develop through teacher training and into professional practice” (p. 48.). Klassen et al. comment that the ETS requires teachers to self-report. This will aid in measuring engagement; however, Klassen et al. also recommend an observational or behavioral component to provide more insight and understanding.

Utrecht work engagement scale. The Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) examines the relationships between work engagement, workplace well-being (job satisfaction and quitting intention), and contextual variables (socioeconomic status, experience, and gender) (Klassen et al., 2018). The 9-item Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) uses a 7-point scale ranging from 0 (*never*) to 6 (*always*) to measure teachers' engagement (p. 320). The UWES applies to research in a range of settings with participants from a variety of professions, and for the purpose of this study, teaching.

Although several work engagement measures exist in the commercial domain, the UWES is the most frequently used work engagement measure in research domains (p. 320).

Klassen et al. (2018) sought to test and validate the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale. In testing the UWES, Klassen et al. (2018) survey a sample of 853 practicing teachers from two culturally Western settings (Australia, Canada) and three culturally non-Western settings (Hong Kong, China, Indonesia, and Oman) (p. 322).

When analyzing the data from the UWES, Klassen et al. (2018) found relationships between engagement and contextual variables (SES, years of experience, and gender) were minimal, and inconsistent across settings (p. 331). On the other hand, as expected, teachers' work engagement was related to the satisfaction they develop from teaching (p. 331). Due to the inconsistencies within the data researchers recommend the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale needs further development before its use in additional cross-cultural research (p. 318).

Teacher Burnout

Assessing burnout as related to engagement. Schaufeli et al. (2002) assessed both engagement and burnout to determine the relationship. They defined burnout as multidimensional and including emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a lack of personal accomplishment (p. 72). At the time of the study, Schaufeli et al. recognized the lack of study on engagement and defined it as related to energy, involvement, and efficacy. They believed engagement involves activation, ranging from exhaustion to vigor, and identification, ranging from cynicism to dedication.

To assess burnout, Schaufeli et al. (2002) applied the Spanish version of the Maslach Burnout Inventory- General Survey (MBI-GS) whereas engagement assessment applied a 24 self-constructed item survey simultaneously formulated in Spanish and English (p. 76). The scale was categorized according to their definition of engagement, including survey items related vigor, dedication, and absorption.

Schaufeli et al. (2002) found “all burnout and engagement scales are significantly and negatively related” (p. 86). Thus, results of the study confirm that burnout and engagement are opposites of one another. Specifically, burnout and engagement are moderately negatively related (p. 86). Ignoring this relationship would not grant a full understanding of engagement.

Recommendations for avoiding burnout. In 2006, Hakanen, Bakker, and Schaufeli delivered a questionnaire to all teachers in the Education Department of Helsinki, Finland (p. 500). Hakanen et al. (2006) applied descriptive statistics and cross-validation to various burnout and engagement scales. This resulted in support of the Job Demands – Resources model and several actionable recommendations for administrators.

Hakanen et al. (2006) stated that burnout and a lack of engagement are key issues in teaching and suggest that, when possible, principals should make efforts to reduce job demands (pp. 509-510). These demands might include interventions designed to support teachers instructing students with high needs, reduction of high workloads, and/or improving school environments. In addition to this recommendation, Hakanen et al. (2006) also called for school administrators to increase job resources. Job resources are “alterable,” and can include increasing support or collegial interaction.

According to Hakanen et al. (2006), increasing job resources will potentially lead to higher levels of work engagement, lower levels of burnout, and stronger career commitment (p. 509). Within the work of the teacher, the job demands are constant whereas resources are more alterable. Developing interventions focused on tasks that provide social and organizational resources will provide a starting point for improvement (Hakanen et al., 2006, p. 510). To conclude this study, Hakanen et al. recommended that administrators should apply the study's findings in teaching seminars and work toward shifting teacher's perspective to the positive aspects of their work.

Burnout Related to Emotional Competence and Social Support

Burnout, emotional competence, and social support. More recently, researchers Fiorilli, Albanese, Gabola, and Pepe (2017), completed a study to explore relationships among emotional competence and social support with burnout. To assess the levels of emotional competence Fiorilli et al. administered the Emotional Competence Questionnaire (ECQ), The Maslach Burnout Inventory-Educators Survey (MBI-ES), and Social Support Questionnaire (pp. 130-131).

Fiorilli et al. (2017) found teachers with the highest levels of burnout are those who have the most difficulty regulating displays of negative emotion. Further, emotional exhaustion and feelings of alienation are positively related to one another; however personal accomplishment and emotional exhaustion are negatively related (p. 133).

The key finding according to Fiorilli et al. (2017) suggested that teachers who felt high intensity of negative emotions (an indicator of low emotional competence) were more exhausted by their work and, likewise, perceived social support they received as

unsatisfactory (p. 133). Fiorilli et al. also suggested that schools should provide intervention programs aimed at reducing burnout in teachers. Specifically, interventions should focus on emotional competence. This would require a shift from schools and administrators in terms of providing more support to aid teachers in learning how to utilize and “appreciate” the support already available to them (p. 135).

The conclusions from Fiorilli et al. (2017), highlight the emotional and social factors while Hakanen et al. emphasizes the Job Demands – Resources model as related to teacher burnout and work engagement. Both studies are valid, however, they just provide different insights to the topics. Burnout and work engagement are multidimensional components of human experience; thus, various perspectives exist.

The Role of the Principal

Building trust and culture. Research points to principals as catalysts in building positive teacher engagement in four key areas; including trust, leadership, school culture, and compassion. Ghamrawi (2011) stated that a reciprocal relationship of trust between the building principal and classroom teachers builds positive teacher engagement. Steps to take to build that trust presented within the article provide practical applications for principals. Barr and Saltmarsh (2014) discussed principal leadership leading to set the tone for the school. This connects back to creating a positive school culture. The concept develops further in the discussion by Million (2005) and actionable steps taken to build culture. The final article by Eldor and Shoshani (2016) highlights the phenomena of compassion, identifying it as a vital ingredient in principal’s role.

Ghamrawi (2011) drew on empirical data to explore the concept of trust between teachers and their principal. Findings revealed that trust established “higher levels of teachers’ self-efficacy, collaboration, commitment, collective vision [and], building a sense of belonging” (p. 333). These psychological components connect to teacher leadership.

Ghamrawi’s (2011) article discusses how building principals can build a sense of trust in teachers. Recommendations center on developing a culture of learning that is rooted in trust creates an environment that encourages teachers to get involved in professional dialogues. Ghamrawi further states, “the role of the principal is evident as a keystone in development of the conditions for dialog about teaching and learning, motivating staff to articulate to others the strategies that work well for them and what make students better learners” (p. 343). This dialog leads to modeling specific leadership behaviors, allowing teachers to engage in reflective practice. Creating a culture in which teachers’ ideas derive from reflective practice generates high levels teacher engagement. In addition to the responsibility of building school culture, it identifies that the principal’s ethical leadership behavior builds trust in teachers. This is positively associated with organizational trust and requires principals to demonstrate moral character and selfless service to the school organization (p. 343).

Though the article discusses building trust in teachers to grow teacher leaders, it connects the relationship of principals to teachers. Beyond this relationship, the recommendations for building trust and the results of that trust (“self-efficacy, collaboration, commitment, collective vision, and building a powerful sense of belonging

to school members” (Ghamrawi, 2011, p. 345) have implications related to work engagement.

The results of trust and teacher leadership as identified by Ghamrawi (2011) parallel with teacher empowerment and factors identified in studies focused on building teacher engagement. Ghamrawi’s description of teacher leadership connects to teacher engagement and broadens understandings of the relationship between teacher leadership, engagement, and empowerment.

Barr and Saltmarsh (2014) explore the principal’s role in building engagement through a parent perspective. According to Barr and Saltmarsh, the principal’s leadership affects student and parent engagement. Barr and Saltmarsh found that the principal is responsible for setting the ‘tone’ through formal management techniques, personal values, and personality attributes (p. 496). Parent groups interviewed in the study agreed that principals play a “transformational role in altering the ‘culture’ of a school by changing the ways in which parents engage with the school” (Barr & Saltmarsh, 2014, p. 498). Thus, the role of the principal transcends teacher engagement and truly impacts the whole school as an organization, including students and their families.

While focused on parent and student’s relationships, this study links school engagement and actions implemented by principals. Written from the perspective of parents, it does not make specific connections to teacher engagement. However, the culture of the building impacts all stakeholders, including students, teachers, and parents. Ghamrawi also points to culture as a responsibility of building principals; this is also related to factors influencing teacher engagement.

Although the study completed by Barr and Saltmarsh (2014) focused on how principals build engagement from a parent perspective, and Ghamrawi (2011) centered on how principals build trust in teachers, both connected to building engagement in between principals, parents, students, and staff members.

Maintaining positive staff morale. In addition to building trust and culture, the study of the role of the principal is further discussed by June Million (2005). As the former director of Public Information for the National Association of Elementary School Principals, June Million provides insightful views from principals in the field with the goal of “keeping staff morale high, even in the toughest of times” (p. 16).

Million (2005) organized the article using eight categorical headings: “Protect them,” “Empower them,” “Equalize the stress,” “Use humor and praise,” “Respect them,” “Speak up for them,” “Show movies,” and “Pile on the perks.” In “Protect them,” Million addresses how principals protect teachers by shielding them from unnecessary negativity and focusing on positivity. To then empower teachers and equalize stress, practitioners quoted in the article recommend seeking teacher input in problem-solving and decision making as well as ensuring that teachers have the materials they need (Million, 2005, p. 17).

Million (2005) also called for school principals to use humor and praise with teachers, to believe and respect teachers, as well as serve as an advocate for them (p. 17). Million shared several actionable steps that school administrators can take to show this support to teachers. These examples, provided by other principals from around the United States, include sending messages to the central office, covering class, providing reserved

parking (or other rewards), as well as awarding certificates and writing personal notes to recognize teachers (p. 17).

Million (2005) provided many actionable recommendations for principals based on the application and experience of the principals discussed in the article. Million advocated for teachers based on application and experiences. Further, while Million does not identify teacher engagement, she does discuss empowerment and morale which predictably link to teacher engagement. The article does not explore how principals feel about their role in building teacher engagement, though one might conclude from those quoted that the principals feel a sense of responsibility, compassion, and dedication to their teachers.

Nurturing teachers. When compared to the other articles discussed in the literature review, “Nurturing Teachers in the Famine of NCLB” remains vastly different as a list of recommendations for principals. It focused on actions principals engaged in rather than the role they take in terms of relationships with teachers, students, and families. Each of the articles linked to school culture when exploring teacher engagement.

The most recent study that ties principals, teachers, and work engagement together written by Eldor and Shoshani (2016) focused more on the phenomena of compassion, rather than teacher work engagement. Eldor and Shoshani found displays of compassion related positively to teachers’ sense of emotional vigor, organizational commitment, and job satisfaction (p. 126). Conversely, displays of compassion related negatively to teacher burnout (p. 126). Thus, “expressions of compassion and

emotionality toward teachers can be a useful managerial tool and a key concept in building vigorous relationships with teaching personnel and may overlap with principals' objective of improving teacher outcomes and school performance" (p. 134). When comparing this study to other studies related to teacher work engagement, this is the first that acknowledges and highlights the importance of the teacher-principal relationship.

Summary

In summation, this literature review examined five aspects of teacher engagement: the topics of teacher empowerment, factors influencing teacher work engagement, measures of teacher engagement, teacher burnout, and the principal's role in teacher engagement. The literature review confirms the importance of each topic and its connection to teacher engagement.

The literature review begins with the introduction that teacher engagement and teacher empowerment are positively related. The dimensions of teacher empowerment are explained. Studies reveal that empowered teachers identify as having increased engagement. Discussion within the literature review then transitioned to the factors impacting engagement. Many factors have been revealed to be alterable, with other factors outside of the principal's control. Within the review, scales are identified to measure engagement, including the Engaged Teachers Scale and Utrecht Work Engagement Scale. However, further study is needed in using the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale. Next, teacher burnout, has been recognized as the opposite of teacher engagement, often presented in research as "preventing teacher burnout and promoting teacher engagement." Though the topics are vastly different, this literature review would

not be complete without acknowledging the relationship. Finally, literature and research related to the principal's role in building teacher engagement discussed. Available studies are related to building trust, empowerment, and developing nurturing relationships between teachers and principals. While this literature connects to engagement, it does not all do so explicitly.

Even with the current literature and research available on the topic of teacher engagement, unknowns still exist. Specifically, literature focused on the principal's role and perceptions of teacher engagement were not identifiable. Further study on administrators perceived role in engagement and what actions these administrators take will contribute to the current body of knowledge on teacher engagement.

The proposed dissertation study will provide administrators, school districts, teachers, and the public with a framework for understanding the principal's perspective in building teacher leadership and actions principals take to build positive engagement in teachers. Applying Kahn's (1990) theory of engagement, this study will seek to answer:

1. What is the principal's perception of his or her responsibility in promoting teacher engagement?
2. What actions do principals take to support positive engagement?

The recommendations of this study can positively impact principals' effectiveness with many implications for both students, teachers, and school districts. Specifically, that increased teacher work engagement connects to teacher retention, positive school culture, increased student engagement and, most importantly, increased student growth and achievement.

The following chapter will present the dissertation methods, including the research questions, rationale, and context of the study. The chapter will continue by identifying the role of the researcher, data collection methods, data sources, data analysis, and validation strategies. To conclude, I will share how I plan to report on my findings and the dissertation.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODS

This study transpires because of human experience and human perspective—in this case, principals’ perceptions of how responsible they are for teacher engagement. It relies on the perspectives of principals and seeks to understand; not to quantify. Since this research focuses on understanding human experience, applying a qualitative study generates understanding through themes. The methods in this proposed study are comprised of interviews, coding, and categorization to reveal themes. Embedded within the research questions and process is Kahn’s theory of engagement.

Chapter Three presents the research questions as well as the rationale and background context of the study. It shares descriptions of the participants, the researcher’s role, and ethical issues before describing the research methodology, analysis, and overall validation techniques. The chapter will conclude with how findings are reported and a management plan of the study.

Research Questions

The study utilizes qualitative methods to explore principals’ perceptions of their responsibility in promoting teacher engagement and actions they take to support teacher engagement. Sub-questions apply Kahn’s theory of engagement to clarify the cognitive, emotional, and physical engagement of principal’s perceptions and filter actions taken to build positive engagement.

Primary and Secondary Research Questions

How do principals perceive their responsibility of promoting teacher engagement? Sub-questions clarify engagement with Kahn's Theory of Engagement embedded within each question. Questions are divided into cognitive, emotional, and physical engagement. Cognitive engagement relates to absorption in work and centers on focus and attention, while emotional engagement is related to feelings, emotion, and empathetic connection (Kahn, 1990, p. 700). Kahn defines physical engagement as working with intensity and becoming physically involved in tasks (p. 700).

Sub-questions include:

1. How do principals perceive their responsibility of promoting teacher cognitive engagement?
2. How do principals perceive their responsibility of promoting teacher emotional engagement?
3. How do principals perceive their responsibility of promoting teacher physical engagement?

How do principals determine what actions to take to support positive engagement? This secondary question is a precursor to sub-questions:

1. What actions do principals take to support positive cognitive engagement?
2. What actions do principals take to support positive emotional engagement?
3. What actions do principals take to support positive physical engagement?

The research paradigm for this study applied a qualitative research approach using interviews.

Rationale

Utilizing the qualitative approach is most appropriate for this study because the objective of this study is to learn and understand from the principal's human experience. In studying the principal's perceptions of teacher engagement and actions taken to build teacher engagement, I learn from current and historical experiences administrators faced related to teacher engagement.

Teacher engagement studied through the principal's perspective must develop understanding through the common or shared experiences of administrators. To do so, one must grasp an individual's common or shared experiences to develop effective practices and gain a deeper understanding of it (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 60). Applying a qualitative approach to this study remains an advantage to researchers as it provides rich data to understand human experience. However, the researcher must sift through this data to aggregate into five to seven themes for discussion of the lessons learned (Creswell, 2014, p. 195).

Context of the Study

This study takes place in a growing Midwestern school district. Within the district, principals that were invited to participate in the study work in six different elementary schools, two different middle schools, and one high school. As described in Chapter One, this district is experiencing rapid growth. Further, each of the sites maintain students with a diversity of socioeconomic status, as three of the six elementary buildings remain targeted Title I schools.

A significant component of the context is the COVID-19 Pandemic of 2020, along with racial justice unrest and the political climate. The school district was impacted by COVID-19 on March 13, 2020, transitioning to remote education to close the school year. During the summer of 2020, following the deaths of several Black Americans at the hands of police, parts of the country experienced tension and protest around racial justice. In addition, political tensions rose as an intense presidential election approached, followed by attack on the U.S. Capitol by protestors who believed the results were fraudulent.

In the fall of 2020, the impacts of remote education were observed in students' lowered baseline assessment scores and behaviors. Most teachers and administrators agreed that online or remote education was not a replacement for in-person learning, especially at the elementary level. However, there was some recognition that some students, particularly at the secondary level were thriving online. Additional impacts following the racial rioting and charged political climate resulted in an increased concern over controversial and political teaching content. Teachers and principals were cautious and aware of discussion of topics and presentation of curriculum.

Besides students' lower academic achievement, behavior and concern over controversy, principals and teachers were also faced with new teaching protocols, including wearing masks and increased sanitation measures. With these sudden changes, teacher engagement as well as the principals' perception of their responsibility of supporting teacher engagement were impacted.

Due to the variety of school sites and national climate following COVID-19 and other events of 2020, I have gained different principal perspectives and an array of data to aggregate. Following the study, I provided the participating district with the study results to support their growth and programs.

Participants

The eligible participants within this study are six elementary principals, two middle school principals, and one high school principal from a growing Midwest school district. Of the eligible participants, four identify as male and five identify as female. The number of years of administrative experience ranges from two (2) years to 14 years. In alignment with the qualitative approach, participant selection utilized purposeful sampling (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 96).

According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), purposeful sampling assumes that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight about a phenomenon, and therefore selects a sample from which the most can be learned (p. 96). Purposeful sampling can also be referred to as criterion-based selection as site or participant selections are based on certain attributes or criteria (p. 97). The type of purposeful sampling that will be applied in this proposed study is “unique sampling” with principals serving as a criterion and the site’s unique feature of growth, with the building and opening of new schools each year. Thus, teachers move within the district to open new buildings; with buildings set to open in 2020 and 2021. Due to this circumstance, the principal’s perspective on teacher engagement will be unique.

Role of the Researcher

Personal interests, bias, & values. As noted, my personal interest in the topic of teacher engagement and the principal's perspective stemmed from my experiences as both a classroom teacher, leader, and administrator. I have experiences working in seven different elementary buildings with nine different building principals. While serving as a teacher and building leader, teacher engagement varied from principal to principal and building to building. As a future administrator, I sought to learn from each principal, while impacted by the levels of engagement within each building and each principal. During my time serving as a classroom teacher and building leader, I learned each principal was vastly different in terms of their beliefs on their roles in engaging staff. Further, each administrator took different actions when it came to engaging staff.

As I engaged in this research, I maintained awareness of my biases and values. As a principal, I believe leaders in this role have a responsibility to take care of the staff and promote engagement. As I do my work and work with colleagues, I find myself drawn to other principals with similar views. As a building principal, I have an interest in taking actions to build teacher work engagement. Therefore, throughout this study, it will be vital to monitor my biases and beliefs to ensure the study's validity (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 16). To further ensure validity, I applied the process of *epoché*, "a Greek word meaning to refrain from judgement" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 33). I will organize and bracket my bias to be set aside to fully open my understanding of other perspectives of teacher engagement (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 27).

Ethical Issues

It was my responsibility to ensure the protection of the identities of the participants as well as the participating schools and district. During the study, I maintained the role of the listener and learner, ensuring not to share my own beliefs or experiences around building positive teacher engagement. In addition, I did not share the beliefs or responses of participants with other participants so as not to skew the data. Proper permissions were received from the district superintendents, all administrators involved in the study, and the University of Nebraska- Lincoln, which were in place before the study ensued.

Institutional Review Board

Institutional permission granted from the University of Nebraska at Lincoln was a requirement for this study. I sought permission from the University Institutional Review Board (IRB). This dissertation study is in alignment with IRB approval requirements as confidentiality protections implemented include the usage of pseudonyms as well as providing a district description rather than citing the name of the district.

Data Collection Method

I solicited participation using purposeful sampling procedures and confirmed study participants and selection through a recruitment protocol (see Appendix B). Purposeful sampling was based on the criteria that all participants would be principals within the same district. Participant sampling included various years of experience as well as included participants from elementary, middle, and high school principals. All principals worked in the same unique, Midwestern district. Once participants were

confirmed, recruitment protocol followed. Appendix B includes a personal introduction as well as information pertinent to the study, including the topic and timeline. Once participants were secured, I emailed them a consent to participate (see Appendix C). Within the email, the consent included another overview of the study and permission to participate. The study overview included information regarding confidentiality and use of pseudonyms along with the timeline and opportunity for follow-up. Once participants responded and permissions granted, I followed up with an email to set up a Zoom interview (see Appendix D).

Interviews were semi-structured open-ended Zoom interviews (Creswell, 2014, p. 191) with selected participants (see Appendix D). Scheduled interviews remained staggered to review the data collected; and interviews themselves took place within a two-week window to maintain credibility. Throughout the interview process, I made notations to capture anything I noticed in tone as well as ideas that might need clarification for follow up questions. These interviews were audio recorded, transcribed, and then coded for analysis using Atlas.ti (<http://www.atlasti.com>) Computer software. Interview recordings were stored on my personal computer, protected by a security password as well as on a flash drive, stored in a locked case within my home. The transcriptions were completed by a professional transcriptionist, that I hired privately. Appendix D contains the interview protocol for administrators, and the semi-structured interview questions that support each research question, as well as each set of sub-questions.

Data Analysis

A vital first step in data analysis is “epoché” or bracketing. This initial step in qualitative data analysis requires researchers to critically examine their own experiences. Epoché is based on the idea that researchers maintain an open mind during data collection to avoid contaminating the data with personal opinions or preconceptions (Terrell, 2015, p. 167). According to Merriam (2009), if a researcher has prior experience(s) with the studied phenomenon, the research must examine their experience(s), to uncover and bracket them. As a former teacher and current administrator, I have experiences and beliefs regarding my responsibilities in building teacher engagement as well as actions I have taken to engage teachers.

Following “epoché,” audio recording of interviews was prepared for an arranged transcription. After transcription, I read the transcribed interviews while listening to the audio recordings of the interviews. Not only did this provide me with a “general sense of the information and an opportunity to reflect on its overall meaning” (Creswell, 2014, p. 197), but also allowed me to double check the transcription. At that time, I employed “horizontalization.” This process consists of reviewing the collected data with equal weight before organizing it into themes and giving it a greater value (Merriam, 2009).

After reading the data and engaging in horizontalization, I coded the data. According to Rossman and Rallis (2012), coding is the process of organizing the data (text or images) by bracketing chunks and writing a word representing a category in the margins. To code interviews, I used open, *in vivo* coding. *In vivo* coding is coding using the actual language of the participant (Creswell, 2014, p. 198). Open coding approach is

not pre-determined codes applied by the researcher; it ensures emerging themes stem from the interviewee's own words (Creswell, 2012). From there, I uploaded the open, *in vivo* coded data in the computer software program, Atlas.ti (<http://www.atlasti.com>). All coding took place on my personal computer, which is password protected. By utilizing an open and *in vivo* coding technique, data remained authentic to the experience of participants. As I applied codes, I was careful and avoided codes utilizing educational jargon, acronyms, and slang terms.

Throughout this process, I featured codes that were related or applied to Kahn's theory of engagement. A table displayed the codes and where these occurred within the interview transcripts. Further, the Atlas.ti software aided in identifying "clusters of meaning" and themes (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 61).

Following transcription using *in vivo coding* using the Atlas.ti software, I categorized the codes. As recommended by Creswell (2014), I generated five to seven themes or categories based on codes (p. 199). To do so, I used axial coding. This method allows for primary themes to emerge which illuminated the principal's perspective and experiences around teacher work engagement. According to Strauss and Corbin (1998), in axial coding, "categories are related to their subcategories to form more precise and complete information" about a phenomenon" (p. 124).

After coding and categorizing, I wrote a rich, descriptive summary of the principals' perspective and beliefs, based on their experiences and how they build teacher engagement in schools. This description shared how school districts, district level leaders, and principals can build programs and train principals in building teacher work

engagement. This narrative passage is a detailed discussion of how themes relate and includes visual illustrations to support connections.

My final step in the data analysis process involved making an interpretation in qualitative research of the findings. This involved a discussion asking, “What were the lessons learned?” (Creswell, 2014, p. 200). My primary goal was to capture the “essence” of principal’s perspectives, based on their experiences of how they view their role in building teacher engagement.

Validation

Validation of this study is critical and I applied several methods to ensure the study’s validity. First, I clarified my bias (Creswell, 2014, p. 202). As with *epoché*, I remained thoughtful in separating my experiences, bias, and beliefs regarding teacher engagement and the role of the principal. Extensive reflection allowed for clear objectivity regarding this topic.

During the data analysis portion of this study, it was imperative to ensure that the interview transcriptions were accurate and transcribed verbatim. As specified in the data analysis, a third party transcribed the interviews. The third party who transcribed the interviews is an experienced, professional transcriptionist. To validate the accuracy, I took time and listened to the audio recording of each interview while simultaneously reading a printed version of the interview transcription. I corrected all errors I found. After I verified the *in vivo* transcription, Atlas.ti software verified the codes and categories.

In alignment with the qualitative approach, my efforts focused on richly describing the findings. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) state that rich, vivid descriptions contextualize the study and readers will be able to determine the extent to which their experience(s) match context (p. 259). This process was an art, illustrating a balance of evidence, short quotations, and themes from the data to explain the study to the full extent.

Along with identifying and discussing my bias, checking transcriptions, codes, and themes, and providing deep descriptions, I also completed member checks. Member checks are a form of “internal validity” that helps ensure the investigator has correctly understood the phenomenon as presented by the participants (Merriam, 2009, p. 217). Member checks require researchers to return to participants to ask if tentative interpretation or findings are plausible (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 259). Thus, I asked principal participants to verify the interpretations of their experiences and perceptions of their role in teacher engagement. Member checks occurred before the interpretations were presented. As the “experiences belong to the participants,” they should be accurate according to the principal participants (Merriam, 2009, p. 201).

Reporting the Findings

Reporting of this qualitative study’s findings were written in a composite description that “presents the ‘essence’ of the phenomenon, called the ‘essential, invariant structure (the essence)’” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 62). This report’s focus remained on the common experiences of the participants, the principals, as related to their perception of their roles in building teacher engagement. This report provides a detailed

descriptive portrait and element themes (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 62). Further, themes, organized into descriptions, gave structure to the ‘essence’ of the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 62).

To write about the ‘essence’ of the principal’s perceptions of their responsibility in teacher engagement, I provided a combination of textural and structural description, as recommended by Creswell and Poth. Textural description focuses on “what participants experienced” while structural description is “how” participants experienced the phenomenon (2018, p. 60). As themes emerged, I reported the findings from the research via variations of opulent, deep descriptions. These allow for readers to grasp major findings within the study. To further illustrate results, tables and figures serve as models to depict interrelatedness of themes and connections to Kahn’s Theory of Engagement.

Management Plan

To manage this plan, I worked closely with my advisor, Dr. Nicholas Pace, the faculty supervisor of the project. After obtaining IRB permission and having successfully proposed this dissertation, I contacted participants immediately. With the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, it was imperative to allow time to interview each principal and then send recordings to the transcriptionist. Throughout the entire process, I continued to seek and appreciate the guidance and support provided by Dr. Pace.

Summary

In summary, this qualitative study explored the principals’ perception of his or her role in teacher engagement and what actions principals take to build positive engagement. It took place in a growing Midwestern school district with six different elementary

principals, two middle school principals, and one high school principal. Principals participated in semi-structured, open-ended interviews via Zoom (Creswell, 2014, p. 191). Interviews took place within a two-week time period to maintain credibility and applied interview protocols and permissions found in the appendices.

These interviews were recorded, transcribed, and then coded for analysis using Atlas.ti (<http://www.atlasti.com>) computer software. The transcriptions were completed by the Zoom software and stored securely. When coding using the Atalas.ti software, *in vivo* and *axial coding* was applied to categorize the codes. Five to seven themes were generated based on codes in alignment with Creswell's (2014) recommendations. Reporting of this qualitative study's findings was written in a detailed description that focused on the common experiences of the principals, as related to their perception of their roles in building teacher engagement. Throughout the process, to ensure validity, epoché was applied to organize and bracket my bias.

To complete this study, institutional permission granted from the University of Nebraska at Lincoln is a requirement. I sought permission from the University Institutional Review Board (IRB). Once permissions were granted, I worked closely with my advisor to aim for study completion by December 1, 2022.

CHAPTER FOUR

ANALYSIS

Introduction

Chapter three outlined and described the data collection methodology and how data was analyzed. This chapter reveals the results from the semi-structured Zoom interviews with nine principals. The descriptions of how principals perceive themselves as responsible for teacher engagement and actions they take to promote teacher engagement are interpreted according to Kahn's Theory of Engagement.

The study uses a qualitative research design to explore how nine principals viewed themselves as responsible for teacher engagement as well as actions they take to promote teacher engagement. Kahn's Theory of Engagement was embedded within the primary and secondary research questions as well as the semi-structured, open-ended interview questions. This allowed the researcher to examine the principals' perceptions through the lens of Kahn's Theory of Engagement. As indicated in chapter three, interviews were conducted and recorded via Zoom, within a two-week window. A third party transcribed the Zoom recordings. The researcher then listened to the Zoom audio and verified the typed transcriptions for accuracy.

Following the interviews and transcription, the researcher began the process of reflection and epoché to clarify bias and beliefs. As a building principal, the researcher also has perception related to the responsibilities of teacher engagement and takes action to promote this. Bias can occur at all stages of the research process, including within the methodology, objective, as well as among the participants and data. According to Denzin

and Lincoln (2018), researchers should acknowledge biases and actively work to neutralize these early in the research process. Throughout the research, the researcher continuously examined bias and belief as to not taint the research. In addition, the researcher completed member checks following the interviews. The member checks consisted of a summarization of the interviews with each participant. Participants were invited to correct and add to their perceptions and beliefs, as well as correct any summarizations that were incorrectly interpreted by the researcher. At this stage in the research, no corrections or additions were made by any of the participants.

Atlas.ti software was utilized to code the data. During the coding processes, the researcher identified sections within the transcription documents that contained paragraphs, sentences, words, phrases with codes. These codes identified relevant patterns within the data. Open coding was conducted conjunction with *in vivo* coding. Thus, the researcher applied the participant's own statements and phrases to create the codes. These coded labels referenced principals' perceptions and beliefs as well as actions around teacher engagement.

To continue to validate the data and codes, the researcher implemented the process of horizontalization. As discussed in the previous chapter, participants' responses were all considered with equal weight before coding into themes. With that, the purpose of this dissertation is not to create a hierarchy of data, rather, all data must be considered equally. Within this process, any repetitive statements as well as those unrelated to the research were removed from the data.

Following the labels generated with open and *in vivo* coding, the researcher categorized the labels into six themes. These themes aid in illuminating the principal's perspective, experiences, and actions taken as related to teacher work engagement. These themes provide a more detailed and better picture of the data and information provided by the principals. This portion of the research resulted in axial coding as the larger categories then related back to their subcategories (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Next, the researcher applied the Atlas.ti software to conceptualize the data. This process involved identifying the critical themes and patterns to present within the dissertation. During the process, themes were eliminated while others were combined or reduced. To present the data within the dissertation, data visualization was utilized from the Atlas.ti software.

To fully present the finding, the researcher has richly described the findings. The vivid descriptions contextualize the study and allow readers to determine how experiences match various context. This creates a balance of coded evidence, with short quotations, and themes from the data to explain the study to the full extent.

Population and Sample

Semi-structured interviews were conducted via Zoom with nine principals from a growing, Midwestern school district. All the principals participating in this study did so voluntarily. The participants included six elementary principals, two middle school principals, and one high school principal. Five of the participants identified as female and four identified as male. The principal's ages ranged from 35-62 years old. In addition, the principals had between eight and sixteen years of teaching. Similarly, the principals had a

vast range of administration experiences, from one in their first year to one in their final year of service. Eight of the nine principals interviewed earned a master's degree, with one principal earning their doctoral degree. The Participant Summary (Table 2) provides an overview of the principal's background.

Table 2 Characteristics of Principal Participants

Principal	Age	Gender	Race	Placement	Education Level	Years of Experience as a Teacher	Years of Experience in Administration
Noah	48	Male	White	Elementary	Masters	8	14
James	39	Male	White	Elementary	Masters	8	8
Nora	46	Female	White	Elementary	Masters	17	6
Sarah	34	Female	White	Elementary	Masters	8	1
Lily	63	Female	White	Elementary	Masters	18	19
Olivia	41	Female	White	Elementary	Doctorate	16	4
Henry	44	Male	White	Middle School	Masters	8.5	13
Sophia	53	Female	White	Middle School	Masters	7	24
Jacob	52	Male	White	High School	Masters	11	16

The average participants age was 47 years old, with an average of 11 years of classroom teaching experience. The principals' average years of experience in administration was 12 years.

Themes

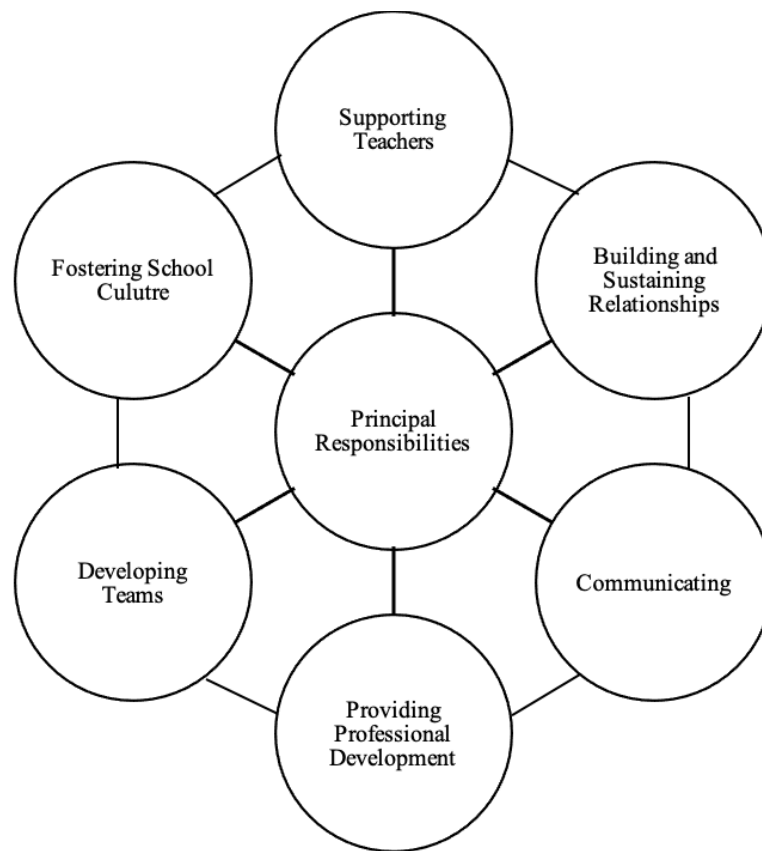


Figure 5. Principal Responsibilities: Supporting Teachers, Building and Sustaining Relationships, Communicating, Providing Professional Development, Developing Teams, & Fostering School Culture

When analyzing the interview data, six broad themes emerged as principals discussed how they perceive themselves as responsible for teacher engagement and actions taken to promote teacher engagement. The themes include support, relationships, communication, professional development, teams, and school culture. These themes are related as all were identified as a responsibility of principals as associated with teacher engagement. These themes were identified through the words used by participants as quotations were transcribed in the process of *in vivo* coding. Each theme is described in

the following sections. The themes are analyzed according to Kahn's theory of engagement to conclude the chapter.

Theme 1: Supporting Teachers.

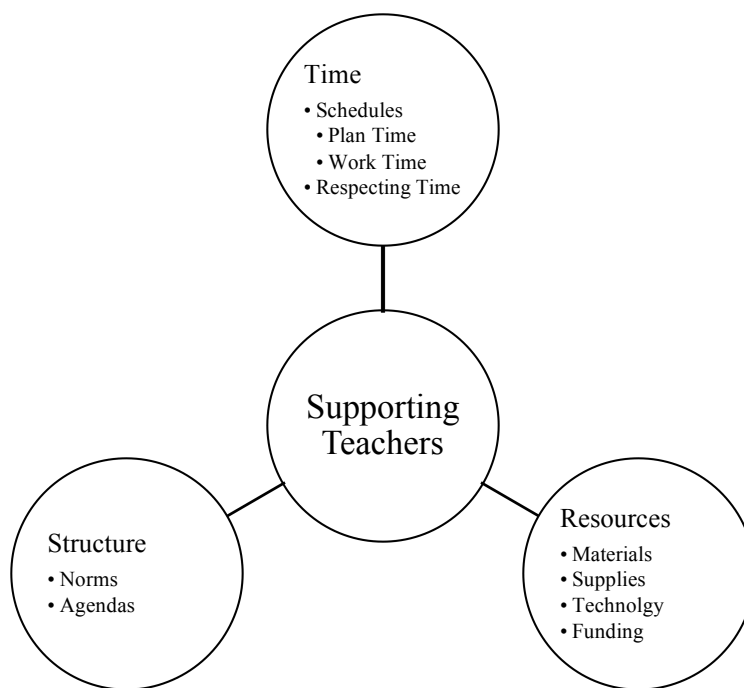


Figure 6. Support

The nine principals all cited supporting teachers as a primary responsibility of promoting teacher engagement. Support was described broadly as serving and helping teachers. When broken down, this included providing teachers with time, resources, and the structures to develop and sustain positive teacher engagement.

Olivia, an elementary principal, shared that, "I think a lot of it is supporting teachers and the work that they are doing." She went on to discuss that supporting teachers was "being a servant leader to help and guide in whatever they [teachers] need, because they are the ones closest to the kids." Along with serving the teachers, Sophia,

elementary principal, also shared that, “I can support and help them [the teachers].”

Jacob, a secondary principal, described how helping teachers is a part of that support. He shared that

“we’re [principals are] trying to support you, it’s okay if you mess up. I want you to mess up. And then we’re going to learn from it and move on. We’re going to help you... the best we can, to learn from it and move on and be the best teacher that you can be.” Henry, a secondary principal, also discussed helping staff grow and helping them grow from each other. A primary principal responsibility is “helping this other person [teacher] to learn and grow from that person [teacher].”

Time was also equated with support. The principals identified various facets of time, including schedules. This can be broken into plan time, time to work together, time to be in each other’s company, and being respectful of time during staff meetings and staff development. Related to the primary student schedules Olivia said, “Creating a master schedule that, you know, allows staff to um, teach the kids in the best way possible. Offer flexibility that’s needed.” In this same vein, Lily elaborated, “I developed a schedule where my teams could all meet together at the same time.”

Staff development time was also discussed. Lily, an elementary principal, stated, “I try not to make it [staff development] so big of a burden that it takes away from what they need to be doing, which is planning, organizing, and preparing for their students.” Jacob advocates for teacher time, “we are fighting for them to have more time and to get away. And, creating time so that they can replenish, recharge their batteries, so to speak.”

In addition to service and time, support was also equated with providing tools or resources to teachers. Nora, an elementary principal said, “it’s really giving them the tools and resources to make sure that they can be successful.” Another elementary principal, Sarah identified, “They need to have the tools and resources they need right there.” Jacob’s statement is nearly identical, as he shared being a principal is “making sure they have everything they need to teach.” Principals were broad in their statement of “resources,” but did make a few specific examples of resources, including materials, supplies, technology, and funding, if necessary.

Finally, principals shared teachers needed support in the form of the structures that they put into place. Principals discussed their perceptions of the importance of structures, and how they related to teacher engagement. Noah stated that principals need to put in place structures that “make it easy for them [teachers] to be engaged in those areas [physical, cognitive, and emotional] in the school.” Thus, the structures serve as a measure of support for teachers. Noah went on to state, “putting in place those structures to allow them to, not inhibit that engagement.”

The structures discussed by the principals interviewed included the norms and agendas for meetings and staff development. Then, when teams and the staff are meeting Henry shared, “the biggest actions we take are how we set up those teaming, the teaming meetings, the staff development.” He continued, “I think the key to the whole system working is giving ownership to the teachers and giving them a voice.”

Supporting teachers was identified within each of the principals’ interviews as an all-encompassing responsibility when asked about their perceptions of their

responsibilities of physical, cognitive, and emotional teacher engagement. All shared why they felt that support is a primary responsibility, however, all differed in their perceptions of the degree of support of teachers. Support was also identified as individualized. Thus, some teachers may require more support than others. According to Sophia, “...they all need different things. And, you have to individualize to meet their needs.” Jacob put it this way: “I don’t know exactly what that line is, um, where uh, where my role ends, and the teacher’s role begins. But I think that that line is going to look different, probably, for every single staff member that’s in the building.”

Theme 2: Building and Sustaining Relationships.

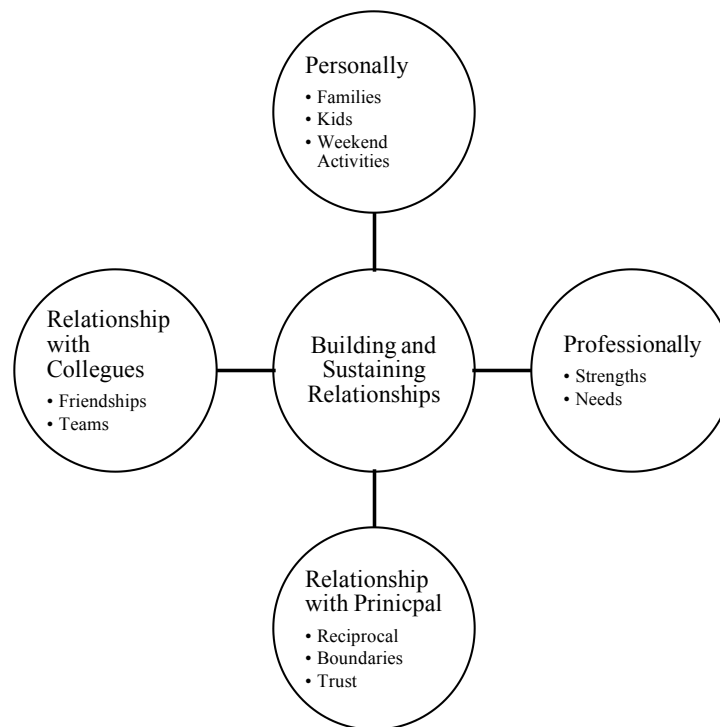


Figure 7. Relationships

The second theme was centered around relationships. Throughout the interviews, no matter the question, almost all responses led back to building and sustaining relationships with teachers as related to teacher engagement. Principals did acknowledge relationships built with students, their families, and the community when asked about their overall responsibilities as a principal. The community and the value of these relationships link to the theme of “culture”. In the interviews, principals did not tie their relationships built with students, families, and the community with their relationships with the teachers.

All nine of the interview participants reflected on their relationship with teachers as well as “knowing” their teachers. This included knowing the teachers both personally and professionally. However, this does not only include principals knowing their teachers, but it is also a reciprocal relationship. Teachers need to feel that they also know their principals. Beyond the teacher’s relationship with the principal, principals also talked about teachers having friends at work. With that, they connected teachers’ relationships with each other as a source of engagement as well. Principals talked about how building a positive relationship with their teachers and teachers’ relationships with each other positively impacted their perceptions of engagement within the buildings.

Principals discussed their beliefs on how important it is to get to know their teachers and continue to build that relationship with them. James admitted, “I’ve always had just a natural drive and desire just to get to know people. To kind of get to know what drives them, what motivates them, what frustrates them.” These aspects of the individual teacher can connect to both the personal and professional understanding. Having an

understanding from a personal perspective also provides a basis in how to respond and to recognize when a teacher is experiencing a challenge. James concedes that, “I might need to draw back, or I might need to relieve them of some of those pressures. I might need to, you know, then push somebody... because I feel like they’re ready for that, because of that personal interaction, that relationship I have, that hopefully then creates a good knowledge base of me being able to take next steps to either push the engagement [or] settle a little bit and give them some time and space.”

Building a Personal and Professional Relationship with the Teacher. To build that personal relationship, Lily divulged,” Just talk with them. Get to know them. Get to know, you know, the whole part of them, not just the one dimension of them here at school. I want to know about their families, and their kids, and what they did on the weekends, and, things like that.” Personal connection beyond that of school helps principals understand staff better; and how personal situations can impact teacher’s engagement.

Professionally, principals revealed that part of building relationships is knowing the teachers’ strengths. They connected this back to engagement by sharing that even those who are not fully engaged have strengths. “I know who my negative teachers are, but I also know those negative teachers have strengths” Henry stated. Henry elaborated:

When you validate their strength, all of a sudden, that negativity starts to shift, because they feel valued. And I think that’s a big part of sustaining that continual growth. It is showing value in your staff and finding the strength of your staff members and giving that a voice and a part in what you do.

Knowing that the professional part of the staff also aids principals in determining the individualization that teachers need to grow. James reflected:

The relationship is so vital because if I know that, then I can strategically do things within the classroom that will help them. Do I need to push? Do I need to pull back? Do I need to, you know, intervene? Do I need to provide additional supports? All those things happen, so then in regard, if that's my main message to create, I then have to do the same exact thing with, and live out the same thing that I'm preaching, so to know what drives our staff, to know what drives individuals, groups of people.

Consequently, the relationship then assists principals in making determination for the staff in terms of the support provided and the message being sent to individuals and groups.

The Teacher Relationship with the Principal. While principals identified knowing the teachers personally and professionally, they also shared that teachers should know their administration. Right away, James declares, "Listen, we're going to get to know each other." Principals working with an assistant also agreed that the assistant should be a part of that reciprocal relationship. "I feel like the teachers also know me, and they know the assistant principal, they know where to go to get help and feel supported. So, that's beneficial to increase engagement," said Sophia. Boundaries exist with getting to know their principal. James explained, "the best way for me to be able to know what our people need is to have a working relationship with them that factors in some of the

personal, to a certain point.” He continued, “knowing that there’s a boundary and a line that I will never cross with that.”

Foundations of Successful Relationships. Part of building the reciprocal relationship with teachers is knowing that the principal cares about them and that they can trust them. “Teachers have to feel like I know them, and I care about them.” Sophia declared. “And people, if they know that you care, they’re more responsive.” Showing care and compassion connects back to the theme of support and can be demonstrated by listening, a form of communication, theme three. By knowing and building a relationship, then principals can show they care about the teachers, personally and professionally.

The foundation of a positive relationship is trust. Successful relationships are rooted in that trust. Lily maintains that teachers:

Have to know that they can count on you. I mean it can’t just be words. It can’t be ‘Yep, I’ll get that done. Yep.’ It has to, if you say, you better do it. And so, I believe my staff now trusts me that they know that I say it that I’m going to do it. They can count on me. But that also takes time because it’s, it’s so much work. But they’ve got to know they can count on you.”

James discussed how he shows flexibility with the teachers and recognizes that “we all have lives and we’re all real people” with aims that this build trust with teachers as well.

Teacher’s Relationships with other Teachers. Building relationships with colleagues aside from the principal was also a factor of engagement. The principals shared their desires for the teams to have a good relationship with one another and enjoy

time together, even outside of school. Nora discussed how she loves it when a team or a building is getting along so well, and they show up for things outside of school to enjoy each other's company. To cultivate these staff relationships, principals are intentional about the formulation of how teams are put together, which draws on theme five, teaming.

Relationships and Teacher Engagement. All principals acknowledged their perception of the importance and responsibility of their relationship with staff as well as the staff's relationships with one another. In terms of responsibility Noah put it this way, "I think the leadership side, the relationship side, that social/emotional side, the behaviors, encompasses quite a bit of what we do." He continued, stating that:

We're a family here, we want to all be present. We all want to do, you know, we want to support one another in whatever is going on in the school as a whole.

And, I guess, again I think, so much comes down to modeling and if you have the relationship as a principal with your teachers, they're going to do so much more...

As a result of the relationship, Henry connected teacher engagement. "I think engagement and building relationships go hand in hand" he expressed. James also summed up his perceptions, "I think in any, really, [the] relationship component has to be in place to support anything that we do in our schools." He also touched on the COVID-19 Pandemic stating that prior to, the approach was "centered on relationships" and now, more than ever, this continues to be a priority.

Theme 3: Communicating.

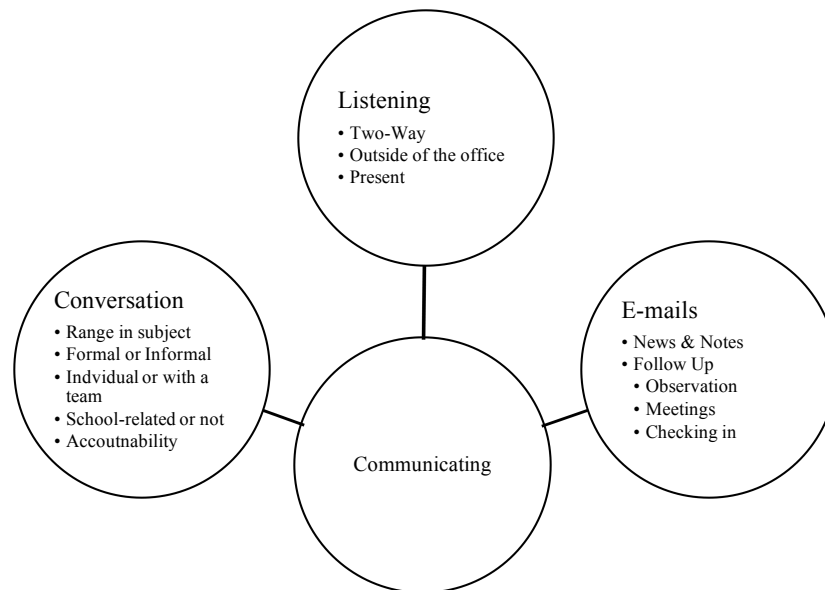


Figure 8. Communicating

Communication in the form of listening, conversation, and, in some cases, e-mail were areas of communication principals identified as a responsibility and connection to teacher engagement. Principals overwhelmingly talked about the importance of conversation with teachers. Over and over, principals also expressed that they must be present and model engagement in the conversation. These conversations, they believed, could be informal or formal, one-on-one or with a team. In addition, the subject of the conversations may or may not be school-related. Conversations are also a method of holding teachers accountable or determining what kind of support that teachers may need. Principals also shared that, through Theme 1, the support or structure put into place can include a system for teachers to either prevent or provide for conversations with one another.

Principals stated that listening to the teachers ensured a rich conversation, rather than a simple dialog. Listening creates the exchange of ideas, rather than one participant doing all of the talking or communicating. Principals need to venture outside of the office to be with teachers. Principal Lily stated, “being out, talking to people, encouraging people, listening to people, obviously, I’m a people person.” Getting out of the office is a key action in establishing conversation. In the case that a teacher approaches the office, principals can engage staff by providing their full attention to that teacher. Depending on the situation, it may require the principal to cancel other meetings, stop working on paperwork or other office tasks. James imparted that he, as the principal, must be present, be involved, and engaged in conversations.

To further support listening and engaging in a two-way dialog, Sarah highlights the importance of asking teachers questions. She shared that she has found herself having to ask a lot of questions about their general role. “What is your role as speech teacher? What do you do? I never taught speech; I don’t know.” The questions can then lead to further discussion and aid the principal’s general knowledge and understanding of aspects of different teachers’ roles. Admitting “I don’t know, what I don’t know” not only provides an element of humility, but also grows continued communication and conversation.

Sometimes the communication may start with an email. The principals share “News and Notes” with the staff, however, sometimes principals shared that they may send an individual email to follow-up to an observation, set up a meeting, or to check in. Nora discussed that this may look different from teacher to teacher, but that

“...sometimes it starts with an email. Like, ‘Hey, I noticed’.” Nora provided an example, “Just saying, ‘Hey, I noticed I’m not seeing as many smiles, you know. How are things going? You know, you’re doing a great job.’.” She also stated that starting with some positives and then bringing in a “I’m just checking in” helps teachers to open. Nora believes she has had amazing results with this approach. Knowing the staff (Theme 2) helps principals know if it is best to e-mail the teacher first, or physically approach them. The conversations principals have with teachers range in subject and whether they are planned or occur naturally. James reflected, “I have individual conversations, team conversations, whether that be in a formal or an informal basis,” and “I can actively be engaged in that conversation, in that discussion, and it might not even be anything school related.”

Throughout the interview, principals described how frequent, meaningful discussions may lead to innovative ideas. Communication, they also discussed, can be a way for teachers to explain their decision-making processes when teaching. The communication described by the principals had positive undertones, while still providing the teachers with the opportunities to converse with the principals. Related to that opportunity, James shared how he would like teachers to share information with him. Even not knowing what the outcome is, he still wants to give them the opportunity to share that information, and “may be spark an interest or plant a seed, in some capacity. We water that seed by having another conversation and then another.” James shared that rich discussion with teachers allows them to “generate and create ideas” together.

Conversations may also focus on the teacher's feelings and passion. Considering the global pandemic, the principals shared that conversations are more prevalent and sound different than they had before. These conversations are more important, given the stress and exhaustion levels; and all lead back to knowing the teachers on a more personal level. Sarah discussed how some conversations are just enlightening the teacher's thoughts and feelings. Nora detailed:

I think our conversations have changed. And, I have to try understand... are we feeling this way because of just the time we're in? And let's give it a little more time and things are gradually getting back to normal. Are we going to get that passion back?

Sarah shared that the conversations require balance and that it can be hard.

Principals also shared that engaging in conversations with teachers is a method of holding teachers accountable. Sophia revealed that she will reflect on observations and ask herself, "is there a good purpose for that?" If not, she said, "then I'll generally have a one-on-one conversation with that person." She revealed that consistency is vital and "You've got to give where you can give, but then, they've got to know that if they're not doing what they're surprised to be doing, you're going to call them on it. You've got to consistently, one-on-one, talk to each one of those people."

Communications with individual teachers and the team are often ignited by asking "Hey, how are things going?" Jacob said he will randomly quickly visit and ask, "Anything I can help with?" Other times he put it, "Hey, you're doing a great job. Is there any way I could help you?" He also shared that sometimes he will check in on the

department heads to get a pulse on how things are going overall. Sophia also agreed, “You’ve got to get out there and have conversations and check in with people and just model that energy and sometimes you’ve got to be weird.” Sophia talked about how she tried different dances. This not only lightens the mood, but also energizes the students and staff.

In addition to the conversations and communications taking place between the principal and the teacher or team of teachers, principals discussed that they are also careful in setting up structures that either encourage or hinder conversation from teacher-to-teacher. Henry shared that after peer observations, follow-up conversation is avoided to prevent teachers from making evaluate judgements that are reserved for principals. However, Henry has set up a system for teachers to “walk and talk” with a peer from their department during a common time. Comparably, Sarah highlighted team meetings are set up at the elementary level once a week. This allows teams and peers to talk about their practice, problem-solve, or celebrate together.

Theme 4: Providing Professional Development.

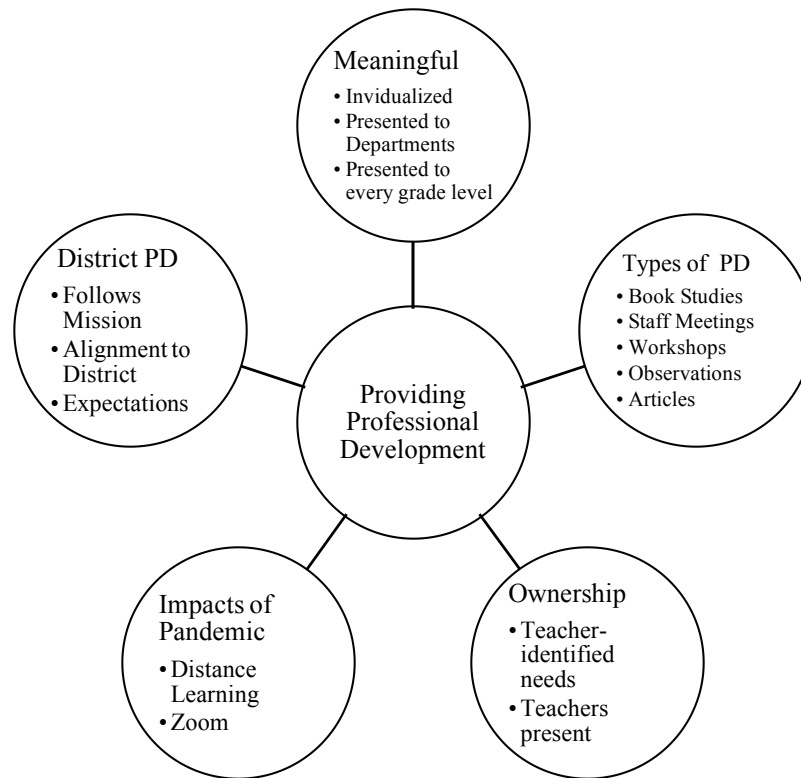


Figure 9. Providing Professional Development

The principals used the terms “professional development” and staff development interchangeably when sharing their responsibility of extending the knowledge and skillset of teachers. Principals highlighted that to engage teachers in professional development, it should be meaningful and include opportunities for participation and ownership. The principals also explained that the COVID-19 Pandemic did have impacts on professional development. Specifically, professional development focused on teaching the teachers how to teach online. Teachers learned how to use Zoom, as well as how to create a distance learning menu that included hyperlinks to documents as well as recorded videos. Since the COVID-19 Pandemic, online learning and technology continues to be part of the focus. Finally, principals believe it is their responsibility to support the district’s expectations and focus.

To be meaningful, professional development should be individualized to the teacher or team. Sophia shared that “There’s not a ‘one-size-fits-all’ when you’re looking at staff development and helping kids, or helping teachers become intellectually engaged.” She asserts that “I want to bring in meaningful staff development that is short doses.” At the secondary level, Jacob declared that he does not facilitate many large group staff developments to prevent professional developments that do not apply to all staff. Instead, staff development may be individualized or presented according to department. At the elementary level, Nora discussed being able to have participation from every grade level during professional development.

Engaging the staff with various kinds of professional development can look different according to the teachers’ needs. Olivia talked about professional development in terms of book studies and staff meetings. She also suggested, “Maybe in your newsletter, sharing a little blurb about something.” She added that it may include engaging other staff in peer observations or setting up opportunities where they are learning from others. Lily echoed this idea by discussing how she encourages teachers to be active in the workshops for curriculum as well as “bringing in articles, or bringing in innovative ideas, or setting things up so they learn from each other.” She felt it is her job, and responsibility to facilitate this aspect of teacher engagement. James agreed that he creates staff development opportunities and activities that support teachers to talk to each other and hear other ideas. Many of the professional developments are presented at staff meetings. Norah shared teachers have opportunities to then “share different ideas of what’s happening in different classrooms.”

The principals described how they plan for and engage teachers in staff development. While teachers at the elementary level all teach content at various levels and at the elementary level content is specific, there is another facet to education; special education and the inclusion classroom. According to Henry:

They've [special education teachers] got the knowledge. How do we get that background and knowledge to our regular [education] teachers because they're working with those students just as well? So, I do believe, being creative and setting up that staff development to really increase that, that knowledge for teachers, and how to engage with all areas of the school, from students to parents, and even with each other.

In terms of the specific content of professional development, principals felt teacher feedback and input on the subject matter provided teachers with ownership in what they were learning. Nora talked about being able to give the teachers ownership by allowing them to identify the needs in the building. Likewise, Sarah provided teachers with the opportunity to share what their needs were, and recognized that her role was, "Hey, you're training this, do you want to give some PD?" Henry also recognized that finding leaders in the building to provide the staff development allowed for continued ownership. Noah also shared the importance of "...giving them [teacher leaders] the opportunities to give professional development in front of the staff."

At times, the principals also stressed the need for professional development outside of themselves and teacher leaders. Henry brought up that the district had gone one-to-one with iPads, thus Apple provided professional development to the teachers. In

the same way, new curriculum adoption brings professional development from the Curriculum Publishing company. Sarah and Lily discussed this at the elementary level with a new reading series.

Principals identified that the COVID-19 Pandemic did have impacts to professional development. As discussed in Chapter 3, the COVID-19 Pandemic and social justice issues were unique to the timing and context of this study. When specifically examining the impacts of COVID-19 on the theme of professional development, the content as well as delivery of professional development changed. Most evidently, professional development took place online over Zoom rather than in person. Teachers also had to learn how to use Zoom, provided to them by the district and Educational Service Unit. Lily discussed that after schools shut down remote learning began, however, the district concluded with this by Spring 2021. Now, students and teachers are face-to-face, but, at times, Zoom is still utilized as a tool for professional development.

Residual impacts of the pandemic impacted students and teachers emotionally. Because of the COVID-19 Pandemic and social justice issues, the culture and mental health of teachers has rapidly led teachers to leaving the profession and high levels of stress and anxiety. Understaffing and lack of substitute teachers further perpetuate the stress and have created a cycle. Nora commented during her interview that many districts are focused on the social/emotional piece of staff development as a result.

Ultimately, Olivia acknowledged that professional developments are tied to, whatever the goal or mission is. “Anything that would help live out that mission, day in

and day out.” she said. This mission encompasses the district mission. Nora highlighted that principals support district-focused professional developments to maintain alignment. Nora stated, “We need to make sure that we are following through with expectations of, that the district has set for, in certain areas.”

Theme 5: Developing Teams.

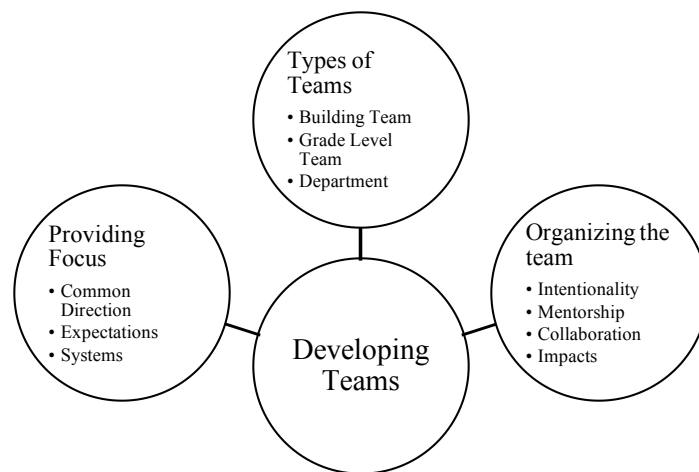


Figure 10. Developing Teams

The fifth theme that emerged was the significance of teams as a whole building and within grade levels and departments. When defining teams, teams include a group of individuals from an organization and are goal driven. The individuals within the team maintain a professional relationship with one another. Principals perceived that their responsibility is to be the “leader of the team.” As the leader of the team, principals discussed how they perceive themselves as responsible for putting the team together and providing the team with focus. Principals also talked about the distinct types of teams within the school as well as the value of the teams.

When placing a team together, Sophia highlighted that, “when you put teams together you’ve got to be very intentional about who’s with whom, who can be a mentor, who is not going to be a mentor.” That intentionality of the placement of team members requires consideration of how the team may get along and collaborate. James also shared that he tries to “be strategic about people that we’re placing together, on teams.” James also connected new teammates placed on a team can “impact that energy level, that you know, that engagement level because a new person is on their team, and that kind of ups the ante a little bit, or it bring a new layer that maybe they’ve been missing.”

Sometimes teams do not always get along. Lily admitted, “Some teams work better than other teams, so again, the teams that roll together, they like each other, they do, those are the easy teams. The teams that have differences of opinion, or differences of philosophy, those are much harder teams.”

As the leader of the team, principals reflected that they are responsible for providing focus and direction. James stated, “So, you know, instilling that trust in our teams, giving them a common direction and a focus, I think is another part of my role.” Like James, Nora shared that she develops expectations for the team meetings each week. Henry also established that the biggest actions principals take are how principals set up the teaming meetings. He discussed how he set up different days of the week with a different focus. This connected back to engagement, “I think that has added to more teacher engagement.”

When meeting with the teams, principals provided examples of various areas of focus. For example, Nora remarked, “We hold them accountable to look at the data.

Discuss with their team, discuss with us, how is the class doing.” Along with the data, Sarah described a student triage the teachers engage in, and following this student “walk and talk,” teachers meet with their teams to discuss how it is going. At the secondary level, Henry disclosed that team topics ranged from content to behavior, depending on the team’s needs.

Overall, the principals referred to their teachers and staff members as team, however, there are many other teams within the team. Nora believes, “... we are all one team. It’s not you on your little island, it’s we are all a team. We all need to be present.” Other principals talked about the other teams within the building as well. James identified, “You’ve got a team, most of our people work on, whether it’s a grade level team, a content area team, you know, an office team.” Principals considered how different teams may interact within and outside of the group. Olivia talked about her responsibility to set up those “opportunities for teams to meet, or people across teams to meet.”

Finally, the principals emphasized the value of teams to cultivate teacher engagement. “One of the huge keys to being emotionally engaged is to have friends at work,” Sophia asserted. For individual teachers, James draws a team around them to help continue to lift them up and support them. Sophia declared that “We all have to function as a team and when we need each other we have to step up.”

Theme 6: Fostering School Culture.

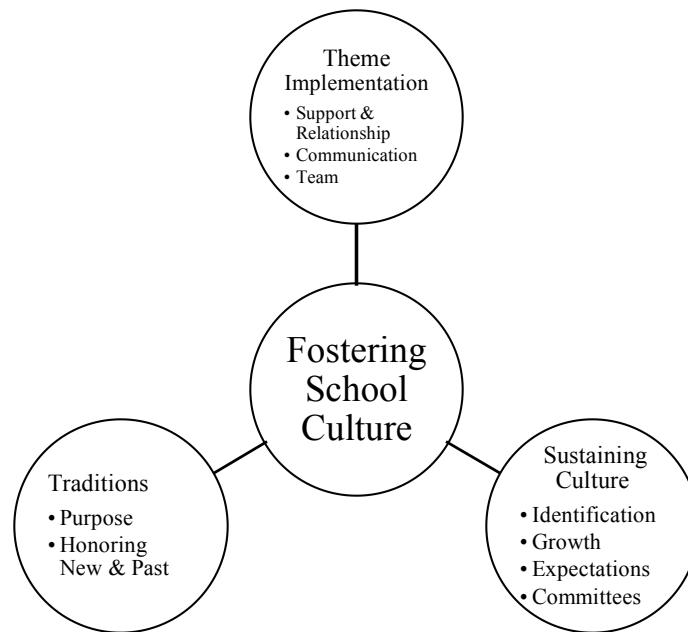


Figure 11. Fostering School Culture

The sixth and final theme that emerged from the interviews with principals was fostering school culture. Principals felt it was their responsibility to build positive culture by implementing the five other themes derived from the interviews. Principals also discussed how traditions of the school, beliefs, and mission all connect back to the culture. All principals were also in agreement that there was a correlation between positive school culture and positive teacher engagement.

Culture was inherently related to the theme of support, relationship, communication, and being a team. Thus, culture is a reciprocal of these themes, stemming from the principal. For the purpose of this study, culture is defined as the values and beliefs of school organization, and the expected behaviors. Nora commented, “I think that’s what makes part of the positive culture, too, is just being that person that says, ‘I’m here for you in lots of different ways.’” This is a support that is created from

the relationship with the teacher as well as conversation with teachers. The theme of communication was evident when Sophia talked about discussions with teachers and how that can create culture. She refers to discussions “that make people want to be the best that they can be. And then, you know, an ‘I believe’ statement or ‘I promise to.’ Something that supports our belief, supports our culture, keeps teachers engaged.”

Like Nora, Henry also talked about relationships and culture. He connected them in this way: “relationships get built, when we know, our teachers are engaged to the school, it’s not just show up, teach my classes, and leave.” Conclusively, James considered culture from a team perspective, “I empower others [and] I think that then helps to generate a culture and an atmosphere of ‘Ok, there’s not just one person that has to do all of this.’”

Besides the interconnections of other themes within this theme, principals also review the how the culture is developed, its impacts, and how to sustain the culture. James began, “One step, I think, is to identify what are those things that make your building unique and special, and then again secondly, how do we continue that? How do we live that day by day?” He also asks, “What are the, the things that we do that we want to make sure that we instill into the new staff? Because we have a lot of new staff coming.” The growth of this district can be impactful to the culture of the established buildings.

Other principals discussed their beliefs that culture is a component of school that must be continuously grown. Sarah provided the analogy; “[culture] is not something that you just do it and it goes on, right? It’s not the foundation of a house. It’s like, it’s like

your grass. You have to continue to care for it for it to grow.” To positively grow that culture, Nora shed light on her expectations for teachers. Nora believes, “We’ve been open two years, the culture is amazing here.” She asks her teachers what steps they will take to ensure the building remains a wonderful place to work. “I think you just have to constantly bring to light your expectation of what you want,” she said.

Other principals develop systems to sustain the culture. Sarah talked about the development of the social and school culture committee within her building. Other principals set up similar committees. At the end of 2021, James talked about how, with his support, the teachers identified different committees that would focus on the culture and climate of his school. Some of the committees that resulted included: One School, One Book, March Madness, Interior Decorating, Atmosphere Committee, 3 Days of Thanks, PTO Appreciation, Announcements, Food Days, among others.

Besides the component of sustainability, principals also reviewed the traditions of the school. James challenges his teachers. “I think when you look at the, you know, the tradition of the school, what do we really want to be known as? You don’t really look at, we want to be known as events that we do, but instead more of qualities of character.” Along with these questions posed to teachers about tradition, James also provides the why traditions are maintained, “We want to be known as a building that honors the traditions that are here, but also does that in such a way that, you know, truly cares about, you know, each student.” As a growing district, Sarah also pointed out the challenges that come with opening a new building and traditions. “It’s beautiful having all these

great traditions, all these different traditions, and these different celebrations that they come with. But at some point, it's very challenging to celebrate everybody's traditions."

In the end, the principals made a connection between teacher engagement and school culture. Sophia declared that "teacher engagement is a result of culture," whereas Henry stated that "culture starts with the engagement of teachers." Though the statements are different, they both link and connect teacher engagement with school culture.

Themes Summary. The purpose of this study was to explore how principals view themselves as responsible for teacher engagement and actions they take to build positive teacher engagement. The themes were derived through semi-structured interviews with nine elementary and secondary principals ranging in their level of experience. Themes revealed through *in vivo* coding included supporting teachers, building and sustaining relationships, communicating, providing professional development, developing teams, and fostering school culture.

The findings revealed that the themes resulting from the principal interviews demonstrated that all nine principals perceived themselves as responsible for teacher engagement in those facets of their jobs. However, the degree of the perception of the responsibility was dependent upon the individual principals' beliefs. For example, one principal shared, "I've had to come to the conclusion there are certain limits or boundaries to what I can do in this role." Another principal owned the responsibility, "I don't know if I could say there's anything that I shouldn't be involved in."

Other principals described more of a nuanced view. “I think that there are, there’s a certain point where teachers have got to be able to be self-motivated and self-engaged.” They continued, “I don’t know exactly what that line is... where my role ends, and the teacher’s role begins.” Principals also briefly discussed the global pandemic and COVID-19, though none of the principals stated that it impacted how responsible they felt they were for teacher engagement. The principals did share it impacted teachers and students level of engagement.

Analysis of Themes Related to Kahn’s Theory of Engagement.

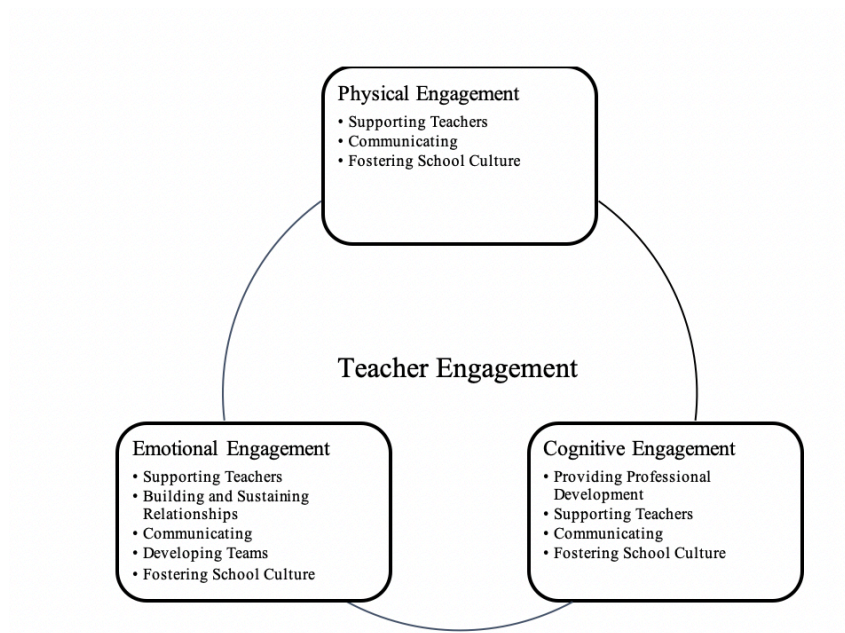


Figure 12: Themes Analysis According to Kahn’s Theory of Engagement

As discussed in Chapter 1, I applied the theoretical framework of Kahn’s Theory of Engagement, which defines three domains of engagement. Research questions were then designed to investigate how principals view themselves as responsible for teacher

engagement in the areas of physical, cognitive, and emotional engagement. Using the principals' responses, common themes were identified and were characterized within the identified domains of Kahn's theory of engagement. The following sections will further explain to the extent that Kahn's theory of engagement was connected to the principals perceived responsibilities.

Physical Engagement. Physical engagement is the vigor, energy, and intensity that teachers exhibit at work. This also includes physical presence at school. Related to this theme, principals all perceived their own responsibility as modeling physical engagement to the staff. Presence and visibility were cited as a part of their roles as building principals. Along with this modeling, principals believed that part of the teacher's duty is to be present. It was identified as an expectation that teachers should be physically engaged at work.

When disseminating the themes of the principal interviews, physical engagement was not as prevalently discussed as in-depth by principals within the themes that emerged. The themes of support, communication, and school culture also fell within the domain of physical engagement. Due to the COVID-19 Pandemic, physical engagement was more of a challenging with "stay at home" orders in place. Now, post COVID-19 Pandemic, schools and principals are navigating a "new normal" or are trying to get back to what was once "normal". The themes support, communication, and school culture were articulated by principals' form of physical vigor, energy, and presence. Accordingly, Principals believed their responsibility of supporting teachers included physically serving and helping the teachers. This, most directly connects to physical act

of principal evaluation and observation of teachers. Communication, then, required teachers to physically “get out” and have conversations with teachers. Especially post-COVID-19, this means face-to-face (or mask-to-mask) communication, not through the use of technology. School culture interconnected with the themes of support and communication. Along with the interweaving of these themes, school culture encompassed physical events and traditions that bonded to physical engagement. Culture also directly is the physical behaviors principals engage in, reciprocating their values and beliefs. Principals repeatedly identified modeling the “vigor” and “energy” they expect from their staff as a crucial component of building positive physical engagement.

Cognitive Engagement. Cognitive engagement is synonymous with the intellectual engagement of teachers. Collectively, principals perceived themselves as responsible for this domain of teacher engagement. When posing questions about cognitive engagement and the actions associated with it, principals cited professional development as the primary source of this engagement domain. Principals used the terms “intellectually engage teachers” within the interviews before discussing professional development.

Along with professional development, the themes of support, communication, and school culture also embody this domain. Related to the support theme, principals help and serve the teacher by providing resources. The resources identified cognitively engage teachers; this component of the theme connects back to the theme of professional development. Thus, professional development contains resources for teachers.

Communication, then, also cognitively engages teachers through the coaching conversations for which principals perceived themselves as responsible.

Emotional Engagement. Emotionally engaging teachers connected to many of the themes discovered within this dissertation study. Though the perspectives of responsibilities principals discussed most often connected back to this domain, principals talked about the responsibility of relationships and providing opportunities to emotionally engage teachers. However, one principal shared in the interview that she can provide support and relationship, but cannot “make a teacher be happy.”

The themes connected to this domain included support, relationships, communication, teams, and school culture. These themes are all interrelated as they all require the foundation of a positive and caring relationship between the principal and the teacher and/or the teacher and their colleagues. Principals frequently cited the question of, “How can I help you?” as an action to provide support, show they care, and open a conversation with teachers. This creates a ripple that impacts the culture of the building, transforming into a wave of, “How can we help each other?” Principals lead and put together the building team, grade level, and the department team to work toward their common mission.

Summary

Interviews with nine elementary and secondary principals in a growing Midwest school district yielded six interrelated themes: Support, Relationships, Communication, Professional Development, Teams, and School Culture. The themes were found to fall into Kahn’s Theory of Engagement (1990) domains. Using the lens of Kahn’s Theory of

Engagement (1990), the theme of support, communication, and school culture encompasses all engagement domains, including physical, cognitive, and emotional. Relationships and teams connected to the social-emotional domain. Principals identified professional development in the cognitive domain. The interviews all touched on the various domains; however, the emotional domain was discussed more in depth than the other domains. The cognitive domain had the second most discussion, followed by physical domain.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Introduction

This qualitative case study explored how principals view themselves as responsible for teacher engagement and the actions they take to build it. This study further explored the extent to which principals felt that they impact teacher engagement and how they sustain engagement in their buildings. Teacher engagement is perceived through the lens of Kahn's Theory of Engagement (1990), considering the physical, cognitive, and emotional domains of engagement.

This chapter includes a discussion of the implications of these findings for building administrators, including principals and assistant principals, district-level administrators and school boards, educational service units, educational organizations, including the American Association of School Administrators (AASA), National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) and National Association for Secondary School Principals (NASSP), Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD), among others. The chapter also shares implications for colleges and universities that prepare building administrators. The chapter concludes with recommendations for future research on the subject as well as a reflection on my own practice.

The interviews indicated that principals felt they owned the responsibility of promoting teacher engagement within their buildings. However, the extent to how much responsibility falls on the principal varied from principal to principal. When principals

take responsibility for promoting engagement, all do recognize that not all facets of engagement can be controlled or remain solely their responsibility. The responsibilities identified and actions taken to promote engagement fell within the physical, cognitive, and emotional domains of Kahn's Theory of Engagement. The themes resulting from the study offer important implications for how building principals work and what to do to improve that work as related to teacher engagement. These implications present the opportunity to strengthen and improve principal leadership and practice, which then impacts teacher engagement. This creates a domino effect, impacting building culture, as well as the students and their families' experiences.

This chapter offers conclusions and recommendations for practice that can be drawn from the perceptions and actions taken by principal study participants. Discussion of recommendations for further study follows with a summary that includes my personal reflections of the impact this study will have on my practice as a principal.

Conclusions

The following overall conclusions can be drawn from the interviews of nine principals serving a growing Midwest school district:

1. Principals interviewed perceived themselves as responsible for promoting teacher engagement.
2. Principals interviewed took action to promote teacher engagement at the physical, cognitive, and emotional level.

3. The six themes (support, relationship, communication, professional development, teams, and school culture) resulting from the interviews were interwoven and connected within one another.
4. The themes maintained unique implications when analyzed through Kahn's (1990) physical, cognitive, and emotional domains.
5. The principals provided a useful perspective in which to examine their responsibilities as related to teacher engagement.
6. The work of principals is more than simple leadership; there are many responsibilities, including promoting the engagement of teachers.

Promoting Physical Teacher Engagement

As indicated in the interviews by the principal participants, physical teacher engagement is promoted through the actions taken within the various themes found within the interviews. It is characterized by the vigor, energy, and intensity of teachers as well as the physical presence at school and school sponsored events. Within the physical engagement domain, the principals cited the importance of modeling, their presence, and expectations when it comes to this engagement.

Implications for Principals and Assistant Principals. Principals should model vigor and energy in order to promote physical teacher engagement. Modeling and their physical presence connect to this domain. Principals should not ask teachers to complete a task that they themselves would not engage in themselves. This includes the physical components of teaching along with student supervision or duties.

The expectations for teachers connect with the accountability piece when it comes to physical engagement. For principals, they should communicate their expectations with teachers; drawing on their positive relationship with teachers and modeling the physical expectation. Expectations for applications of teaching methodology, as well as student supervision and duties can be communicated in many ways. As identified by one principal participant- teachers are more likely to step up and engage when they have that relationship with them and ask the teacher face-to-face to commit to a duty. This is more personal than electronic communication.

Physical engagement for teachers can look different at different teaching levels, however, it involves teaching different content areas, grade levels, and is varied professional development. During the COVID-19 Pandemic, physical engagement involved physical tasks at home on an independent stage, using technology to connect. Post COVID-19 Pandemic, physical engagement occurred with various physical restrictions, and may or may not have included wearing masks, maintaining a physical distance of six feet, and using clear (usually acrylic) barriers between individuals. The following physical engagement expectations described, are post COVID-19 pandemic. At the elementary level, physical engagement also includes engagement in supervision of students before school, after school, as well as during recess. At the middle and high school level, physical engagement also includes before school, after school, hallway supervision, as well as supervision at sporting events. Though it is not an expectation, all levels may have teachers physically engage in sponsorships of extracurricular activities or serve as coaches for a school sports team.

Along with modeling, presence, and communication of expectations, of physical engagement, the principal should show appreciation to teachers for the engagement. Whether it be with a note, jeans coupon, or physically telling the teachers “Thank you,” principals acknowledged this engagement. This acknowledgement may be due to the fact physical engagement can be most easily observed by principals, whereas cognitive and emotional engagement are intrinsic and a part of the teacher’s thinking and emotion.

Physical teacher engagement cannot be forced by principals; however, it can be communicated as an expectation and encouraged by principals. As evidenced in the data, one principal shared, “you just plain have to state your expectations for their physical appearance [presence] at things” while another said, “...it’s setting it up, kind of a force of success”. Principals should not only be communicating these expectations, but also living and modeling their own expectations. Positive physical engagement can be modeled within all six themes found within this study, involving support, relationships, communication, professional development, teams, and school culture.

The principals’ presence and modeling prominent levels of energy within the themes urges the teachers to do the same. A teacher’s physical presence, of course, is a requirement of their work. Physical presence and physical engagement are two different components of teaching. Teachers can be physically present but disengaged in their work. The vigor, energy, and intensity that teachers physically present in their work should be a consideration within the teacher evaluation process, which also links back to

expectations. As a teacher's physical presence is a requirement, the degree to which the teacher is physically engaged can then be supported by the principal's evaluation process.

Promoting Cognitive Teacher Engagement

When promoting teachers' cognitive engagement, principals often connected this domain of engagement with professional development and reflective conversations. This domain they established as a responsibility specific to the principal. Whether it was facilitating professional development, organizing it, or funding it, principals accepted this responsibility as a part of their role. District level administrators can then support principals in staff development. This may include providing principals with membership to professional organizations that principals can draw on to teach teachers, through funding, or by communicating a district staff development focus. It should be noted that principals interviewed from this district do not have a "staff development facilitator" role, however, those principals at the secondary level do work with assistant principals. Many of the principals interviewed discussed drawing on classroom teachers as experts in staff development. One principal talked about eliciting teachers' passions in different teaching practices or content areas and inspiring those teachers to then share what they have learned. Another principal talked about the number of years that he had been out of the classroom. He shared that teachers get more out of staff development presented by their colleagues. In addition, this then creates greater ownership as well as buy-in from the teachers.

Along with drawing on classroom teachers when presenting professional development, principals also discussed the focus on following district initiatives. They

discussed being provided with “principal time” during district staff development. During that time, principals support the district mission, vision, and overall focus. This was also identified as a principal responsibility.

Finally, reflective conversations with teachers also engage teachers cognitively. These conversations may occur at any time with the building principal. Specifically, formal conversation is a follow up to a teacher observation for the purpose of evaluation. These conversations are initiated with the goal of improving the teacher’s practice and to grow knowledge and skills. For this kind of cognitive engagement conversation, responsibility falls solely on the principal, as they are the evaluator of the teacher.

Whether cognitive engagement is derived from professional development or cognitively engaging conversations, principals stimulate cognitive engagement with teachers to intellectually challenge them in the practice of teaching or in their content areas. All principals identified that intellectually stimulating teachers varied among the principals depending on the teacher’s need. Just as teachers differentiate their lessons based on the needs of the students, principals differentiate cognitive teacher engagement based on the needs of the teachers. Overall, principals also believed that the intellectual stimulation provided to teachers should be meaningful and accessible to them.

In completing the analysis of how principal participants promoted cognitive teacher engagement, the most obvious implications are exposed within professional development. To intellectually engage teachers, one of the greatest and most obvious actions is providing professional development to the teachers. Whether principals are presenting the professional development, drawing on other staff members to provide it, or

providing access to workshops, professional development is at the heart of promoting cognitive teacher engagement. Inevitably, professional development itself comes with its own set of implications. As suggested by the participants, it needs to be accessible, meaningful, and differentiated to the needs of the teachers. Quality professional development is necessary in promoting cognitive teacher engagement.

Besides implications for professional development, there are also several implications to consider related to conversations that promote cognitive teacher engagement. To engage in intellectually stimulating conversations, principals need to know the needs of the teacher(s) to ask questions that challenge the teacher's thinking; these questions should have the power to positively influence the teacher's practice. Like professional development, conversations need to be meaningful and differentiated. Consequentially, the art of conversation is a study within itself. Principals that master this art promote cognitive teacher engagement at higher levels.

Promoting Emotional Teacher Engagement

Promoting emotional teacher engagement had links to the relationships developed between principals and teachers as well as the relationship between colleagues. Identified as a responsibility by principals, principals did acknowledge that they can only be responsible for teacher emotional engagement to a certain extent. There are some teachers' personal circumstances that are out of the principals control. Principals did discuss how they can demonstrate compassion for their teachers, however, they cannot force their teachers to be happy. Rather, actions principals take from knowing their

teachers and developing that relationship can aim to positively promote teachers' emotional engagement.

Emotional engagement tasks were also supported by principals through teachers' work with other teachers. This can be explored through committee work or mentorship. Principals identified the "social committee" as an outlet for their teachers to bond with one another outside of the school day. In addition, principals are intentional regarding how they place certain staff members together, whether that be through committee work or mentorship programs. At times, principals support the teacher's cognitive interest through the committee work, which can then emotionally engage them. Teachers not only develop a love and passion for their interest in the work but can also develop an emotional gratitude for having their principal's encouragement.

The global COVID-19 Pandemic and social justice issues also had implications for promoting teachers' emotional engagement. Principals shared that the pandemic created fear among society and "fear is real." Principals recognized this fear and supported teachers by providing substitute teachers when necessary. A lack of substitute teachers did present challenges, though the district responded with "on call" substitutes. Emotionally, this implication also included wearing masks, which one principal identified as a barrier to engaging with teachers. Now teachers (and students) are not required to wear masks, which has led to more access and engagement. Social justice issues had serious implications for one principal who shared, no matter what he did or did not do, his actions seemed to fall short. Relationships and conversations aided principals as they navigated "a new normal" with their teachers and school community.

Overall, emotional teacher engagement is tied to the theme of relationships, and is part of the principal's perceived responsibilities, to a degree. Principals develop relationships with their staff members; however, they are also intentional about creating opportunities for the staff members to develop relationships with each other through committee work and mentorship programs. COVID-19 and social justice issues have been implicated in the emotional engagement of teacher. Positively promoting emotional engagement has been more important than ever as more teachers experience impacts from these trials.

Implications for Principals and Assistant Principals. Implications for principals promoting emotional teacher engagement include maintaining awareness of factors that influence emotional engagement as well as developing and sustaining relationships with teachers. By understanding factors that influence a teacher's emotional engagement, principals can shield or advocate for teachers based on their current realities. Principals need to know the current health, social, and political climate impacting their teachers as well as personal tribulations that teachers may be facing. Knowing these factors will provide principals with the knowledge to make decisions to protect the emotional wellbeing of their teachers and promote emotional engagement.

Sustaining and developing positive professional relationships has its own set of implications for principals. The work of principals is humanistic, requiring principals to apply the teaching doctrines of psychology and sociology within their work. With that, principals also employ their understanding of human relations to foster and maintain healthy relationships. In addition to knowledge and application, principals' characteristics

and personality must contain some degree of likeability for teachers to want to forge a relationship with their principal.

Overall Recommendations for Practice

This study explored how principals view themselves as responsible for teacher engagement. All principals interviewed within this dissertation study agreed that they are responsible for physical, cognitive, and emotional teacher engagement. Do all principals feel this way? How does the district define this responsibility for principals? If it is defined, how, then can principals support this teacher engagement? If principals and districts do perceive principals as responsible for teacher engagement, providing principals with support will then influence teacher engagement.

Providing support for principals begins at a pre-service level. Principals need to understand what teacher engagement is, how it is defined, and why it is important for student growth and achievement. Colleges and universities can teach various theories of work engagement, including those developed by William Kahn. These lessons would lend themselves to human relations or leadership courses that are already a part of a program. Knowledge of work engagement is a topic that could be included within human relations courses at the undergraduate level and could be expanded within a graduate level elective course. A foundational understanding of teacher engagement will support principal's understanding of teacher engagement and benefit them as they act in their future role as a principal.

School districts and district level leaders may further support principals by defining the responsibilities of principals in terms of teacher engagement. Districts can

support principals by providing them with professional development related to teacher engagement as well as providing them with time to collaborate with one another on how to best support their teachers.

Depending on the size of the district, the district may also be part of the actions and responsibilities for promoting teacher engagement at a physical, cognitive, and/or emotional domain. This can be developed through teacher mentorship programs, teacher leadership development programs, wellness programs and/or committees aimed at teacher appreciation and recognition. School boards can support district level leaders in the development of these programs through approval of funding and policies to support them.

At the local level, the school community, parent-teacher organizations, and school boards should receive education on the duties and responsibilities of a building principal. Many have outdated views of the principal's role. Many refer back to what their own building principal did. For example, if the principal was solely the disciplinarian and scheduler, that is an outdated view of the principal's role. To learn more about the principal's job, district level leaders as well as principals can educate the community at open houses, a meet and greet, as well as through public notes/newsletters

In addition to that, the local community can also focus efforts on supporting teachers. This support can be provided in terms of funding for recognizing teachers, providing materials to energize them from a physical standpoint, and resources to support emotional engagement as well. At all levels of the school community, teacher engagement can be supported.

Besides the school district, school board, and community, the local educational service unit (ESU) has a plethora of resources and opportunities to not only support principals, but also to support the engagement of teachers themselves. Educational service units provide professional learning, data, and networking, purchasing opportunities, and student services to local school districts. To promote positive teacher engagement, professional development as well as networking opportunities will engage teachers in cognitive and emotional domains. For principals, these two services can further educate principals on teacher engagement as well as provide networking with other principals to learn from one other.

Along with the university and local levels, positive teacher engagement and how principals can promote it can also be supported through various educational organizations. Organizations such as the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) and National Association for Secondary School Principals (NASSP) can highlight how principals can support teacher engagement through articles and research within their print publications, online blogs, as well as through continuing education through conferences. This topic has so many facets to it, that it could even serve as a spotlight in the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD)'s *Educational Leadership* magazine.

In addition to local, state, and national organizations, legislators at all levels can lead efforts to establish frameworks to prepare and support principals as they promote teacher engagement. More directly, however, state and federal legislators can advocate for programs and policies that support teacher engagement. Before passing any

legislation, state and federal politicians must also understand the role of the building principal. Administrator organizations as well as teacher union representatives may invite policymakers into schools to experience a day working with building principals. Additionally, more education may be provided through formal and informal meetings or through lobbying.

Besides supporting building principals, policymakers can support teachers overall. With the current state of the United States, there has been more emphasis and awareness on mental health and wellness programs at large. This would support teachers from an emotional domain. In addition, funding teacher and principal preparation programs to fully engage teachers and administrators support teacher engagement at all levels should be a priority.

Finally, principal perceptions of teacher engagement and actions taken to support it yield recommendations to shape a principal's understanding and beliefs on the subject. As described throughout this chapter, there are several recommendations to ensure that the principals are equipped to positively take action to promote teacher engagement. In summary:

- Principal preparation programs at the university should include the topic of teacher engagement as a part of the curriculum and coursework. Courses should teach principals about the impacts of teacher engagement on school culture and student achievement. This could possibly be emphasized during the internship experiences of pre-service principals.

- Continued education for principals on how to build successful relationships with teachers will aid principals in engaging teachers.
- Districts should have an outline of job responsibilities for principals, including their expectations for principals in promoting teacher engagement.
- District hiring practices should focus on hiring principals with beliefs that are in alignment to the district's mission and philosophies. This should be in accordance with the district beliefs of the principal's responsibility for supporting teacher engagement.
- The district should provide mentorship programs for new principals that include a component on supporting teacher engagement. For veteran principals, districts should provide and value time for principal collaboration. The collaborative time should allow for principals to share actions they are or have taken to promote teacher engagement.
- Wellness programs provided for teachers at the district level will support teacher engagement at all levels. These programs may focus on overall health, including diet, exercise, as well as getting enough sleep. Just as importantly, emotional wellness should be included. Stress management, time management, organization, as well as focus on interpersonal and intrapersonal relationships may

- The local community at large (including Parent-Teacher organizations) can support teacher engagement through recognition and/or funding for materials to engage teachers.
- Educational service units can provide professional development and networking opportunities to both principals and teachers to support teacher engagement.
- Local, state, and national educational organizations can highlight teacher engagement and provide further education on the topic through online and print publications as well as through workshops and conferences.
- Legislators at all levels can support teacher engagement through the establishment of programs and policies that support and/or fund teacher engagement.

Principals should take action to develop and sustain teacher engagement at all engagement domains; this includes physical, cognitive, and emotional domains of engagement. Responsibilities of teacher engagement include support of the staff, building and maintaining relationships, communication with the teachers, providing professional development opportunities, and putting together and drawing on the building team and teams, and finally, sustaining an overall positive school culture.

Recommendations for Future Research

The topic of principals' roles in promoting teacher engagement presents many opportunities for future research. This study focused on the perceptions of the principal's

responsibility for teacher engagement from nine principals in a Midwest, growing district. This study could be with participants from another area of the United States or focus on participants from either an urban, suburban, or rural district. A quantitative study could survey a larger pool of principals. This study could also focus on solely on principals serving elementary schools or secondary buildings. The participants themselves could also compare the perspectives of principals and assistant principals or explore if there is a difference in perspective between those principals that work alone or those that work with an assistant. Likewise, a quantitative study could also survey a large pool of teachers to acquire additional information.

The study could also expand by looking at mixing the methods. To follow up the study of perception, statistics could be used to compare the degree of responsibility or even the differences between perceptions of elementary versus a secondary principal. In this same way, comparisons may be made among principals serving different regions of the United States. This can inform districts on principals' perceptions in the area and what adjustments may or may not need to be made based on their teacher clientele and or level of engagement.

Besides expanding the topic of this study and the study participants, studying how principals support teacher engagement from a teacher perspective would yield valuable results for principals and school districts alike. It would be interesting to learn how teachers view themselves as responsible for their own engagement, but also how they perceive principal support in the areas of physical, cognitive, and emotional engagement.

This study could also compare results from teachers across the United States or be compared to elementary versus a secondary level.

In digging into the results of this study, follow up could also be studied within the derived themes. The themes of support, relationship, conversation, professional development, teams, and school culture could be studied more in-depth in terms of principals' responsibility and perceptions as well as the different actions taken to grow the theme. The themes could also be studied from the teacher's perspective of actions taken by their principals within the various themes to further understand teacher engagement.

As discussed in the literature review, teacher engagement has been studied as the inverse or opposite of teacher burn out. With fewer teachers entering the field and more teachers leaving the field, this phenomenon could be studied through the lens of Kahn's theory of engagement and preventative measures principals take to avoid teacher burn out. Burn out could also be studied using the themes derived within this study. The study of teacher retention as related to teacher engagement could yield serious positive repercussions for the current situation of education.

There are many different facets of teacher engagement that can be further studied. The more that is learned about teacher engagement, the more informed decisions principals, districts, and legislators can make on the actions to promote positive teacher engagement.

Summary

From the research and literature findings in Chapter two, teacher engagement is a vital component to the success of a school. It is established in the principal interviews that all principals interviewed viewed themselves as responsible for teacher engagement at some level. School principals need to have the knowledge of the importance of teacher engagement with an expectation from their school district of the degree that they are responsible for teacher engagement. This will lead to direct and indirect actions principals can take to foster and sustain positive teacher engagement.

Teacher engagement relates to the success of the school as it can have either positive or negative consequences for the students. There are various assessment tools that districts use to measure and gauge the level of teacher engagement within their building or district. Other studies have identified varied factors that can positively or negatively impact teacher engagement; some are within the control of administrators while others are not. Along with these studies, current research also compares teacher burnout with teacher engagement.

As a researcher and building principal, the qualitative approach to this dissertation study allowed me to understand how responsible other principals perceive themselves in teacher engagement from a physical, cognitive, and social perspective. From these interviews, responsibilities were in accordance with the themes of support, relationships, communication, professional development, teams, and school culture. Themes were interwoven within each other, with different applications within the domains of physical,

cognitive, and social teacher engagement. Throughout the interviews, principals provided reflections of their responsibilities and actions related to teacher engagement.

As presented in this chapter, there are many implications for future research and recommendations for supporting principals as they promote positive teacher engagement within their respective buildings. As discussed, additional studies may further explore a specific theme, whereas others may apply to different participants from different regions and districts. Studies may expand on the qualitative perspective by implementing either quantitative or mixed method study to quantify the degree of principal responsibility or teacher engagement. Studies stemming from this study also can seek the perspective of teachers and their perceptions of the principals' level of support.

Within the literature review, it was evident that teacher engagement has an impact on student growth and achievement. In addition, it was clear that there were different tools to measure teacher engagement. At the time of this dissertation study, there was no research from the principal perspective as related to teacher engagement. This study provided a district of principals with a voice to share their viewpoints of teacher engagement, and allowed principals to contribute to research on the practices involved with promoting teacher engagement.

Personal Reflections for My Practice

The results of this study will positively impact my practice as a building principal. I have always viewed my work through a lens of advocating for teachers so that they can teach students to the best of their abilities. Throughout this study, I have learned that I am not alone in believing this is a part of my core responsibilities as a principal. Engaging

teachers is a part of my “why.” As described by the participants, I too, find it difficult to distinguish the line between when promoting teacher engagement becomes the responsibility of the individual teacher versus my responsibility. From the interview discussions, the principals validated my own perceptions and philosophies around principal responsibilities and promoting positive teacher engagement. It can be a struggle to determine how much support is enough, and when it can be too much. Finding the balance can be challenging. From this study, I am affirmed in my beliefs of the importance of teacher engagement as supported by the principal.

From the interviews, I have cultivated many new ideas from specific actions to structures and process principals set up to engage their teachers. As an elementary principal, I have garnered a new understanding of how secondary principals operate in terms of the kinds of systems they establish for their teachers. For elementary principals, professional development often takes shape during a staff meeting. However, with so many different content areas, that does not make sense in the world of secondary education. In addition, the philosophy around professional development and how meaningful it can be when presented by other teaching colleagues has impacted my own practice. With more years of experience in administration, I am being cognizant about organizing a professional learning plan centered on individual teacher’s learning from one another.

As I reflect on the various themes that have resulted from this study, I think about how I implement each one within my own actions as a building principal and where I can continue to grow. In the new building, I am still learning about all the teachers that I am

supporting. This can impact how I am able to establish various teams and committees. However, in learning about them, I am supporting them and building a relationship with them. I will continue to utilize various modes of communication and engaging genuine conversation with the teachers.

Along with learning about the teachers, I am also reminded of how valuable it is to have a community of principals to collaborate with and to learn from. There are many times that there are unanswered and/or recurring questions related to teacher engagement. Whether it be specific actions, or related to a specific domain of teacher engagement, having a sounding board of other administrators with similar experiences helps me to determine the best course of action for the teacher and school.

Overall, I believe this topic has so many implications vital to the success of principals, teachers, students, and the overall school. Having more opportunities for principals to learn about teacher engagement and learn from one another, I believe, is essential for the vital work ahead. As one participant shared, “Teacher engagement is everything.” For me, promoting and supporting positive teacher engagement is principle to who I am and why I entered profession of education.

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Development.

Appendix A

Research Permissions



Official Approval Letter for IRB project #21202 - New Project Form

June 14, 2021

Jennifer Hellbusch
Department of Educational Administration

Nick Pace
Department of Educational Administration
TEAC 141C UNL NE 685880360

IRB Number: 20210621202EX

Project ID: 21202

Project Title: Teacher Engagement and the Perceptions of the Principal: A Phenomenological Study

Dear Jennifer:

This letter is to officially notify you of the certification of exemption of your project for the Protection of Human Subjects. Your proposal is in compliance with this institution's Federal Wide Assurance 00002258 and the DHHS Regulations for the Protection of Human Subjects at 45 CFR 46 2018 Requirements and has been classified as exempt. Exempt categories are listed within HRPP Policy #4.001: Exempt Research available at:
<http://research.unl.edu/researchcompliance/policies-procedures/>.

o Date of Final Exemption: 6/14/2021

o Certification of Exemption Valid-Until: 6/14/2026

o Review conducted using exempt category 2(ii) at 45 CFR 46.104

o Funding (Grant congruency, OSP Project/Form ID and Funding Sponsor Award Number, if applicable): Investigator Personal Funds

We wish to remind you that the principal investigator is responsible for reporting to this Board any of the following events within 48 hours of the event:

- * Any serious event (including on-site and off-site adverse events, injuries, side effects, deaths, or other problems) which in the opinion of the local investigator was unanticipated, involved risk to subjects or others, and was possibly related to the research procedures;
- * Any serious accidental or unintentional change to the IRB-approved protocol that involves risk or has the potential to recur;
- * Any protocol violation or protocol deviation
- * An incarceration of a research participant in a protocol that was not approved to include prisoners
- * Any knowledge of adverse audits or enforcement actions required by Sponsors
- * Any publication in the literature, safety monitoring report, interim result or other finding that indicates an unexpected change to the risk/benefit ratio of the research;
- * Any breach in confidentiality or compromise in data privacy related to the subject or others; or
- * Any complaint of a subject that indicates an unanticipated risk or that cannot be resolved by the research staff.

This project should be conducted in full accordance with all applicable sections of the IRB Guidelines and you should notify the IRB immediately of any proposed changes that may affect the exempt status of your research project. You should report any unanticipated problems involving risks to the participants or others to the Board.

If you have any questions, please contact the IRB office at 402-472-6965.



Official Approval Letter for IRB project #21202 - Change Request Form

February 17, 2022

Jennifer Hellbusch
Department of Educational Administration

Nick Pace
Department of Educational Administration
TEAC 141C UNL NE 685880360

IRB Number: 20210621202EX
Project ID: 21202
Project Title: Principals Perceptions of their Role in Teacher Engagement: A Qualitative Study (Title change 2/17/2022 per change form #58239)

Dear Jennifer:

The Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects has completed its review of the Request for Change in Protocol submitted to the IRB.

The change request form has been approved to:

1. Change the title of the project.
2. Utilize Zoom instead of the phone for interviews.
3. Change interview questions to be more open-ended.

We wish to remind you that the principal investigator is responsible for reporting to this Board any of the following events within 48 hours of the event:

- * Any serious event (including on-site and off-site adverse events, injuries, side effects, deaths, or other problems) which in the opinion of the local investigator was unanticipated, involved risk to subjects or others, and was possibly related to the research procedures;
- * Any serious accidental or unintentional change to the IRB-approved protocol that involves risk or has the potential to recur;
- * Any protocol violation or protocol deviation
- * An incarceration of a research participant in a protocol that was not approved to include prisoners
- * Any knowledge of adverse audits or enforcement actions required by Sponsors
- * Any publication in the literature, safety monitoring report, interim result or other finding that indicates an unexpected change to the risk/benefit ratio of the research;
- * Any breach in confidentiality or compromise in data privacy related to the subject or others; or
- * Any complaint of a subject that indicates an unanticipated risk or that cannot be resolved by the research staff.

This letter constitutes official notification of the approval of the protocol change. You are therefore authorized to implement this change accordingly.

If you have any questions, please contact the IRB office at 402-472-6965.

Appendix B

Recruitment Protocol

Dear [Recipient Name],

My name is Jennifer Hellbusch, and I am a doctoral student at the University of Nebraska at Lincoln. I am conducting a qualitative research study to learn more about how principals view themselves as responsible for teacher work engagement and how principals positively build this engagement. Teachers that are engaged in there are more effective and engaged teachers result in student engagement (Bakker & Bal, 2010), (Klassen et. al 2013).

As a building principal, you have been selected as a potential participant for this study, which would consist of one 60-minute digitally recorded Zoom interview. Interview questions pertain to your beliefs about teacher work engagement and how you build positive teacher engagement. Please note: You are not required to participate in this study and your participation is completely voluntary. However, should you choose to participate, the information you provide will support new and veteran administrators as new buildings are opened or veteran principals retire.

Confidentiality is a priority, and I attached more information on the consent form. There are no known risks involved in this research. In addition, the consent form contains more detailed information about the study. Please read the attached form and let me know if you would be willing to serve as a participant in this study. Once you have responded, we can set up a date and time for this interview.

I greatly appreciate your willingness to support this research. If you have any questions, please let me know.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Hellbusch,
Doctoral Student
University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Reminder Message:

Dear [Recipient Name],

This is a reminder that you have signed up to participate in a research study about teacher engagement and the principal's perception. You are scheduled for an interview on [date] at [time]. I will call you at [phone number provided]. If you have any questions, please contact me at 402-813-8493 or jhellbusch2@huskers.unl.edu.

Thank you!

Jennifer Hellbusch

Appendix C

Consent Form

IRB Project ID #: 21202

Project Title: Principal's Perceptions of their Role in Teacher Engagement: A Qualitative Study

Dear Participant,

My name is Jennifer Hellbusch. I am conducting a dissertation study that seeks to learn more about principal's perceptions on teacher engagement. This study is being conducted as a part of the doctoral program at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. I am completing this study under the supervision of my University Advisor, Dr. Nicholas Pace. If you are 19 years of age or older and a principal within the invited district, you may participate in this research.

Purpose

The purpose of this is to explore and identify how administrators view themselves as responsible for teacher engagement. This study investigates what role and to what extent building administrators feel that they impact the engagement of classroom teachers. This is a qualitative study, which requires an interview design. The following information is provided for you to decide whether you wish to participate in the present study. Individuals involved in the data collection will be the researcher and interview participants for this study. You are free to decide not to participate or to withdraw at any time without affecting your relationship with the researcher.

Study Procedures

The data collection procedure for this study will involve a series of phone interview questions that will be set up at a convenient time for you. This interview will take no more than 60 minutes and will be digitally recorded, and then transcribed. After the interview has been completed and transcribed, the recording will be deleted. The transcribed interview will be kept on a password protected computer by this researcher and uploaded on the UNL secure server OneDrive. The transcription will then be coded to find themes among the responses of the participants. Before reporting, I will check themes and responses with the study participant. Once verified, the results will be reported and defended as a part of this researcher's dissertation.

Risks/Benefits

There are no known risks and/or discomforts associated with the study. The expected benefits associated with your participation are the information about the experiences in learning how to support novice and veteran administrators in developing positive teacher engagement.

Compensation

As a thank you for your participation in this dissertation student, the lead investigator, Jennifer Hellbusch, would like to provide you with a \$10 gift certificate to the local coffee shop. This gift will come from her personal funds.

Confidentiality

Reasonable steps will be taken to protect the privacy and the confidentiality of your study data; however, in some circumstances we cannot guarantee absolute privacy and/or confidentiality.

Transcribed information being kept in a confidential space (OneDrive), the researcher will use pseudonyms in place of your names to protect your anonymity. The schools and school district will also remain anonymous, with an overall indistinguishable description to protect the identity.

The research records will be securely stored electronically through the University system OneDrive and will only be seen by the researcher and/or those authorized to view, access, or use the records during and after the study is complete.

Those who will have access to your research records are the study personnel, the Institutional Review Board (IRB), and any other person, agency, or sponsor as required by law or contract or institutional responsibility. The information from this study may be published in scientific journals or presented at scientific meetings and may be reported individually, or as group or summarized data but your identity will be kept strictly confidential.

Your Rights as a Research Subject

You may ask any questions concerning this research and have those questions answered before agreeing to participate in or during the study.

For study, related questions, please contact the investigator(s):

Ms. Jennifer Hellbusch

- Phone: 1-(402)-813-8493
- Email: jhellbusch2@unl.edu

Dr. Nicholas Pace

- Phone: 1-(402)-937-0068
- Email: mailto:nick.pace@unl.edu

For questions concerning your rights or complaints about the research contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB):

- Phone: 1-(402)-472-6965
- Email: irb@unl.edu

You can decide not to be in this research study, or you can stop being in this research study (“withdraw”) at any time before, during, or after the research begins for any reason. Deciding not to be in this research study or deciding to withdraw will not affect your relationship with the investigator or with the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

You will not lose any benefits to which you are entitled.

Please sign your consent with full knowledge of the nature and purpose of the procedures. A copy of this consent form will be given to you to keep. Do not hesitate to ask questions about the study either before participating or during the time that you are participating. The researcher will be happy to share findings with you after the research is completed. However, your name will not be associated with the research findings in any way, and only the researchers will know your identity as a participant.

Date: _____

Signature of Participant: _____

Printed Name of Participant: _____

Principal Investigator: Jennifer Hellbusch

Appendix D

Interview Protocol

Date:
 Start Time:
 End Time:
 Interviewer: Jennifer Hellbusch
 Interviewee:

Instructions for the Interviewer: Introduce yourself as Jennifer Hellbusch, a doctoral candidate at the University of Nebraska at Lincoln and elementary Principal with Gretna Public Schools. Share that your doctoral research is focused on understanding how principals view themselves as responsible for teacher engagement.

Script:
 I want to reiterate that your name will not be cited in my study or my notes. I will assign you a pseudonym for reference purposes. I will quote and incorporate your feedback; however, I will not use your name, or the names of individuals or schools referenced by you.

Thank you for your time today! My goal is to ask you some questions aimed at how you perceive your role in teacher work engagement and how you build positive engagement in your building.

For the purpose of this study, teacher work engagement references the positive psychological state of teachers when they apply their energies into physical, cognitive, and emotional work at school.

Icebreaker question:

Can you tell me about what you believe your overall role is as a building principal?

Interview questions:

First, I will ask you about your beliefs on what you believe your responsibilities when it comes to teacher engagement.

How do you perceive teacher engagement in your building?

What do you believe attributes to teacher engagement in your building? What might impact your teacher's engagement the most?

Primary Question

What do you believe is your overall role or responsibilities as an administrator in building teacher engagement? What (if anything) is not your responsibility or role?

Sub question 1

When breaking down engagement, what do you believe is your role in intellectually engaging teachers?

Sub question 2

How do you perceive your role in socially and emotionally engaging teachers?

Sub question 3

Physical engagement refers to involvement in physical tasks and using vigor, energy, or intensity in work. How do you perceive your role in physically engaging teachers?

Secondary Question:

Now that we have discussed your beliefs on your responsibilities on building teacher engagement, I will ask you about what steps you take to promote teacher engagement.

What are some overall actions that you take to build teacher engagement from year to year?

To further explore these actions, how do you cognitively, or intellectually engage teachers?

How do you socially and emotionally engage teachers?

How do you promote vigor, energy, or intensity when engaging teachers?

Is there anything else around teacher engagement that you would like to share related to your roles or actions administrators take in building positive engagement?

Thank you again for your time! You are free to email me any additional thoughts or questions that you may have. I greatly appreciate your time and willingness to talk with me. As a token of my appreciation, please accept a gift card that has been mailed to your building. Thank you!

Appendix E

Interviewee Pseudonyms

Interviewee Pseudonyms

Noah, a male elementary principal

James, a male elementary principal

Nora, a female elementary principal

Sarah, a female elementary principal

Lily, a female elementary principal

Olivia, a female elementary principal

Sophia, a female secondary principal

Henry, a male secondary principal

Jacob, a male secondary principal