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International School Leadership: A Phenomenological Study Of Climate And Culture

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INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL LEADERSHIP:
A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF CLIMATE AND CULTURE

By

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to describe and explain the phenomena of international school leadership and school climate and culture. It proposed to identify key leadership strategies and techniques that can be implemented to initiate change which will foster a positive school culture and climate. The theoretical framework that shaped this study was the Five Dimensions of School Climate as described by Thapa, Cohen, Guffey, and Higgins-D' Alessandro (2013). This study used a Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) methodology to explore the lived experiences of leaders of international schools in south-east Asia in relation to school culture and climate. Through semi-structured interviews with eight participants the key leadership styles and techniques that foster a positive school culture and climate were identified along with the specific challenges that leaders in this setting face. It was found that relationships are integral to the fostering of a positive school culture and climate. This could be the relationships that leaders have with each other and the relationships that they have with all stakeholders in a school, such as staff, students and parents. Positive relationships can be built from the specific practices of having an open-door policy and through a leader's recruitment and human resources practices. Leaders should also measure the existing culture, model the expected culture and communicate it across a school. Further, leaders should provide professional development for staff since it plays an important role in fostering a positive school culture. The specific challenges that leaders in this setting face were the cultural diversity that exists in the make-up of an international school, the expectations from parents and the ones that staff place upon themselves, retaining staff and recruiting new staff. It is therefore recommended that any data that is collected on the

existing culture and climate should be used to grow and develop the culture and climate.

Further, it is recommended that the specific leadership practices that were identified are used

in conjunction with one another. Lastly, it is recommended that professional development is

used to invest and develop people in order to foster a positive school culture and climate.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

International schools are a unique setting. International schools often operate in different languages and often subscribe to and implement different curricula to that of their host country (Machin, 2017). As such, the culture and climate that is created within them is also unique. Within a school setting, the culture is the "set of norms, values and beliefs, rituals and ceremonies, symbols and stories that make up the 'persona' of the school" (Petersen, 2002, p. 10). Culture can be defined as the framework that a group uses to solve its problems (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015). It is the social indoctrination of unwritten rules that people learn as they try to fit into a particular group (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015). Further, culture serves to bring people together for the accomplishment of a task (Marion & Gonzales, 2014). A positive school culture is one where educators have an unwavering belief in the ability of the students to achieve and where the belief is passed on to others (Muhammad, 2018). It is also where educators create policies and procedures and adopt practices that support their beliefs (Muhammad, 2018). A positive school culture should foster a sense of community, individuality, and possibility (Robinson & Aronica, 2015). As such, quite simply, school culture matters to a school (Louis & Wahlstrom, 2011). Culture can be used to understand how teachers and students communicate, how principals position themselves as leaders and how students are situated in a school (Marion & Gonzales, 2014).

Culture requires attention from school leaders. Further, there is increasing evidence that organisations with stronger cultures are more adaptable, have higher member motivation and commitment, are more cooperative, are able to resolve disputes better, have a greater capacity for innovation and are more effective in achieving their goals (Louis & Wahlstrom, 2011). Therefore, it is important for leaders in schools to create and manage culture and for

leaders to be effective, they need to be able to understand and work with culture (Marion & Gonzales, 2014).

Another term often used in conjunction with culture when describing an organisation is climate. The climate of a school is the attitude of an organisation (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015). The climate of a school is as equally important to a school as culture since a positive school climate is associated with school safety, healthy relationships, engaged teaching and learning and school improvement efforts (Thapa, Cohen, Guffey, & Higgins-D'Alessandro, 2013). For students, a positive school climate has a profound impact on students' mental and physical health contributing to self-esteem, motivation to learn, mitigates the negative impact of socioeconomic contexts, contributes to less aggression and violence, and is proactive factor for the learning and positive life development (Thapa et al., 2013). A positive school climate also contributes to students' academic outcomes and achievement (Thapa et al., 2013). In a positive school climate, teachers feel supported and are more committed to their profession. Further, a positive school climate is associated to the development of teachers' belief that they can positively impact student learning and is linked to teacher retention rates, feelings of exhaustion and attrition (Thapa et al., 2013). Even though school climate is based on an individual's perception of school life, it is more than individual perception: it is a reflection of group trends (Cohen, 2009). Consequently, when examining the culture of a school, one can look at its climate as a gauge to the culture and as such, the two terms go "hand in hand".

A leader must identify what the existing culture and climate is within their organisation before any change is brought about. To do this, Bulach (as cited in MacNeil, Prater, & Busch, 2009) stated that a leader must identify a school's existing culture. This can be achieved through various types of surveying of stakeholders (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015). Examining the climate alongside culture also gives one an indication of how people feel

within an organisation, how and why they go about solving their problems and if there even is a capacity for change within the organisation. If a leader understands the culture and climate of a school, then they can carefully cultivate it so that it grows in the desired direction (Morrison, 2018).

Gruenert and Whitaker (2015) noted that it is important that it is leaders who shape the development of a school's culture and climate because everything that happens in an organisation is a reflection of its leadership. Therefore, there are specific leadership styles and practices that can help to change and develop school culture and climate positively. Having a vision (Kotter, 2012; Morrison, 2018), mobilizing followers (Muhammad, 2018), establishing routines (Bambrick-Santoyo, 2014; Morrison, 2018), building relationships and trust (Louis & Wahlstrom, 2011; MacNeil, Prater, & Busch, 2009), investing in professional development (Khourey-Bowers et al., 2004), giving students ownership and responsibility within their schools (Kotter, 2012; Marion & Gonzales, 2014; Rutledge & Cannata, 2016), personalising learning (Grover, 2014) and applying transformative leadership practices (Gardner-McTaggart, 2018; Marion & Gonzales, 2014) are all leadership styles and practices that may assist in the change process of bringing about positive development in the areas of school culture and climate. Louis and Wahlstrom, (2011) suggested that in order to for a change in school culture to take place, shared or distributed leadership that engages many stakeholders in major improvement roles, is required. However, the leadership styles and practices that are employed may differ dependent on the context and setting on the school. One such setting is that of international schools.

International schools often operate in English (ISC Research, n.d.) catering to the global elite, with many wealthier families seeking schools which engage in global issues of equity and responsibility, yet also have an instrumental pull of 'qualification capital' and cultural appropriation particularly to those from less developed and connected areas of the

globe (Gardner-McTaggart, 2018). Gardner-McTaggart (2018) found that senior leaders in these settings share rich 'English' cultural capital, and that schools' market this feature. Consequently, in international school settings, school leaders face specific challenges which may impact the process and capacity for change of an organisation, particularly in relation to climate and culture.

Some of the specific challenges that leaders in these settings might face may be particular to their respective organisations, however, some challenges are generic to the international school setting and as such need to be considered when change is desired and before any change or development can be implemented by a leader. Challenges such as a high rate of staff turnover, high parental expectations, conflicts and pressures between host countries and the school, and diverse cultural staff (Blandford & Shaw as cited in Lee et al., 2012) may all pose a threat to the change and development process and consequently to the climate and culture of a school. As such, an international school leader needs to show an awareness to these challenges before enacting any change. Further, since the international school setting is a growing market (Machin, 2017), leaders in international schools also need entrepreneurial skills along with relational intelligence, pedagogical knowledge, heuristic intelligence and reflective intelligence and relational intelligence (Calnin, Waterson, Richards, & Fisher, 2018). These skills also need to be employed when implementing change in an international school setting.

In terms of leadership styles and practices in international schools there is an orientation towards collegial models of management and distributed leadership models as a normative trend, with transformational approaches often valued by school principals (Gardner-McTaggart, 2018). Within international school settings, and in this study, leadership predominantly refers to senior administrators such as principals, heads, and directors. Yet due to enormous variation in the make-up of international school leadership

structures, this also includes curriculum coordinators and middle managers (Gardner-McTaggart, 2018).

This study used an interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) methodology to describe and explain the phenomena of international school leadership and school climate and culture. Through this study, key leadership strategies and techniques that can be implemented to initiate change that will foster a positive school culture and climate in international schools were identified. As part of this study, the researcher conducted one-to-one semi-structured interviews using voluntary participants that were sought from the researcher's contacts, professional networks and through referrals. The data were then transcribed and coded as per the guidance by Smith et al. (2009). The data were analysed for emergent key themes and trends again using the guidance given by Smith et al (2009). This study aimed to identify the key themes of the phenomenon that can then be utilised by leaders in international school settings to develop organisational culture and climate.

Statement of the Problem

The connection between school culture and climate and school leaders is a complex one, influenced by a myriad of factors. Within a school, culture and climate will develop over time as the members learn to solve their problems as a survival mechanism (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015). The culture and climate of a school will develop with or without a leader manipulating or directing change. However, everything that happens in a school is a reflection of its leadership (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015) and as such, a leader may wish to influence change, particularly if the climate and culture are not reflective of their own values and beliefs. This raises questions about the extent to which a leader can influence, change, or develop culture and climate. Further, one might need to consider how a leader may not be fully aware of the impact that their leadership has on culture and climate, particularly if culture and climate do not necessary yield specific tangible results.

However, culture and climate do indeed exist and, as such, are unique phenomena. Further, culture and climate matter to a school (Louis & Wahlstrom, 2011). The culture of a school is reflected in the way things are done (Muhammad, 2018). Climate, however, is based upon the feelings of individuals; how people act, feel and think within schools (Peterson & Deal, 2011). Consequently, the climate is a reflection of the collective attitudes and an indicator of the culture. For example, if one were to tell teachers about a 'snow-day', that is when a school is closed because of snowfall, one could gauge the climate of the school by the reaction of the staff (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015). This response might be collective, and as such not representative of individuals' beliefs, but the collective attitude of the school would be evident. This is the climate of the school. Even though the climate of school is based on an individual's perception of school life, it is more than individual perception: it is a reflection of group trends (Cohen, 2009) which in turn influences the approaches to tasks, what is done and the way that problems are solved, in other words, the culture. Therefore, climate, may need specific fostering by a leader with a leader changing the way things are done combined with changing the collective attitudes of the school's members.

However, school culture and climate pose a problem for leaders. The impact that culture and climate is often difficult to measure (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015). One method is to survey stakeholders seeking descriptions of their experiences and perceptions (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015). However, due to the complexity of school culture and climate, and the disagreements on definitions of the terms, potential models and the different aspects that school culture and climate incorporate, this can be challenging (Thapa et al., 2013). Similarly, identifying the specific leadership styles and techniques that best foster culture and climate is challenging (Thapa et al., 2013). Yet, the culture and climate impact a school and all of its members in numerous and various ways (Teasley, 2017), some of which are identified further in this study. Further, within certain settings, there will be specific styles

and techniques that will best foster culture and climate relative to that particular setting. One such setting is that of international schools.

International schools often offer a different curriculum framework to that of their host country such as that developed by the International Baccalaureate Organization (Machin, 2017). The International Baccalaureate Organization (IBO) have been key players in the global market of international education for several decades (Lee, Hallinger, & Walker, 2012). Machin (2017) suggests than an organisation might classify themselves as an international school so as to avoid state-directed regulatory control, show a philosophical alignment to international education, convey status and prestige and make profit because there are significant commercial incentives. This might explain why the international school setting is a growing market since it is profitable. There is an expectation that the number of international schools will double to more than 16,000 schools and 8.75 million students worldwide by the year 2027 (Wechsler, 2017). Despite this, there was little by the way of literature that specifically highlighted the best practices in of international school leaders from around the world (Blandford & Shaw as cited in Lee et al., 2012; Morrison, 2018).

Given the anticipated growth of the sector, and the specific challenges that leaders in this setting face, this is a problem. Further, in the international school market, an ability to implement appropriate and effective change is of critical importance to a school's success in this rapidly evolving educational environment (Morrison, 2018). Consequently, there was a need for research to be done in this area particularly given the significance of school culture and climate to a school. As such, it was important to examine the perspectives of leaders in this setting with relation to their experiences of implementing change specifically in regards to culture and climate. As Morrison (2018) stated, there are leaders around the globe who are working in cultural and socio-political environments foreign to that of their home countries.

Despite a thorough and extensive review of the literature, the researcher found very little that described and explained how leaders in international school settings may go about initiating change and development of school culture and climate. There were significant literature that detailed how important school culture and climate are within schools (Cohen, 2009; Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015; Louis & Wahlstrom, 2011; Muhammad, 2018; Peterson & Deal, 1998; Sparks, 2013; Teasley, 2017; Thapa et al, 2013) and literature that described how a leader may implement change (Bambrick-Santoyo, 2014; Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015; Grover, 2014; Khourey-Bowers, Dinko & Hart, 2004; Kotter, 2012; MacNeil, Prater, & Busch, 2009; Marion & Gonzales, 2014; Morrison, 2018; Muhammed, 2018; Rutledge & Cannata, 2016). There were only a few works of literature that were specific to leadership in international school settings (Calnin et al., 2018; Hammad & Shah, 2018; Lee, Hallinger & Walker, 2012; Machin, 2017; Morrison, 2018). The researcher was unable to identify any examples in literature that discussed international school leadership and the implementation of change in relation to school climate and culture specifically.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to describe and explain the phenomena of international school leadership and school culture and climate and to identify key leadership strategies and techniques that can be implemented to initiate change that will foster a positive school culture and climate in international schools. Through an examination of the experiences of leaders from the international school setting, the researcher hoped to describe and explain their perspectives in relation to initiating change in culture and climate in international school settings.

This study focused on the region of south-east Asia because in this area within China specifically, there is an insatiable appetite for international schools (Machin, 2017). In Asia, in 2017, there were approximately 5,032 international schools (Machin, 2017). To exemplify

the rate of the growth in this region, at the turn of the century Hong Kong had 92 internationals schools and as of 2017 had 176; Thailand had less than a dozen, and as of 2017, had 181 (Machin, 2017).

Research Questions

The research questions that guided this study were:

1. How do international school leaders perceive the impact that their leadership has on the culture and climate of a school?

2. What strategies and best practices do international school leaders use to initiate change to foster a positive school culture and climate?

Conceptual Framework

This study was rooted in the researcher's own personal and professional interests. Whilst working in a previous position within the administration of an international school, the researcher of this study became interested in the notion of school culture. The researcher was part of the team that transitioned the school to a new campus and watched the culture change significantly due to this change. For example, the ways in which staff and students interacted changed due to the new locations of learning and social spaces and there was a change in the rituals of the school for similar reasons. The researcher wondered as to why the change had happened, if culture was itself important and what could and should be done to improve the culture. This led the researcher to investigate the unique phenomenon of school culture which in turn, further led them to consider the climate of a school.

The theoretical framework that shaped this study was by Thapa et al. (2013). This framework highlights a proposed five dimensions of a school climate which in turn are a reflection of a school's culture. These five dimensions are: safety (e.g., rules and norms, physical safety, social-emotional safety), relationships (e.g., respect for diversity, school connectedness/engagement, social support, leadership, and students' race/ethnicity and their

perceptions of school climate), teaching and learning (e.g., social, emotional, ethical, and civic learning; service learning; support for academic learning; support for professional relationships; teachers' and students' perceptions of school climate), institutional environment (e.g., physical surrounding, resources, supplies) and a school improvement process (p. 358). These five dimensions are a framework for the different facets of what school climate looks like. The framework by Thapa et al. (2013) was developed by initially interviewing people in the field and then through an extensive literature review which cross referenced articles and citations. As such, the framework is valid, making a strong case for the importance of school culture and climate and how it positively impacts various areas within a school. The framework that Thapa et al. (2013) produced also takes into account different social, cultural and economic aspects, which makes it valid for international settings, although it does not refer to international schools specifically.

Assumptions, Limitations, and Scope

This study sought to describe and explain the phenomena of international school leadership and school climate and culture, identifying key leadership strategies and techniques that can be implemented to initiate change that will foster positive school culture and climate in international schools. Assumptions reflect what the researcher holds to be true as they go into the study. The limitations of the study are the characteristics of design or methodology that impact or influence the interpretation of the findings in the research (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019).

The researcher of this study assumed that school culture and climate exist. The researcher also assumed that they are important to a school organisation and to school leaders. Despite identifying key literature that claimed this to be the case, the culture and climate of an organisation may not be important to school leaders. The researcher relied on personal contacts, referrals and professional networks to find participants that met the criteria

identified, and participation was voluntary. As a result, the assumption was that leaders would only participate if they felt that their leadership did indeed influence and impact the culture and climate of a school or if they felt that they have something to share in relation to the topic. Participants who did not believe that their influence was impactful, or that fostering a positive school culture and climate was important, may not have been as willing to participate. The scope of this study may be limited due to this concern and participation being voluntary.

A limitation of this study was due to the small sample size that was used and how representative it was of the wider population. This study sought between eight to twelve participants, which is in keeping with the prescribed sample size of an IPA study (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). The sample was from leaders of international schools in south-east Asia where the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme (IBDP) curriculum was taught. As such, the descriptions and explanations of the phenomena and the subsequent conclusions and results that were generated may not be applicable or generalisable to other international schools outside of the region or indeed to international schools that do not teach the IBDP.

One other limitation to this study was related to the way in which local culture impacts the culture and climate of a school. Machin (2017) claims that the local customs, cultures, norms and social systems will 'seep' into a school. And of course, the laws of a country will still apply. That means that the extent to which a school leader can impact the school culture and climate may be limited or bound by the local customs and laws. Further, school culture and climate may be unique to an organisation and as such there may be an issue with the transferability of the conclusions drawn.

Lastly, the researcher's own personal experiences with school culture and climate may limit this study. Clearly, the exploration of this phenomenon was an interest of the

researcher. Consequently, the researcher's own personal bias was addressed during the interpretation phase of analysing the data.

Rationale and Significance

Louis and Wahlstrom (2011) concluded that school culture matters to a school. Teasley (2017) suggested school culture matters because it provides a sense of identity and promotes achievement and that it is important because it fosters a sense of community, individuality and possibility (Robinson & Aronica, 2015). Thapa et al. (2013) claimed that a positive school climate influences child and youth development, is effective for risk prevention and health promotion efforts, as well as student learning and academic achievement and increases student graduation rates and teacher retention rates.

Further, there is increasing evidence that organisations with stronger cultures are more adaptable, have higher member motivation and commitment, are more cooperative, are able to resolve disputes better, have a greater capacity for innovation and are more effective in achieving their goals (Louis & Wahlstrom, 2011). Because of this, understanding how one can initiate change to an organisation's culture and climate and how best one might foster a positive school culture and climate are worthy of investigation.

Everything that happens in an organization is a reflection of its leadership (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015) and as such, it is a leader who should transform a culture in a school into a strong and positive one. According to MacNeil, Prater, and Busch (2009), the relationships that shape the culture and climate of a school are strongly influenced by the school principal. As such, using existing leaders to describe and explain their experiences of this unique phenomenon will surely be useful to expand on the current body of literature.

Further, given that this study focused on international schools specifically where there was limited literature available, this study may prove useful for leaders who have identified that the culture and climate within their respective international school organisations need

attention and development. Also, since the international school market is growing, particularly within south-east Asia (Machin, 2017) with new schools opening continuously, this study may be useful for new school leaders who are tasked with opening a school and/or seek to create a positive school culture and climate from the outset.

Definition of Terms

School Culture: The set of norms, values and beliefs, rituals and ceremonies, symbols and stories that make up the "persona" of the school (Petersen, 2002).

School Climate: How people act, feel and think within schools (Peterson & Deal, 2011).

International Schools: International schools are often schools that offer a different curriculum framework to that of their host country (such as the International Baccalaureate) (Machin, 2017). International schools are autonomous, private bodies that largely cater to the globally advantaged, that is, those who are "wealthy in two main forms: the international and globally mobile, and (increasingly) the upwardly mobile local-national demographic" (Gardner-McTaggart, 2018, p. 148).

International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme (IBDP): The IBDP is a programme offered to students in the age range of 16-19. The programme aims to develop students who have excellent breadth and depth of knowledge and who flourish physically, intellectually, emotionally and ethically (International Baccalaureate Organization, n.d.).

International Baccalaureate Organization (IBO): The IBO offers an education for students from age 3 to 19, comprising of four programmes that focus on teaching students to think critically and independently, and how to inquire with care and logic. The IBO prepares students to succeed in a world where facts and fiction can merge in the news, and where asking the right questions is a crucial skill that will allow students to flourish long after they have left the programmes (International Baccalaureate Organization, n.d.).

Conclusion

School culture is related to providing a sense of identity, promoting achievement and creating distinct ways of doing things that helps to shape standards (Teasley, 2017). It also is "conducive to professional satisfaction, effectiveness, morale, and creating an environment that maximizes student learning and fosters collegiality and collaboration" (Teasley, 2017, p. 3). School climate is associated with "positive child and youth development, effective risk prevention and health promotion efforts, student learning and academic achievement, increased student graduation rates, and teacher retention rates" (Thapa et al., 2013, p. 369). Consequently, school culture and climate are arguably worthy of investigation.

It is school leaders who are able to foster, develop and initiate change in school culture and climate. Teasley (2017) suggested that school leaders are key to the development and maintenance of organisational culture. According to MacNeil et al. (2009), the relationships that shape the culture and climate of a school are strongly influenced by the school principal. As such, having school leaders describe and explain their experiences with school culture and climate will assist in understanding this unique phenomenon.

With international school settings there was little by the way of literature surrounding school culture and climate. Similarly, there were few pieces of literature that commented on how a leader in the international school setting might foster a positive school culture and climate or initiate change, particularly since there are some unique challenges that are specific to this setting. This study therefore may be a useful addition to the small body of existing literature on the topic. Further, it will hopefully be useful for international school leaders who are looking to initiate change and/or develop the school climate and culture within their respective organisations.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Culture is the social indoctrination of unwritten rules that people learn as they try to fit into a particular group (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015). Within a school organisation, culture of a school relates to the "set of norms, values and beliefs, rituals and ceremonies, symbols and stories that make up the 'persona' of the school" (Petersen, 2002, p.10). These might be the ways in which meetings are conducted or may relate to the teaching styles employed or the values and beliefs throughout a school. These cultures develop as a survival mechanism and as a framework for which organisational members to solve problems (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015). This set of often informal values and beliefs that have evolved over time are typically derived from the climate of a school, that is, how people act, feel and think within schools (Peterson & Deal, 2011) and vice versa. Muhammad (2018) explained that the culture of a school is its personality and it explains why things are done in a certain way. Whereas, the climate is the attitude of an organisation (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015). Therefore, a school's climate can be a window into its culture (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015). A positive school culture should foster a sense of community, individuality, and possibility (Robinson & Aronica, 2015), whereas a positive school climate is associated with school safety, healthy relationships, engaged teaching and learning and school improvement efforts (Thapa et al., 2013).

Everything that occurs in an organisation is a reflection of its leadership (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015). As such, if a leader feels that the culture and climate within a school are not reflective of their own values and beliefs, they may wish to initiate change. In order to do this, a leader will need to develop an awareness of what the culture and climate within their organisation is, measuring it and then changing it if they see fit (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015). This study describes and explains the phenomena of international school leadership and

school climate and culture, identifying key leadership strategies and techniques that can be implemented to initiate change that will foster a positive school culture and climate in international schools. These descriptions and explanations will be useful for school leaders, not only in the vastly increasingly market sector of international schools (Machin, 2017), but to those in school settings, worldwide. Within international school settings, and in this study, leadership predominantly refers to senior administrators such as principals, heads, and directors. However, due to variation in the make-up of international school leadership structures, this also includes curriculum coordinators and middle managers (Gardner-McTaggart, 2018).

This literature review firstly presents the conceptual framework for this study. The existing literature surrounding school culture and school climate is then explored, clearly identifying their importance as well as the difference between the two concepts since it was noted by Thapa et al. (2013) that there is a range of different definitions. This literature review then examines literature regarding the leaderships styles and practices that may help in initiating change, identifying key practices and techniques in relation to change of school culture and climate. However, it must be noted that there is minimal existing literature on the topic of school culture and climate in reference to international schools specifically. With this in mind, this literature review then examines the specific contextual challenges that international school leaders face since they may impact any change process.

Conceptual Framework

Ravitch and Riggan (2017) defined a conceptual framework as, "an argument about why the topic one wishes to study matters, and why the means proposed to study it are appropriate and rigorous" (p. xv). Ravitch and Riggan (2017) expand upon this definition, stating that a conceptual framework both shapes the design and direction of a study and guides its development, and, it also serves as a way of linking all of the elements of the

research process together. Using this definition, the review is divided into three sections; personal interests, topical research and theoretical framework (Ravitch & Riggan, 2017). Each of the three sections outlines key areas for the study, effectively combining them to establish an overall conceptual framework.

Personal Interest

Personal interests are what drives one to undertake a study. These interests usually come from a sense of curiosity or passions and an interest in answering questions about a phenomenon (Ravitch & Riggan, 2017). Since these are inherently personal, they are usually based on one's background, knowledge and circumstances. This study is rooted in the researcher's own personal and professional interests. Whilst working in a previous position within the administration of an international school, the researcher became interested in the notion of school climate and culture. During the researcher's time at this particular school, the campus shifted from a central area of Singapore to more rural location on the outskirts of the island. The new purpose-built campus was much larger and spacious, whereas the older campus, albeit run down in parts, was more compact. At the old campus, the students and faculty would interact often since they were more likely to run into and see each other more frequently. In the new campus, one could quite easily travel between rooms without any interaction whatsoever.

Over the course of six months of being in the new site the culture of the school shifted quite dramatically (particularly amongst the staff) as people would only cluster in various areas and departments since they had become more isolated. It was the researcher's understanding after discussion with the school's senior leadership team that little was done to acknowledge this change and to develop culture, and that the culture was allowed to develop naturally without influence or interference, for better or worse. Admittedly, the impact of a culture shift will largely relate to the values that a school or organisation holds, both

collectively and by the individuals in leadership positions since some organisations might not regard culture as being a contributing factor to the 'success' of a school. Yet, as Gruenert and Whitaker (2015) claimed, a school's culture represents the unwritten mission of the school since it tells students and staff why they are there. With this in mind, and given the researcher's experiences, this situation became an area of interest. The researcher asked himself 'what are the contributing factors to the shift in culture?' and whether anything could (and should) be done to address the shift. The researcher's interest was further aroused whilst in his current role at a different international school, albeit within the same country of Singapore, since the school culture there was extremely different. There was a culture in this school of togetherness, of sharing and helping one another. This is even though the school was in the same country and with largely the same curriculum of International General Certificate of Education (IGCSE) and International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme (IBDP). The researcher reasoned that the curriculum itself might not have a large impact on the school's culture, but the practices of leaders, teachers and students might do. Gruenert and Whitaker (2015) compared the difference in cultures within schools to the difference of experiences one might face in going to two different restaurants; one where the customer is greeted in a friendly manner and the other where one can barely make eye contact with the waiter. Despite this difference of experience, could one still have a wonderful meal? Just how much of an impact would this exchange have on one's overall dining experience? In short, does it matter? This led the researcher to consider just how important school culture might actually be, and, what types of leadership styles and techniques can best initiate change with fostering a positive school culture and climate in mind.

Therefore, this study may be useful to leaders and future leaders within international school settings, particularly within Singapore, or those within a culturally diverse school settings, similar to international schools. Further, this study might also be useful for

organizational leaders within transformative settings. The types of leaders that might find this study useful would be those looking to change the culture with their organizations. As such, this research could influence the practices and policies of international schools along with their respective leaders who may wish to, or have been tasked with, developing and transforming a school's culture.

Topical Research

Topical research is the research that already exists about a topic of study Ravitch and Riggan (2017). Existing research shaped the study's approach and provided the researcher with the thoughts, ideas, methodologies and findings of others, identifying any gaps that could be addressed in one's own study (Ravitch & Riggan, 2017). The topical research below highlights the emergent themes from the literature surrounding the topics of leadership, change and school culture and climate.

As Gruenert and Whitaker (2015) claimed, a school's climate is a window into its culture. However, these two concepts are often spoken about synonymously. Gruenert and Whitaker (2015) explained the difference in several ways, with the most succinct expressing that "if culture is a school's personality, climate is its attitude" (p. 11). Muhammad (2018) suggested that culture is the way we do things, whereas climate is how we feel about it. These definitions indicate that when one is looking to shift culture, they can look to the climate as a guide to the overall attitude of the organisation and how it might react to any proposed change or shift in culture. For example, if one were to announce to the teaching faculty that the school would be closed for a number of days for a 'snow day' or similar, the climate could be gauged by the reactions of the faculty (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015). But, as Gruenert and Whitaker (2015) pointed out, changing a personality, as opposed to an attitude, requires a more purposeful and sustained effort and therefore, targeted leadership practices.

This might involve looking at why specific cultures have developed and why attitudes and perceptions exist in the way that they do.

It is claimed that the culture within a school organisation is the set of norms, beliefs, traditions and rituals that have built up over time as people have worked together and solved problems (Peterson & Deal, 1998). These impact the climate of a school, that is, how people act, feel and think within schools (Peterson & Deal, 2011) and are "based on patterns of people's experiences of school life and reflects norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices, and organizational structure" (Thapa et al., 2013, p. 358). It is further claimed that a sustained positive school climate is associated with "positive child and youth development, effective risk prevention and health promotion efforts, student learning and academic achievement, increased student graduation rates, and teacher retention rates" (Thapa et al., 2013, p. 369). This not only suggests that the culture of a school is important to how it functions and solves its problems, it also suggests that in order to improve a school's culture , a leader should look to examine the climate and then employ specific transformative practices to develop the climate and the overall culture.

There are gaps in the literature about school culture and climate, particularly in relation to international schools. There was little reference to the leadership styles and practises that best foster positive school climate and culture within international schools. Further, there was sparse literature that acknowledges the specific challenges that international school leaders face in the development of school culture and climate. Some of these challenges may be that international schools are traditionally culturally diverse (Wechsler, 2017), are growing at a rapid rate (ICEF Monitor, 2018) and often face dissonance between their approaches to that of their host country (Hammad & Shah, 2018). These ideas, amongst others, will be discussed further along in the chapter.

Theoretical Framework

Theoretical frameworks are the formal theories that exist about a topic

(Ravitch & Riggan, 2017). These can be quite complex depending on the relationships

between various theories especially considering no one 'right' theory will exist

(Ravitch & Riggan, 2017). With regards to the existing theoretical framework for this study,

a framework developed by Thapa et al. (2013) highlights five dimensions of a school climate.

These five dimensions are:

1. Safety (e.g., rules and norms, physical safety, social-emotional safety).

2. Relationships (e.g., respect for diversity, school connectedness/engagement,
   social support, leadership, and students' race/ethnicity and their perceptions of
   school climate).

3. Teaching and Learning (e.g., social, emotional, ethical, and civic learning;
   service learning; support for academic learning; support for professional
   relationships; teachers' and students' perceptions of school climate).

4. Institutional Environment (e.g., physical surrounding, resources, supplies).

5. A School Improvement Process. (p. 358)

These five dimensions create a framework for the different facets of what school

climate looks like. Thapa et al. (2013) concluded by claiming, quite simply, that school

climate matters, as do Louis and Wahlstrom (2011). And since climate is reflective of a

school's culture (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015), this framework is particularly useful. Since the

framework by Thapa et al. (2013) was developed by initially interviewing people in the field

and then through an extensive literature review which cross referenced articles and citations,

it was certainly a thorough examination of the topic and as such is valid, making a strong

case for the importance of school culture and how it positively impacts various areas within a

school. The framework that Thapa et al. (2013) produced also takes into account different

social, cultural and economic aspects too, which makes it valid for international settings, although, it does not refer to international schools and the specific challenges that are unique to this setting.

Gruenert and Whitaker (2015) discussed different discrete elements of school culture to claim that overall a school's culture constitutes the climate, mission and vision, language, humour, routines, rituals and ceremonies, norms, roles, symbols, stories, heroes and values and beliefs of a school. These elements align with the five facets to those of the Thapa et al. (2013) model. Both of these frameworks, therefore, outline the difference facets of school culture and climate. As such, in relation to this study, they provided a comprehensive outline of the different facets and provided the researcher of this study with a solid foundation from which to build the research, thus ensuring that all the aspects associated to school culture and climate were addressed. Since the frameworks did not clearly relate to international schools or specific leadership styles and techniques, they did not present findings, claims or hold any bias or opinion in this area. This, again, highlighted a gap in the literature. Further since the specific challenges that international school leaders face were not considered in the development of these frameworks, the results of this study may be able to expand upon and possibly even enhance those frameworks within the context of international schools.

Review of the Literature

The following subsections of this literature review examine the existing literature surrounding school culture and climate. Firstly, the difference between the two concepts of school culture and climate is explored through the existing literature on the topic. Then, literature on the importance of school culture and climate are examined. Lastly, literature that discusses the importance of leadership in relation to school culture and climate are reviewed.

Culture and Climate

Climate and culture are both concepts that describe interactions with an environment. In schools, the culture is the values and beliefs of an organisation whereas climate refers to those values and beliefs in action (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015). Therefore, a school's climate can be a window into its culture (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015) and a reflection of group trends (Cohen, 2009). One can witness the values and beliefs of a school through the way in which actions take place within it. Similarly, a school's climate can inform its culture since the attitudes that a school has can influence the way in which things are done or not done and the values and beliefs of a school (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015). However, attitudes can change instantly and are easier to alter, but a shift in culture requires slow and sustained transformation and can take many years to evolve (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015).

As such, it can be difficult to precisely tell when there has been a shift from climate to culture. This is in part due to the difficulty in describing what culture is since it is easier to describe what you do as opposed to why you do it (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015). This might be why the large majority of literature seems to focus on culture as opposed to climate. That said, since a school's climate can be a window into its culture and since attitudes are easier and quicker to change (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015), a leader may focus on a school's climate with the aim of this impacting a longer-term cultural change. Sparks (2013) states, "improving a struggling school's climate can be both the foundation of long-term school improvement and a source of immediate, visible progress" (p. 8). As such, improving a school's climate in the short-term can aid the development of the overall school culture in the long-term; however, knowing how those short-term improvements will impact the overall culture will surely need strategic planning so they are not simply for the short-term.

The Importance of School Culture and Climate

Louis and Wahlstrom (2011) and Thapa et al. (2013) stated very simply that school culture matters to a school. There is increasing evidence that organisations with stronger cultures are more adaptable, have higher member motivation and commitment, are more cooperative, are able to resolve disputes better, have a greater capacity for innovation and are more effective in achieving their goals (Louis & Wahlstrom, 2011). Peterson and Deal (1998) claimed that a positive school culture is one where staff share purpose, there is a norm of collegiality, where student rituals celebrate accomplishment, informal networks provide richness of information and where success, joy and humour are prevalent. Teasley (2017) suggested that a school's culture provides a sense of identity, promotes achievement and creates distinct ways of doing things that help to shape standards. Robinson and Aronica (2015) suggested that a positive school culture is one of community, individuality, and possibility. Further, Teasley (2017) suggested that a positive school culture is "conducive to professional satisfaction, effectiveness, morale, and creating an environment that maximizes student learning and fosters collegiality and collaboration" (p. 3). Based on these definitions, it could be argued that the literature suggests that a positive school culture fosters improvement, collaborative decision-making, professional development and staff and student learning.

With regards to school climate, it is claimed that a sustained positive school climate is associated with "positive child and youth development, effective risk prevention and health promotion efforts, student learning and academic achievement, increased student graduation rates, and teacher retention rates" (Thapa et al., 2013, p. 369). Further, "a sustainable, positive school climate fosters youth development and learning necessary for a productive, contributing, and satisfying life in a democratic society" (Cohen, 2009, p. 100). For students, a positive school climate has an impact on students' mental and physical health, contributing

to self-esteem and motivation to learn as well as mitigating the negative impact of socioeconomic contexts (Thapa et al., 2013). A positive school climate contributes to less aggression and violence and is a proactive factor for the learning and positive life development and it also contributes to students' academic outcomes and achievement (Thapa et al., 2013). In a positive school climate, teachers feel supported and are more committed to their profession (Thapa et al., 2013). Further, a positive school climate is associated to the development of teachers' belief that they can positively impact student learning and is linked to teacher retention rates, feelings of exhaustion and attrition (Thapa et al., 2013). Therefore, it matters to both staff and students. Similarly, Gruenert and Whitaker (2015) noted that addressing school climate is a good strategy for assessing and leveraging cultural change and Sparks (2013) suggested that improving a school's climate is the foundation of long-term school improvement and a source of visible progress.

Why Leadership Matters to School Climate and Culture

According to MacNeil, Prater, and Busch (2009), the relationships that shape the culture and climate of a school are strongly influenced by the school principal. It is a leader who should transform a culture in a school into a strong and positive one since everything that happens in an organization is a reflection of the leadership (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015). Of course, because of this, one assumes that the converse is also true and that a leader can also have a negative impact on school culture and climate. As such, effective leadership is crucial, particularly when positive change is desired. Leithwood (cited in MacNeil et al., 2009) referred to principals as 'change agents' and Teasley (2017) suggested that school leaders are key to the development and maintenance of organisational culture. This implies that school principals are important, yet it can also be suggested that leadership is required across an organisation at multiple levels for cultural and climatic change to happen. Louis and Wahlstrom (2011) made this link between why school culture matters and why leaders

are so integral to its development. The findings presented in their study claimed that "changing a school's culture requires shared or distributed leadership, which engages many stakeholders in major improvement roles, and instructional leadership, in which administrators take responsibility for shaping improvements at the classroom level" (p. 52). Clearly, leadership is important for school culture and climate, but for a school's culture to change, there needs to multiple leaders and leadership across an organisation in different capacities and at different levels and consequently the impact that leadership has on school culture cannot be underestimated.

Key Leadership Strategies and Techniques for Fostering Positive School Culture and Climate

The following subsections of this literature review examine literature that discusses key leadership strategies and techniques in relation to initiating change in a school. The strategies and techniques identified within the existing literature are in relation to leaders initiating change to school culture and/or climate. As such, this literature was particularly pertinent to this study. Following the exploration of this literature, the international school setting is explored. This includes examining literature that discusses the specific challenges faced by leaders in this setting.

Examining Culture and Climate

Having knowledge of an organisational culture and climate helps in understanding individual and collective attitudes, behaviours and performance (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015). This is because if a leader understands the culture of a school, then he/she can carefully cultivate it so that it grows in the desired direction (Morrison, 2018). MacNeil et al. (2009) also similarly claimed that a school principal must first understand the school's culture before implementing change. According to MacNeil et al. (2009), measuring school climate and using these assessments to focus a school's goals on learning is also important.

As such, examining the existing culture and climate within a school is an important part of the change process.

Gruenert and Whitaker (2015) provided a range of surveys in their book that can be utilised for the task of identifying a school's culture. They proposed that a survey is firstly administered to staff in a school which asks participants about their thoughts and opinions about the purpose of education since this will engage people in deep philosophical conversations (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015). Secondly, it is suggested that a form that asks staff about the elements of their school culture be completed. This form is used to collect data on things like what the school vision is, and who staff are proud of in relation to the school. This form helps to reveal the current culture. The third task that is suggested is a survey that is administered to staff along with students and parents. This survey examines 'who owns what' and explores the differing perspectives of where responsibilities lie within the school and the ways in which the school culture might contribute to these differences. These three tasks are based around the idea that dysfunction in schools can often be traced to a lack of ownership of certain actions. They also noted that it is important for deep discussions to take place in relation to the data, using a learning mindset to address possible emotional responses that may occur to the survey (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015).

Gruenert and Whitaker (2015) acknowledged that identifying the culture in a school may take time and that leaders cannot expect to change values and beliefs instantly. Yet, having an awareness of where things are not functioning well is the first step in the evolution of school culture (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015). Morrison (2018) and MacNeil et al. (2009) similarly claim that a leader must first understand the school's culture. Further, Gruenert and Whitaker (2015) noted that it can be a sensitive proposition to expose the beliefs of an organisation; however, if teachers can also contribute to the process of administering the

survey, or even add other items which they feel are important, this may lessen this risk with the longer term change or improvement in mind.

Restrictors to the Change Process

It is important for any leader to anticipate any potential restrictions to the change process. Marion and Gonzales (2014) conducted a study whereby perceptions of students, parents and teachers and their respective school's climates were measured over time in relation to the change processes that were taking place. It was suggested that, after initial improvement there is a tendency for further improvements to 'level-off', and the rate of improvement to slow (Marion & Gonzales, 2014). As such, it can be argued that a leader is most impactful during the initial change process and, as these changes become part of the culture, further changes become more difficult. This could be because leaders are often introduced to organisations in order to make changes and the amount of change will surely slow as the organisation becomes increasingly aligned to their visions. Kotter (2012) similarly argued for a sense of urgency to be instilled for the identification of a problem necessitating change. These ideas therefore raise the question as to if it is possible for existing leaders within an organisation to make long-lasting impacting change over a period of time.

Have a Vision

Once the culture and climate of a school are identified and the restrictors to change identified, a leader can identify potential areas where they would like to initiate change. Thapa et al. (2013) outlined five key areas where change can be implemented: safety, relationships, teaching and learning, institutional environment, and the school improvement process. Having a vision is important because it allows followers to engage in any transformative process providing clarity and direction, describing the outcome and providing alignment (Kotter, 2012). Having and sharing a vision is important since it means that

individuals and groups involved with the school can have a clear understanding of where they want to be and can develop an operational plan for how to get there (Morrison, 2018).

According to Muhammed (2018), it is important to "get people on the bus" (p. 52). This implies, similarly to Kotter (2012), that a vision that people can buy into is an essential part of the transformative process since it provides a clear picture of the future that provides the general direction for change, and, it can help coordinate a large amount of people. A vision should be imaginable, provide clarity, be feasible, provide focus yet also be flexible and easy to communicate (Kotter, 2012).

Communicating a vision once it has been created is essential for it to be taken onboard by a desired number of people (Kotter, 2012). Frequently, a vision can be lost under a lot of 'clutter' that makes it difficult to follow. As such, Kotter (2012) suggested keeping the language that is simple and easy to understand, using metaphors and examples, dispensing the vision in many different forms, repeating it and to leading by example.

Establishing Routines

It is suggested school culture and climate will develop with or without a leader employing leadership styles and techniques (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015). Yet, to develop school culture and climate positively, it is recommended that effective leadership is required (MacNeil et al., 2009). Bambrick-Santoyo (2014) suggested that new cultures can be made common across a school if fostered correctly as a routine over a period of time. Bambrick-Santoyo (2014) described a school where the first day of school is practiced word-for-word thereby creating a routine among staff, allowing for everyone to have the same accepted vision of what it will look like, what the intention is, and the visions are. One might argue that this allows for all those involved to create, and subsequently employ, a shared culture. This also suggests that culture is important and that all those associated and involved to an

organisation need to be part of the development of the culture and are involved in the shaping of its culture.

Build Relationships and Trust

Building trust in oneself and the followers along with the celebrating of success of all stakeholders both on an impromptu basis and as part of an institutionalised system is important to the change process (Muhammad, 2018). Further, school principals seeking to improve student performance should focus on improving the school's culture by getting the relationships right between themselves, their teachers, students and parents (MacNeil, Prater, & Busch, 2009). No professional community can endure without trust between teachers and administrators, among teachers, and between teachers and parents (Louis & Wahlstrom, 2011). Louis and Wahlstrom (2011) suggested that trust in a principal by teachers can be achieved when they talk about instruction, visit classrooms, and make instructional quality a visible priority. With this in mind, Morrison (2018) identified that effectively developing the human resource aspect of an organization is a very strong component for successful change management. Morrison's (2018) study suggested that this entails "hiring the right people, getting them in the right position, building those important relationships, and building and maintaining clear lines of communication as a means of increasing the efficacy of change" (p. 522). Connected to these goals is the need for a leader to develop and maintain the trust between all stakeholders (Morrison, 2018).

Identifying Types of Followers, Mobilising Them and Managing Conflict

Muhammad (2018) claimed that it is important to identify and understand the distinct characteristics of teachers in a school since each will behave and interact with the school system, students and each other to create the school's culture. Muhammad (2018) suggested that there will be some teachers who have intrinsic motivation and that these 'believers' do not depend upon their leaders' influence in relation to their participation. The key

characteristics of this group are that they often have a personal connection to the school, are flexible, they apply student pressure positively, are willing to confront opposing viewpoints and use varied levels of pedagogical skills (Muhammad, 2018).

Another group identified by Muhammad (2018) were the 'tweeners'. This group are usually new to the school and as such do not often have as strong a connection to the school but are enthusiastic by nature in relation to the school, are generally compliant due to the 'honeymoon period' they might be in and they have high attrition rates (Muhammad, 2018). For these reasons, one might argue that this group would therefore be one group in particular that could be most successfully mobilised into cultural change.

Other groups identified by Muhammad (2018) were the 'survivors' who are those who might have 'given up' and their only thought is how to get through, usually from term to term and the 'fundamentalists'. The fundamentalists are those who are opposed to change, cling to the old ways of doing things and consider themselves as the keepers of institution tradition (Muhammad, 2018). As such, they tend to be driven by their emotions. This does go against the ideas of Marion and Gonzales' (2014), though, since they believed that in a transformative setting, it is those that are the most dissatisfied that are the most susceptible to mobilisation.

Muhammad (2018) claimed that the two most influential groups on a school's culture are the 'believers' and the 'fundamentalists.' As such, it is up to the leaders to successfully navigate and 'manage' the two if change is going to occur (Muhammad, 2018). However, eliminating the fundamentalism within an organisation, and not creating a division between the staff presents possibly the greater challenge to a leader. And, there are a myriad of ways that a leader can respond to this (Muhammad, 2018).

Within a school, fundamentalism amongst staff might manifest itself as conflict for example, and according to Marion and Gonzales (2014), conflict can be destructive to an

organisation, even though they also claim that those dissatisfied in their workplace organisation are easily converted to align to a leader's vision in a transformative setting. Yet leaders often make the mistake of dealing with conflict by asserting their authority or power in order to resolve it (Marion & Gonzales, 2014). But there are more effective ways to deal with conflict, and sometimes conflict can be good for an organisation such as when the task orientated conflict is high, but relationship orientated conflict is low (Marion & Gonzales, 2014).

It is difficult to lead through conflict since often task-oriented conflict can turn into relationship-oriented conflict, often resulting in negative emotionality and alliances forged (Marion & Gonzales, 2014). There are certain triggers or 'tags' (Marion & Gonzales, 2014) which can cause conflict and a leader must be able to manage these (and problematic interactions) effectively. As such, if negative conflict arises, a leader must know how to 'spin' it. Therefore, this type of leader needs to be very socially aware of what is happening within their organisation, but also very responsive to individuals' needs and understand their potential reactions. Further, leading through conflict would require the leader to be exceptionally responsive to their group. This type of leader may subsequently feel like they are constantly managing conflict, and due to the causes and triggers of conflict, they might not necessarily be directly related to the organisation.

Yet, understanding why the conflict exists initially can be an important part of the process. Fundamentalists may be resisting change due to their time spent at an institution, but there may be other reasons. Conflict theory (Marion & Gonzales, 2014) suggests there are various other influencing factors that can initiate conflict. A group may feel they have been treated unfairly, for example, or feel deprived (Marion & Gonzales, 2014). Further, a group might feel that conflict will lead to a resolution of their 'needs' or there might be a 'them-us' mentality (Marion & Gonzales, 2014). Or, there may be some event that triggers a conflict

(Marion & Gonzales, 2014). As such, a leader must be aware of the potential that such conflict triggers.

Distributed and Shared Leadership Structures

The loose coupling of structural relationships described by Marion and Gonzales (2014) puts forward the idea that a leader in this style would allow parts of an organisation to evolve independently. Kotter (2012) promoted the ideas of networks within organisations where people feel they can have a voice and be a part of change. Muhammad (2018) also highlighted the importance of giving people a voice, too. Louis and Wahlstrom (2011) claimed that principals shape the culture in positive ways when they share leadership and take responsibility for shaping classroom improvements.

Kotter (2012) suggested that networks and hierarchical systems should exist together since both have positive influences on an organisation. In a loose coupling type structure, the leader lets the structures (or networks) develop more naturally, as opposed to within a tightly coupled structure, since in a tightly coupled structure any conflict that arises would affect all parts of the organisation. Further, tightly coupled structures tend to be more resistant to change too. Yet, as mentioned above, conflict needs to be managed so a moderate coupled structure might be more successful as part of the change or transformative process.

Ultimately, the level of change that the leader is advocating for will determine the parts' coupling and the speed at which that change will occur (Marion & Gonzales, 2014). However, through the process of dissemination in the increased interconnectedness of the modern educational system, changes can happen quite quickly (Marion & Gonzales, 2014). Burns (1978) noted that decisions are sometimes put off or actually limited due to legislature or decisions that were made prior to their leadership and that the real test of a leader is the level of intended social change that comes about. This suggests that if the leadership decisions can be shared or distributed, then they may be more in keeping with the current

needs of the organisation. Similarly, Louis and Wahlstrom (2011) suggested that changing a school's culture requires shared or distributed leadership that engages many stakeholders in major improvement roles, and instructional leadership, in which administrators take responsibility for shaping improvements at the classroom level.

Professional Development

A leader needs to develop and invest in their team for change in culture to take place. Khourey-Bowers, Dinko and Hart (2004), explored the effects of a Local Systemic Change (LSC) initiative over a five-year period that implemented a shared leadership style whereby professional development was increased. Their results indicated that sustained and intensive professional development influences individuals and school culture (Khourey-Bowers et al., 2004). It was commented that high-quality, intensive, and sustained workshops, seminars, and courses promote reform-oriented growth in beliefs, pedagogical content knowledge, and disciplinary content knowledge among teachers (Khourey-Bowers et al., 2004).

This could also be related to the leadership idea that developing positive relationships is integral to leadership, but this also aligns with the thoughts of Peterson and Deal (1998), Robinson and Aronica (2015) and Teasley (2017) in that a positive school culture is one that fosters improvement, collaborative decision-making, professional development and staff and student learning. One other way a positive school culture can be achieved that is linked to professional development according to Knutson, Miranda and Washell (2005) is to introduce the practice of peers observing behaviours in the classroom and subsequently reviewing and giving feedback since it is claimed that this develops a positive culture. However, in some cultures and climates this might be seen as threatening and as such leaders may need to develop the attitudes towards this practice.

Student Ownership and Responsibility

Another area where a leader may wish to initiate change is student autonomy. Rutledge and Cannata (2016) described their research findings where higher-performing schools are engaged in an intentional set of systemic practices that they call Personalization for Academic and Social Learning (PASL) and how higher-performing schools also established integrated structures of academic press and support that scaffolded the development of Student Ownership and Responsibility (SOAR) for their learning. Both PASL and SOAR place their emphasis on students rather than only on adults as key agents in the school (Rutledge & Cannata, 2016). Further, PASL and SOAR emphasize the integration of social and academic elements of schooling and are enacted through school culture (Rutledge & Cannata, 2016). Part of this is increasing students' sense of belonging in the school, which as noted by Thapa et al. (2013), is part of a positive school culture. Adults promote a culture in which students describe feeling safe and cared for, personalising their approach (Rutledge & Cannata, 2016). This behaviour, therefore, encourages active relationships and a positive culture within a school. This article suggested that attention to the student is a key factor in creating a positive school culture where students can flourish, and it also suggests that positive relationship development is important.

Personalised Learning

Implementing personalised learning may also contribute to a positive school culture and climate. Grover (2014) described a high school that was developed in order to serve its local community better. This school provides students with access to high-quality, digital-blended learning courses that offer the flexibility needed for students to acquire the knowledge and technology skills necessary in a digital world. Grover (2014) described how removing the constraints of the traditional model of taking attendance, completing registers and such has freed them to create and innovate an environment that is both positive and able

to address student needs. The students have flexible timetables, are able to negotiate the speed at which they learn content and are working on an individual learning plan (Grover, 2014). The results showed that the school culture is a positive one where behavioural issues are few and achievement is higher than average (Grover, 2014). However, other external factors such as increased spending, training and motivations might have also contributed to these outcomes. However, it does suggest that a positive school culture is one where personalisation of learning is a key factor. This is evidence of how culture can be developed with positive effects.

Transformative Leadership Theory

One common theory or model to invoke change is that of transformative leadership (Marion & Gonzales, 2014). Transformational leadership functions best in organisations that are looking to set new directions, goals or initiatives. The transformational leader in this setting is often charismatic and what might be called 'likeable' for a variety of reasons such as being an inspirational motivator or intellectual stimulator (Marion & Gonzales, 2014). Those most likely to respond to this type of leader might be those who are dissatisfied with their workplace since part of being a transformative leader is empowering persons to have a voice or role within any organisational change. However, this could become quite challenging if the voices are not in line with the leader's own morality. It may also be challenging for a leader if any potential proposed changes are not be in line with the intended direction of the leader.

The transformational leader may also be subject to issues of power and how they wield it (Marion & Gonzales, 2014). Their morality may come under fire and also followers may be subject to 'founder's syndrome' where the followers view the leader as the answer to all their problems. (Marion & Gonzales, 2014). Despite this, transformational leadership theory is perceived to be a popular entity-based theory due to the results that it produces.

Within international school settings, transformational models of leadership are in demand due to their effectiveness in nurturing teachers and students (Gardner-McTaggart, 2018). However, according to Gardner-McTaggart (2018), for the senior leader aspirant they "also sell well, and any omission of competence in empowering leadership would be unwise in a job interview" (p. 160). This suggests that models of transformative leadership are currently a popular choice to those interviewing leaders within international school settings.

The International School Setting

International schools are often schools that offer a different curriculum framework to that of their host country such as the International Baccalaureate (Machin, 2017). Machin suggested that motivations for being an international school include a philosophical alignment to international education, commercial incentive, since the term 'international' conveys status and prestige, and the adoption of the title of 'international school' to avoid state-directed regulatory control (Machin, 2017). ISC Research supplies the current and objective data on the world's international schools (ISC Research, n.d.) and defines international schools in their terms of reference as schools operating wholly or partially in English (2017). As such, their research includes schools that operate in other languages, too. In short, international schools are schools which call themselves such since the term 'international' is open for any school to adopt as they see fit (Machin, 2017). International schools often cater to the global elite, with many wealthier families seeking a school which engages in global issues of equity and responsibility, yet also has an instrumental pull of 'qualification capital' and cultural appropriation particularly to those from less developed and connected areas of the globe (Gardner-McTaggart, 2018).

The international school sector has experienced significant growth, particularly in Asia since the turn of the 21st century (Lee et al., 2012; Machin, 2017). The International Baccalaureate (IB) are key players in the international school market and, even though there

has been exponential growth demonstrated by IB schools globally, the Asia-Pacific region has experienced the most rapid gains in the number of IB schools since 2000 (Lee et al., 2012). An ISC research report in 2018 claimed that twenty years ago, there were only about 1,000 English-language international schools worldwide with most of the student body made up of children from expatriate families working abroad such as diplomats and mid-level corporate types (Wechsler, 2017). However, in 2018, ISC research counted a total of 9,605 English-medium international schools worldwide (ICEF Monitor, 2018). This represents a year-over-year increase of 6.3% and contributes to a compound annual growth rate of nearly 6% over the last five years (ICEF Monitor, 2018). Further, according to ISC, demand is continuing to rise, predicting that in the next 10 years, there is an expectation that the number of international schools will double to more than 16,000 schools and 8.75 million students worldwide (Wechsler, 2017). In China, the appetite for international schools, is, as Machin (2017) put it, insatiable.

Despite these types of schools initially being set up to cater to expatriates, in 2018 around 80% of the student body came from the host country where their school is based (ICEF Monitor, 2018), and around 40% of international schools offer a curriculum aligned to the English National Curriculum (Machin, 2017). It was suggested that this is because the "British economic elite are embedded throughout the global economy, thereby having stronger connections in markets such as Asia" (p. 133). In Asia, there were around 5,032 international schools in 2017, exemplifying the growth in the region at the turn of the century Hong Kong had 92 internationals schools and as of 2017 had 176; Thailand had less than a dozen, and as of 2017, 181 (Machin, 2017). One might think that this significant growth would mean competition would be fierce, but international schools in this region are still enjoying buoyant market conditions and benign competitive influences (Machin, 2017).

Leadership in International School Settings

Due to enormous variation in the make-up of international schools, leadership predominantly refers to senior administrators such as principals, heads, and directors. Yet it can also include curriculum coordinators and middle managers (Gardner-McTaggart, 2018). According to Machin (2017) globalisation has created the demand (and necessity) for international *education* and in turn, neoliberal policy, with regards to economic markets, in particular, has created the regulatory framework (and the acceptance) for that demand to be filled, in part, by international schools. Yet, despite the buoyant market conditions (Machin, 2017), leaders also need entrepreneurial skills along with relational intelligence, pedagogical knowledge, heuristic intelligence (so as to not to think strategies that worked in one school will automatically work in another), and reflective intelligence when working in the international school sector (Calnin et al., 2018). Gardner-McTaggart (2018) found that senior leaders in these settings share rich 'English' cultural capital, and that international schools market this knowledge.

In terms of leadership styles and practices in international schools there is an orientation towards collegial models of management and distributed leadership models as a normative trend, with transformational approaches often valued by school principals (Gardner-McTaggart, 2018). One study that sought to find answers to similar questions as the ones being asked in this study found that the characteristics most frequently linked to effective change in an international school setting included being visionary, being committed to school/staff and creating a collegial/supportive work environment (Morrison, 2018). The study by Morrison (2018) also identified other key characteristics that a successful leader in an international school setting should demonstrate. They included being approachable, being a good communicator and having a strong ethical disposition (Morrison, 2018).

However, according to Calnin et al. (2018) who reviewed leadership in IBO schools, there is not one particular approach to leadership which can be said to be effective across all settings. It was instead argued that context is important, and that leadership is context sensitive (Calnin et al., 2018). Further, they pointed out that leaders in an international school setting need to have relational intelligence since the shaping of a school's culture is linked to trust and the developing a strong set of ethical principles between leaders and stakeholders (Calnin et al., 2018). This links to ideas previously explored in this chapter relating to trust (Louis & Wahlstrom, 2011; Morrison, 2018) and ethics (Morrison, 2018).

Specific Challenges Faced by Leaders of International Schools

International schools largely sit outside of government and local educational systems and frameworks, usually with little governmental interference (Machin, 2017). However, it can be argued that since there are increasing numbers of students attending schools from the school's host country, the local customs, cultures, norms and social systems will seep into a school. And of course, the general laws of a country will still apply. As such, it can be claimed that there might be a dissonance between the more liberal approaches to education prevalent in international schools and the conservative nature of those observed in some countries (Hammad & Shah, 2018). Clearly, this might present a unique challenge to school leaders, particularly in countries such as the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia where there are issues such as sex segregation and high parental expectations in relation to grades or qualifications (Hammad & Shah, 2018). These types of tensions between the local and international cultures can sometimes lead to international schools and their communities becoming isolated from their immediate locality (Gardner-McTaggart, 2018). As a consequence, this can "intensify relationships due to limited social possibilities and both psychological and linguistic isolation" (Caffyn as cited in Gardner-McTaggart, 2018, p. 155). As such, these challenges may impact the culture and climate of a school. Similarly, a study by Walker and

Cheong (2009) reported that leaders had difficulties associated with leading the learning of students from different national and cultural backgrounds. Bailey and Gibson (2019) also found that cultural differences affected the diverse relationships of school leaders with students, parents, teachers and school owners. Bailey and Gibson (2019) said that the participants of their study that was conducted in Malaysia felt that managing the cultural composition of either the student body and/or the teaching staff was a feature of the role as a leader, with many of the principals that were interviewed as part of their study reporting that demographic decisions were an important aspect of their role. Hammad and Shah's 2018 study unveiled two coping strategies for these challenges that have been developed by school leaders in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia; compliance and circumvention.

Blandford and Shaw (as cited in Lee et al., 2012) offered a list of leadership challenges specific to international schools:

1. High but diverse parental expectations

2. High rate of staff turnover and student mobility

3. Conflicting pressures emerging from the need for compliance with host country education laws and policies and the educational goals and processes guiding international education

4. Cultural diversity of staff, students, and board members

5. Conflicts between local and global curriculum standards and expectations. (p. 294)

Based upon these challenges, Lee et al. (2012) noted that in the Asia Pacific region, school leaders in IBO schools face even further specific challenges such as achieving coherence and consistency across the three IBO programmes; managing the complexity of a formal organization; recruitment, selection, and deployment of staff; ongoing professional development of teachers and managing parental expectations. Each of these challenges may subsequently present a barrier to the fostering of a positive school culture. This list was

written some time ago and it is the opinion of the researcher that the challenges will have shifted somewhat; however due to market growth, the researcher believes that they may have also intensified. One element of this list is of particular interest in relation to the development of culture and climate is the high rate of turnover of staff and students.

According to Gardner-McTaggart (2018), "transience is a real, debilitating problem for international schools" (p. 160). A moderate degree of turnover in any organization is generally deemed to be healthy (Odland & Ruzicka, 2009) and a high turnover of staff may allow for a leader to bring in their own 'people'. However, if the rate of staff turnover is high there may need to be constant readjustment and reconfiguration of any intended change in relation to culture. Further, in international school settings there are usually significant costs involved such as job advertising, relocation fees and flights are often required to transport teachers from various parts of the world (Machin, 2018). In the case of a high turnover then, one might also argue that culture would be allowed to develop naturally, for better or worse, since there are few there to develop it over a period of time. And, for leaders, forming stable spaces and enduring traditions of excellence are biggest challenges that face leaders of international schools (Gardner-McTaggart, 2018).

Mancuso, Roberts, and White (2010) concluded that the teacher turnover rate correlated to the perception of a supportive head of school (their leader), along with other correlates that included age and satisfaction with salary and Morrison (2018) suggested that this is linked to trust in leaders, too. According to Mancuso et al. (2010), characteristics that defined teachers' perceptions of supportive leadership are closely linked with transformational and distributed leadership. Further, Gardner-McTaggart (2018) suggested that distributed leadership can develop leadership capacity and address the issues of transience which can be damaging for international schools.

Odland and Ruzicka (2009) found that three causal factors influence staff turnover in international schools. They are administrative leadership, compensation and personal circumstances. This implies that not only is the leader an important factor whether teachers will remain in a school, it also suggests that in relation to the development of culture the leader is key, since teachers feel that the leaders are the ones who are determining the future of the organisation. The same could be said of a high student turnover since, if students are transient, they bring with them their own sets of values and beliefs that may have formed from a different school or country, and as such may not be aligned to their current school. This may pose a problem for the development of culture and climate that as noted earlier, takes time to develop (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015). However, as mentioned earlier on in this chapter, Morrison (2018) identified that effectively developing the human resource aspect of an organization is a very strong component for successful change management, including hiring the 'right' people. Therefore, having transient staff may allow for people to be removed quicker, and new people with the 'right' attitudes and behaviours brought in sooner. Of course, this does not accommodate the idea that the 'right' people may leave of their own accord. As such, a leader may have to consider how to keep existing staff who have been identified as having the right attitudes, too.

Conclusion

The literature review suggests that the culture and climate within a school is significant to its success. This is because it provides a sense of identity and promotes achievement (Teasley, 2017) and it fosters a sense of community, individuality, and possibility (Robinson & Aronica, 2015). Thapa et al. (2013) further claimed that a positive school climate is related to child and youth development, effective for risk prevention and health promotion efforts, along with student learning and academic achievement, increased student graduation rates, and teacher retention rates.

According to the literature reviewed, it can be noted that there are some key leadership skills and techniques that enable a transformation or change within an organisation to occur. Generally, in relation to leadership and the change process, Kotter (2012) suggested that change is most impacting initially but may fall prey to founder's syndrome. As such, Kotter (2012) suggested creating a sense of urgency around the proposed change and creating a vision that all members of the organisation can buy into. With regards to the transformative or change process in schools, in order to mobilise groups, a leader should look to the 'believers' for their potential, but also the 'tweeners', too, since these groups are most likely to buy into a vision (Muhammad, 2018). Once the vision has been created, a leader has to effectively communicate it (Kotter, 2012), and be aware of any potential conflicts that might arise in resistance to change (Marion & Gonzales, 2014). According to the literature, a leader might look to create some networks within their organisation so as to give followers a voice, too (Kotter, 2012). However, this needs to be done with caution and it is suggested that it is done alongside a hierarchy (Kotter, 2012). Lastly, Marion and Gonzales (2014) suggested that a leader needs charisma, which is arguably something that cannot be taught and is something that is much more of a natural trait.

Specifically relating to transforming school culture, Khourey-Bowers et al. (2004) suggested investing in people through professional development. Similarly, Grover (2014) suggested that flexibility in the school environment/organisation allows for individualism in students' learning which in turn fosters a positive climate. Rutledge and Cannata (2016) also leant towards the argument of individualising students' experiences whilst Bambrick-Santoyo (2014) suggested that leaders create new routines.

This literature review has pointed out that there are many perspectives on what culture and climate is within a school environment, and how it can be fostered through specific transformative processes. However, there are few literatures that point out what overall

leadership styles might be best suited to foster a school change in relation to international schools specifically. Morrison (2018) suggested that being visionary, committed to school/staff and creating a collegial/supportive work environment are important in the development of change. Within the literature it is also suggested that since the international school setting is a growing market (Machin, 2017), leaders need entrepreneurial skills along with relational intelligence, pedagogical knowledge, heuristic intelligence, reflective intelligence and relational intelligence (Calnin et al., 2018).

The literature that was examined also identified some of the specific challenges faced by leaders of international schools. These include the issues surrounding international schools being a growing market (Machin, 2017), that there is sometimes dissonance between the liberal approaches in international schools and the conservative nature of others (Hammad & Shah, 2018) and that there are often issues with high turnovers in international schools (Mancuso et al., 2010). Other challenges might include parental expectations, pressure for compliance, cultural diversity and conflicts with curricula (Blandford & Shaw as cited in Lee et al., 2012). It is therefore suggested that knowledge of and appreciation of local customs, cultures and laws would be beneficiary here with Hammad and Shah (2018) suggesting that leaders currently deal with this by compliance and/or circumvention.

This literature review has provided a comprehensive outline of the topic. It has highlighted some of the key areas that have previously been researched identifying some of the prominent authors in this area. It has also discussed the conceptual framework of the study, discussing the personal contexts, the topical research and the theoretical framework of the study.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to describe and explain the phenomena of international school leadership and school climate and culture. It proposed to identify key leadership strategies and techniques that can be implemented to initiate change which will foster a positive school culture and climate. A positive school culture fosters a sense of community, individuality, and possibility (Robinson & Aronica, 2015). According to Thapa et al. (2013), a positive school climate is associated with positive child and youth development, risk prevention, health promotion, student learning and academic achievement, increased student graduation rates and teacher retention rates. Since everything that happens in an organization is a reflection of its leadership (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015) a leader may initiate change to the culture and climate of a school particularly if they feel that the culture and climate are not reflective of their own values and beliefs. In international school settings, school leaders face specific challenges which may impact the process and capacity for change of an organisation.

This study sought to describe and explain this unique phenomenon of international school leaders and school culture and climate. As such, a phenomenological methodology was chosen. One of the founding principles of phenomenological inquiry is that experience should be examined in the way that it occurs, and in its own terms (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). Therefore, phenomenological research attempts to describe the lived experiences that several individuals have with a phenomenon (Creswell, 2015). These lived experiences have meaning to the individuals and occur during the everyday flow of life (Smith et al., 2009). According to van Manen (2016), the goal of phenomenological research is to understand the nature of these lived experiences. As such, this type of qualitative research generates detailed descriptions of the experiences of the participants.

Research Design

Interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) methodologies are useful for understanding personal lived experience and exploring persons' relatedness to, or involvement in, a particular event or process (Smith et al., 2009). IPA aims to capture and explore the meanings that participants assign to their experiences with participants recruited for their expertise in the phenomenon (Reid, Flowers & Larkin, 2005). IPA is an approach to qualitative, experiential and psychological research which has been informed by concepts and debates from three key areas of the philosophy of knowledge: phenomenology, hermeneutics and idiography (Smith et al., 2009). Firstly, IPA is a qualitative research approach committed to the examination of how people make sense of their major life experiences. Whereas, hermeneutics relates to the theory of interpretation (Peoples, 2020). This means that when conducting an IPA study, the researcher needs to interpret the accounts of the participants. Third, idiography is concerned with the particular which means that IPA is committed to detail, is thorough and systematic, and is committed to understanding how particular experiential phenomena is understood from the perspective of particular people, in a particular context (Smith et al., 2009).

Fundamentally, IPA is the exploration of a lived experience combined with the subjective and reflective process of interpretation (Reid et al., 2005). It is a qualitative research approach that is committed to the examination of how people make sense of their major life experiences (Peoples, 2020; Smith et al., 2009). This is because when a life experience is significant, people begin to reflect upon it and IPA research aims to engage people with these reflections (Smith et al., 2009). Consequently, this research design allowed for examination and description of best practices in fostering positive school culture and climate by those experiencing it: leaders within international school settings.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) study was to describe and explain the phenomena of international school leadership and school climate and culture, identifying key leadership strategies and techniques that can be implemented to initiate change to foster a positive school culture and climate in international schools. Through the use of an IPA methodology, this study identified the key themes of this phenomenon from the descriptions and perceptions given by leaders in international school settings. By conducting in-depth interviews that examined the experiences of leaders from international school settings, this research hoped to describe and explain their perspectives in relation to initiating change in culture and climate in international school settings. These key themes can then be utilised by leaders in international school settings in order to develop organisational culture and climate.

Research Questions

It was identified through a review of the literature that there is a gap in the literature in regard to the leadership styles, techniques and practices that best foster positive school culture and climate in international schools. The identification allowed the researcher to develop research questions that addressed this gap and aided the development of the study. Further, this study sought to explain and describe the phenomenon of international school leadership and the impact it has on school culture and climate and as such, in line with IPA. The research questions were directed towards seeking out the understandings of the participants. The research questions were:

1. How do international school leaders perceive the impact that their leadership has on the culture and climate of a school?

2. What strategies and best practices do international school leaders use to initiate change and foster a positive school culture and climate?

Population and Sampling

According to Smith et al. (2009), IPA studies usually have a small number of participants even though there is no definitive answer as to what size a sample should be. Ten participants are usually at the higher end of a recommended sample size (Reid et al., 2005). The aim of an IPA study is to reveal the experiences of the participants and the accounts need to be in the participants own words, and as such, in as much detail as possible (Reid et al., 2005). If a sample size is small, it allows the researcher to examine the perceptions and stories of participants in great detail. Further, participants are usually selected on the basis that they can grant access to a particular perspective on the phenomena under study (Smith et al., 2009). As such, sampling is most frequently undertaken by the researcher seeking potential participants via referral, from various kinds of gatekeepers, from one's own contacts, or through snowballing where participants recommend other participants (Smith et al., 2009).

This study used a purposive, non-random sampling strategy, seeking for as homogenous a sample as possible. By making the groups as uniform as possible by factors relevant to the study, one can examine in detail psychological variability within the group, by analysing the pattern of convergence and divergence which arises (Smith et al., 2009). With purposive sampling, Creswell (2015) stated that a researcher will specify the characteristics required and then actively seek out participants with those characteristics. Considering this, the potential participants needed to be leaders in international schools. Further, the potential participants needed to be leaders in schools that prescribe to the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme (IBDP) curriculum. They also needed to have worked in a leadership position within the region for at least two years. The reason for this was that the International Baccalaureate (IB) are key players in the international school market (Lee, Hallinger, & Walker, 2012) and the IBDP is a two-year programme. As such, if leaders have been in their

position for at least two years they will have led for a complete cycle of the programme. Seeking leaders who ascribe to the same curriculum also assisted in the aim to generate a homogenous sample. Further, acquiring leaders from the region of south-east Asia also added to the homogenous nature of the sample, making the group as uniform as possible by factors associated to this study. This region has also seen the most rapid growth of international schools, with new schools constantly opened (Machin, 2017). As such, the development of culture in an expanding market, as well as in new schools which provide opportunities for leaders to foster positive cultures from the outset, deserved specific attention. Along with this, the researcher resided in the region and has worked in the international senior high school sector for over ten years. Further, the researcher was able to access potential participants via personal contacts, professional networks through schools' associations with the International Baccalaureate (IB) and referrals from those same places. The researcher used snowball sampling to seek out further participants who also had the key characteristics that were identified. The researcher sought a sample size of between eight to twelve participants. A sample of this size allowed the researcher to develop meaningful points of similarity and difference between participants, but not so many that he is in danger of being overwhelmed by the amount of data generated (Smith et al., 2009).

Data Collection

IPA is best suited to a data collection method which will invite participants to offer a rich, detailed, first-person account of their experiences (Smith et al., 2009). With this in mind, the best data for an IPA study are generated by in-depth interviews and diaries since they allow for elicitation of stories, thoughts and feelings about the target phenomenon (Smith et al., 2009). Semi-structured, one-to-one interviews tend to be the preferred means for collecting this type of data since they allow the researcher to construct interview questions relevant to the research question so that key aspects of the research study are sure

to be covered while allowing for participants to discuss other information that may end up being relevant to the study (Peoples, 2020). The researcher for this study conducted semi-structured interviews with the participants, recording the responses that were later transcribed for analysis. According to Reid et al. (2005), in semi-structured interviews, the interviewer can work with respondents in flexible collaboration, to identify and interpret the relevant meanings that are used to make sense of the topic. Semi-structured interviews also allow for rapport to be developed, for participants to think, speak and be heard, are well suited to in-depth and personal discussion and are easily managed (Reid et al., 2005).

The interviews for this study were conducted in person wherever possible since face-to-face interviews allowed for the participants to engage with the researcher more effectively and naturally. However, due to the participants living across a wide region, the use of a video conferencing system such as Zoom that also has a recording feature was also required. For face-to-face interviews the audio was recorded using a recording device such as that found on Apple's iPhone. All participants' identities were kept confidential using pseudonyms with transcripts being produced via transcription software such as that on www.rev.com.

According to Smith et al. (2009), it is useful to use interview schedules, sometimes referred to as interview protocols, when conducting IPA interviews. The researcher used an interview protocol as it allowed for an agenda of the topics to be set. The agenda topics were the ones that were to be discussed with the participant. Following agenda allowed the researcher to anticipate potential sensitive issues, and to frame the questions in suitably open forms (Smith et al., 2009). However, during an interview the agenda may change since, for example, a participant may not provide great detail of an experience and as such may need prompting or the researcher may need to use probing questions to elicit sufficient detail. For the most part, the participants were forthcoming in their interactions but having an interview

protocol allowed the researcher to be prepared for any circumstances during an interview where that might not be the case.

Interview questions were developed that allowed for in-depth discussions and as such asked for descriptions, narratives, evaluations and comparisons. Smith et al. (2009) suggested that for articulate participants, one should prepare a schedule of between six and ten open-ended questions, along with possible prompts, which will create an interview between approximately 45 and 90 minutes. It is also important to make participants feel comfortable during the interviews as it will encourage participants to speak more in depth. The researcher ensured that each interview environment was safe and free from interruptions by placing signs outside the door ensuring no one would enter and they spoke clearly and slowly (Smith et al., 2009).

Pilot Study

A pre-study pilot can help to refine the techniques and tools that a study will use (Arthur, 2012). A pilot interview was conducted in a situation as close to that of an actual interview with someone who was a person from outside the participant group. The pilot interviewee was able to play an active role in suggesting improvements after the interview had taken place. This allowed the researcher to establish if there were too many questions, if there were any leading or closed questions or if any of the questions were too direct, or not direct enough. A pre-study pilot also allowed the researcher to identify if and where prompts may be needed. Consequently, it was found that the interviewees needed serval prompts in order to fully describe their specific experiences, particularly in regard to their own impact as a leader.

Data Analysis

Since the goal of phenomenological research is to illuminate the lived experience of a phenomenon, the method of analysing data is emergent (Peoples, 2020). Data analysis in IPA

can be characterised by a set of common processes such as moving from the particular to the shared and from the descriptive to the interpretative (Smith et al., 2009). It can also be characterised by principles such as being committed to understanding the participant's point of view (Smith et al., 2009). Consequently, analysis can be described as an iterative and inductive cycle (Smith et al., 2009). Through the descriptions given by the participants, the researcher focused on analysing their attempts to make sense of their experiences using some common processes of phenomenological studies (Peoples, 2020). Part of this process was moving from the descriptive to the interpretative. The researcher was able to do this through the use of interpretative commentary using verbatim examples from the transcripts (Reid, et al., 2005). This involved using the transcripts from the participants' interviews and interpreting them. The researcher needed to move positions during this process from that of an 'insider' where the researcher was trying to make sense of the stories, to that of an outsider where the researcher tried to make sense of the stories in relation to the proposed research questions.

Heidegger suggested that a researcher use the hermeneutic circle for the process of understanding. Using the hermeneutic circle allows for the researcher to visit the data and revisit it until new understanding is reached and the researcher can make sense of the phenomenon (Peoples, 2020). Further, according to Smith et al. (2009), the researcher of an IPA study is engaged in a double hermeneutic because the researcher is trying to make sense of the participant trying to make sense of what is happening to them. As such, the researcher had a dual role during data analysis. The result was that the researcher's sense-making was second order and only had access to the participants' experiences through their accounts (Smith et al., 2009). This meant that analysis was always tentative, and the analysis was subjective (Smith et al., 2009). Reid, et al. (2005) say that this process is "underpinned by a process of coding, organising, integrating and interpreting of data, which is detailed and

labour intensive, but also very rewarding" (p. 22). This study used the step-by-step process as described by Smith et al. (2009). The steps included:

- Step 1: reading and re-reading,

- Step 2: initial noting,

- Step 3: developing emergent themes,

- Step 4: searching for connections across emergent themes,

- Step 5: moving to the next case, and

- Step 6: looking for patterns across cases.

Step 1 involved the immersing of the researcher in some of the original data (Smith et al., 2009). Once the transcriptions were completed, the researcher read them and listened to the original recording alongside them since imagining the voice of the participant during readings of the transcript assisted with a more complete analysis (Smith et al., 2009). The Step 1 process ensured that the participant became the focus of the analysis, with the researcher entering their 'world' (Smith et al., 2009). Further, the researcher needed to live through their participants' descriptions as if they were their own, taking time and dwelling upon the accounts (Peoples, 2020). Often Step 1 merges into Step 2 and these two steps can be the most time consuming since they involve examining content and language at an exploratory level (Smith et al., 2009). The aim was to produce a comprehensive and detailed set of notes and comments on the data. After this free textual analysis, Smith et al. (2009) suggested that the notations are then sectioned into descriptive comments, linguistic comments, and conceptual comments. Descriptive comments focus on describing what the participant has said, looking for key words, experiences and events. Linguistic comments focus upon exploring the specific use of language by the participant, examining use of pause, laughter, articulation and use of pronouns and conceptual comments focus on engaging with

the data at a more interrogative and conceptual level, asking questions about it, usually involving reflection from the researcher (Smith et al., 2009).

After this process, the researcher then engaged with Step 3 in which emergent themes were identified whilst trying to reduce the volume of detail whilst maintaining complexity especially in terms of mapping the interrelationships, connections and patterns between exploratory notes (Smith et al., 2009). This involved developing a coding system that sought to identify the emergent themes. The researcher used the coding software MAXQDA to code the data. Smith et al. (2009) explained that this may mean deconstructing the data in order to put it back together through interpretation as a new whole. These themes were then organised chronologically until Step 4 when the researcher sought to examine how all the themes fitted together. Peoples (2020) noted that not all the emergent themes must be incorporated with some being discarded. This is in part due to the focus of the research questions but also allows the researcher to interpret and then draw together all the key emergent themes in order to describe the phenomenon (Smith et al., 2009).

The processes of abstraction and subsumption were then utilized in order to reorganise the emergent themes. Abstraction is a basic form of identifying patterns between the emergent themes and developing a 'super-ordinate' theme. Subsumption operates where an emergent theme itself acquires a super-ordinate status helping to bring together a series of related themes (Smith et al., 2009). Other processes of polarisation which examine the oppositional relationships between themes, contextualisation which looks at the contextual and narrative elements in the data and numeration which explores the frequency of the emergent themes with the data were considered at this stage. These first four steps were undertaken for each transcript, leading to Step 5 which reinforced the idea that only once the first four steps are completed for a transcript will the researcher be able to move onto the next. Step 6 in the process of data analysis was to then question what the connections

between each 'case' were (Smith et al., 2009). The researcher looked for key emergent themes and superordinate themes in particular, while trying to achieve a general description.

Limitations of the Research Design

One limitation of this study was due to the small sample size of the study. This was a limitation because a small sample size may not be a representation of the wider population. As such, the conclusions drawn from the study may not be applicable to the wider population. However, the sample size used for this study was in keeping with IPA (Smith et al., 2009). This is since Smith et al., (2009) claimed that having a small sample size allows the researcher to gather in-depth data and allows for the researcher to analyse the data in great detail, too. Further, having a small sample helps the researcher to achieve a homogenous sample.

For this study, leaders from international schools in south-east Asia that work in schools that teach the IBDP curriculum were sought. As such, the descriptions and explanations of the phenomena and the subsequent conclusions and results generated may not be transferable or generalisable to other international schools or indeed to international schools that do not teach the IBDP. Therefore, one limitation of this study was the extent to which the results are transferable to the wider population.

Another limitation to this study was related to the way in which local culture impacts the culture and climate of a school. As identified in the literature review in Chapter 2, Machin (2017) claimed that the local customs, cultures, norms and social systems will seep into a school. And of course, the laws of a country will still apply. That means that the extent to which a school leader can impact the school culture and climate may be limited or bound by the local customs and laws. And since there may be great disparity between local customs and laws from country to country, even within south-east Asia, not all of the results will be applicable to all leaders in all contexts. Similarly, some leadership strategies and techniques

may be more impacting on a school's culture and climate with some schools being more receptive to the attempts by the leader depending on the local customs and laws of an international school's host country. Similarly, some of the challenges faced by international school leaders may only have been specific to their local, national or regional context.

A fourth limitation to this study was the way in which participants were gathered. This study relied on personal contacts, referrals and professional networks to find participants that met the criteria identified, with participation being voluntary. Because of this, participants may have only wished to participate if they felt that their leadership did indeed influence and impact the culture and climate of a school. Seeking participants who did not believe that their influence was impacting may not have been as willing to participate and if they did, they may not have been able to offer any meaningful descriptions of the phenomena. Similarly, they may not have been able to accurately describe their experiences. As such, presenting a balanced conclusion may be difficult.

Lastly, the researcher chose to embark upon this study due to his personal experiences with school culture and climate. One final limitation to this study may be the researcher's own involvement. The researcher has an interest in how school culture and climate is shaped and perhaps their own personal bias may have crept in during the interviewing stage, particularly when probing for responses and also the interpretation phase of analysing the data. The probing questions may have led participants to answers that the researcher wanted, or probing may have been insufficient as the researcher felt a topic was not worthy of deeper investigation during the interview. It also may be that the researcher's bias led the researcher to conclusions that suggest that a leader's impact on school culture and climate is more impacting than it actually is.

Validity

According to Creswell (2015), validating findings means that a researcher determines the accuracy or credibility of findings through certain strategies. The strategies that the researcher put into place in order to achieve validity in this study were member checking, reflexivity and standardizing the interview protocol. These three measures were used to ensure the validity of this phenomenological study. They will be further explained in the following sections.

Credibility

Lincoln and Guba (as cited in Creswell, 2015) discussed how the credibility of a study is how trustworthy the data is. This can be achieved using multiple approaches such as a check of the accuracy of the data or through the development of themes and codes using multiple data sources (Creswell, 2015). The first strategy that this study used in order to achieve trustworthiness was member checking. Member checking is a process whereby the researcher asks one or more of the participants to check the accuracy of the account (Creswell, 2015). This involved taking the findings back to the participants and asking them about the findings of the study. The researcher did this in writing, asking participants about whether the themes, the case analysis, the grounded theory and the cultural description were accurate (J.W. Creswell & J.D. Creswell, 2018). The researcher conducted this whilst the research was in a semi-polished state, providing an opportunity for them to comment on the findings (J.W. Creswell & J.D. Creswell, 2018).

The second strategy that was used in order to ensure credibility was admitting the biases and assumptions of the researcher, acknowledging the limitations of the study, otherwise known as reflexivity (Creswell, 2015). This process of self-reflection created an open and honest narrative that will resonate well with readers and is at the core of good qualitative research (J.W. Creswell & J.D. Creswell, 2018). As part of this study the

researcher paid specific attention to how their interpretation of the findings was shaped by their professional background and experiences (J.W. Creswell & J.D. Creswell, 2018). As part of the hermeneutic circle it is important for the researcher to note these explicitly (Peoples, 2020). Throughout the process, the researcher took notes and journaled about how his own assumptions and biases might be influencing the interpretations. This also ensured that the study's findings were based upon the accounts of the participants and not based upon the researcher's own biases and assumptions, ensuring confirmability.

Dependability

Another strategy to ensure validity was the use of an interview protocol. The interview protocol for this study can be seen in Appendix C. Smith et al. (2009) refer to this as an interview schedule. An interview protocol or schedule served as a way of reminding the researcher of the questions that needed to be asked to the participant and also provided the means for recording notes (Creswell, 2015). This form was created and contained instructions for the process of the interview, the questions that were to be asked and also had space for handwritten notes to be recorded by the researcher. The interview protocol also allowed the researcher to remain consistent in all of the interviews that were conducted.

Ethical Issues in the Study

In qualitative research it is important to understand and anticipate that ethical issues may arise during any stage of the research (J.W. Creswell & J.D. Creswell, 2018). It is also stated that researchers need to protect their research participants and that they should develop a trust with them which will promote the integrity of research, guard against misconduct and impropriety that might reflect on their organizations and that researchers should cope with new, challenging problems. Ethical questions may relate to issues with personal disclosure, authenticity and credibility of the research report. Along with this, the role of the researcher

and issues of personal privacy through forms of Internet data collection for example, may also raise ethical questions (J.W. Creswell, & J.D. Creswell, 2018).

All of the participants of this study were adults and all participants were asked to sign a digital informed consent form, as seen in Appendix B. The consent form established confidentiality protocols. The consent form also outlined the proposed study, the purpose and benefits of participating in the study, the potential risks, the freedom to withdraw, and the promise of confidentiality to the participants (Creswell, 2015). In order to establish confidentiality of the participants, on the consent form participants were asked not to refer to their school or organisation or any individuals by name at any point during the interview. The form also requested for permission for interviews to be video recorded if the interviews were conducted online and audio recorded if the interviews were conducted face-to-face. Further, it asked for permission for the recordings to be transcribed. In order for the recordings and transcriptions to be kept confidential, they were numbered as opposed to being labelled with participants' names or organisations. Written consent forms were kept in a secure location in a locked office cabinet with the digitally completed consent forms and collected data being stored on a secure server through use of a password protected Google Drive folder. Both the consent forms and the data will be kept for two years after the completion of the study.

Researcher's Position

Given the researcher's professional experiences and background, the researcher inevitably brought their own biases and assumptions to the study. This study was borne out of the researcher's experiences in a particular school where the culture and climate were identified by the researcher as being negative. As such, the researcher already had some assumptions as to what school culture and climate is and how it may develop if not interfered with or fostered.

The researcher is now employed in a different organisation where the culture and climate are currently undergoing transformation due to a new principal joining the organisation. Being a witness to this leadership change may also have impacted the researcher's interpretations of this study. However, at all times, the researcher tried to remain objective and not let his own experiences influence the interpretations of the data. That said, the researcher was aware that their experiences may have influenced the findings and the conclusions of this study.

Conclusion

This study used an IPA methodology to describe and explain the phenomena of international school leadership and school climate and culture, identifying key leadership strategies and techniques that can be implemented to initiate change that will foster a positive school culture and climate in international schools. IPA uses semi-structured interviews in order to generate qualitative data from the participants in-depth experiences (Smith et al, 2009). As part of this study, the researcher conducted one-to-one semi-structured interviews using voluntary participants that were sought from the researcher's contacts, professional networks and through referrals. The data was then transcribed and coded as per the guidance by Smith et al. (2009). The data was analysed for emergent key themes and trends using the guidance given by Smith et al (2009) and Peoples (2020). The limitations of this study were identified with measures and strategies put into place in order to achieve validity in the proposed study. Further, ethical issues and questions were addressed, and procedures put into place. By using the IPA research methodology and design described in this chapter, this study aimed to identify the key themes of the phenomenon that can then be utilised by leaders in international school settings in order to develop organisational culture and climate.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Through the use of an interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) methodology,

this study sought to describe and explain the phenomena of international school leadership

and school culture and climate. Further, this study intended to identify key leadership

strategies and techniques that can be implemented to initiate change that will foster a positive

school culture and climate in international schools, specifically those that teach the IBDP in

south-east Asia. The theoretical framework that shaped this study was a framework

developed by Thapa et al. (2013) which described a proposed five dimensions of school

climate and, as such, school culture, too. The research questions that guided this study were:

1. How do international school leaders perceive the impact that their leadership has on

   the culture and climate of a school?

2. What strategies and best practices do international school leaders use to initiate

   change to foster a positive school culture and climate?

As part of this study, the researcher conducted one-to-one semi-structured interviews

utilising the protocol as described by Smith et al. (2009). This study used voluntary

participants that were sought from the researcher's contacts, professional networks and

through referrals. The data was then transcribed and coded as per the guidance by Smith et al.

(2009). The data was analysed for emergent key themes and trends using the guidance given

by Smith et al. (2009) and Peoples (2020). The aim of this study was to identify the key

themes of the phenomenon of school culture and climate so that these can be utilised by

leaders in international school settings in order to develop organisational culture and climate.

Data for this study were collected through a semi-structured interview protocol.

Interviews were conducted either online and recorded using Zoom, an online web-

conferencing software that includes a recording feature, or face-to-face with audio data being

collected via a memo recorder application. The audio files from the interviews were transcribed using rev.com, a professional transcription service and reviewed by the researcher. The data was analysed for emergent key themes and trends again using the guidance given by Smith et al (2009). This involved the researcher listening to the recordings whilst reading the transcripts and identifying key themes from each transcript. The researcher then searched for connections across the emergent themes before moving on. The final stage was looking for patterns across the transcripts. The process of reviewing the transcripts, making notes and reflecting on the data was supported by the application MAXQDA. Alongside this process, each participant was presented with a copy of the findings in a semi-polished state so that they could conduct member checking. Member checking is a process whereby the researcher asks one or more of the participants to check the accuracy of the account (Creswell, 2015). Further, participants were asked about whether the emergent themes that were later identified were accurate and were asked for clarifications, too.

Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted with one initial individual. It was found during the pilot study that the original intended interview questions needed some adjustment. It was established that the questions were too closed in their approach and that they did not always allow for the participant to fully present their own experiences, leading to general answers about school culture and climate. For example, one initial question asked, 'Do you think it is important to measure the culture and climate within an international school?'. The answer that was given by the individual in the pilot study was very general and did not allow for them to describe their own experiences and the understanding of lived experiences are fundamental to an IPA study. Consequently, this question was adjusted to be, 'Can you please describe how your current school measures school culture and climate?'. Other

questions were also adjusted that allowed for the participants to give more descriptions of their own experiences.

Issues During Data Collection

When collecting the data, a few issues emerged. It seemed that the participants were not as forthcoming as the researcher had hoped and hastened at times to offer meaningful personal experiences without being probed. As a result, the researcher needed to re-ask certain questions to get the 'full picture' and to repeatedly probe. Since the level of probing required was not fully anticipated, some of the probes proved to be ineffective or insufficient. This was particularly the case when trying to ascertain why, based upon their experiences, the participants felt school culture and climate were important to a school. It also emerged that the participants did not discuss all of the aspects of school culture and climate as per the theoretical framework for this study. However, the participants were not informed of this theoretical framework in advance. The omission in the descriptions by the participants of certain aspects of school culture and climate framework as described by Thapa et al. (2013) could also have been due to the participants not seeing them as important, though. This will be discussed further in another section of this study. Additionally, in order to discuss all the aspects of the theoretical framework, much longer interviews would have been required. The researcher struggled to find participants who were able to commit to 30 to 40-minute interviews and asking participants to commit to longer interviews may have proved difficult. This may have been because at the time interviews were being conducted the region of south-east Asia was being impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic, with the majority of international schools shut down whilst this study was being conducted.

Coding

The researcher went through a process of coding the data. The initial stages of data analysis involved undertaking a process of immersing oneself with the data in order to ensure

clarity and understanding. As suggested by Smith et al. (2009), initial notations were

sectioned into descriptive comments, linguistic comments, and conceptual comments. The

descriptive comments made on the data focused on describing what the participant had said,

looking for key words, experiences and events. Linguistic comments focused upon exploring

the specific use of language by the participant, examining use of pause, laughter, articulation

and use of pronouns. This was particularly pertinent since this study sought to describe the

participants own lived experiences. Lastly, the conceptual comments that were made focused

on engaging with the data at a more interrogative and conceptual level, asking questions

about it, and involved reflection from the researcher (Smith et al., 2009).

When identifying the emergent themes, the researcher tried to reduce the volume of

the data whilst maintaining the overall complexity of it. This involved mapping the

interrelationships, connections and patterns between exploratory notes (Smith et al., 2009).

Smith et al. (2009) and Peoples (2020) both noted that not all the emergent themes must be

incorporated with some being discarded, and as such, some of the emergent themes were

indeed discarded. This was in part down to the focus of the research questions but also since

the researcher aimed to draw together all the key emergent themes in order to describe the

phenomenon (Smith et al., 2009). The processes of abstraction, subsumption and polarisation

were also utilized in order to reorganise the emergent themes. Abstraction was the basic form

of identifying patterns between the emergent themes (Smith et al., 2009). Subsumption was

the process of bringing together the series of related themes, whereas, polarisation examined

the oppositional relationships between themes (Smith et al., 2009). The data was analysed

utilising these processes.

Participants

This study aimed for eight to 12 participants. In total, eight participants were

interviewed for this study. The eight participants worked in various international schools in

south-east Asia, in various leadership roles, and took part in the semi-structured interview protocol. The participants were asked eight questions along with various prompts and clarifying questions. These questions and prompts can be seen in Appendix C. Table 1 outlines the participants demographical information.

Table 1.

Demographic of Participants

	Nationality	Country currently working/residing	Number of years working internationally	Number of years as a leader in an IBDP school
Participant 1	British	Singapore	10	4
Participant 2	New Zealand	Singapore	11	5
Participant 3	British	Singapore	20	15
Participant 4	British	Singapore	6	6
Participant 5	Chinese	Hong Kong	18	8
Participant 6	British	Singapore	10	9
Participant 7	British	Singapore	15	11
Participant 8	South African	Thailand	17	2

Participant 1

Participant 1 had worked in an international school setting for approximately ten years. They had previously worked in China for six years and had been in their current position in Singapore for the last four years. Both of those schools taught the IBDP. During this time, they had progressed from middle leadership to a senior leadership position. Participant 1 had been attracted to working outside of their native U.K. after traveling the region prior to gaining employment.

Participant 2

Participant 2 had worked for approximately 11 years in international school settings in Europe and Asia. All of these schools had been IBDP schools. They had worked in leadership positions such as Deputy Head and IBDP Coordinator. They were attracted to work in this region for family reasons and claimed that it was an attractive place to live. Participant 2 was currently working in Singapore and had been in their current role for over two years.

Participant 3

Participant 3 had worked in international schools for nearly 20 years. They had worked in schools in Australia, China and Singapore, of which, the last 15 years were in IBDP schools. Their current role was Head of Senior School in an international school in Singapore having moved from a sister school in China. Participant 3 had been attracted to this region due to the lifestyle.

Participant 4

Participant 4 had worked for six years in international schools in Brunei and Singapore. Both of those schools taught the IBDP and they had been in senior leadership positions in both of those schools. Participant 4's current role was as Vice-Principal for Pastoral in an international school in Singapore. They had visited the region some years earlier and identified that the region was a nice place to raise a family and as such had sought a role in an international school.

Participant 5

Participant 5 was a Head Teacher and IBDP Coordinator in an international school in Hong Kong. They had been in their current position for six years. Originally from Hong Kong, Participant 5 was educated and trained in Canada, initially working there and also in a British school using the British National Curriculum. They later returned/moved to Hong

Kong and progressed from a teaching role to their current position. Particpant 5 claimed that the region was very attractive for them in terms of career development and lots more opportunities were available to them, particularly as someone who was bilingual.

Participant 6

Participant 6 had arrived in Singapore as a trailing spouse nearly ten years ago, having previously lived in South Africa. Prior to, they had worked as a school inspector in the U.K. Participant 6's current role was Assistant Principal and they had worked in that role for nine years.

Participant 7

Participant 7 had worked internationally for the last 15 years, 11 of those were in International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme (IBDP) schools. All of the positions they had held were senior leadership positions. Participant 7 had previously been in China, Indonesia and was now at a British international school in Singapore. They had been attracted to the region because of the weather. They claimed that growing up in the U.K. they had heard lots about the beaches, and the traveling, the exciting cultures, and difference in cultures and consequently it had always been on their radar to work in the region.

Participant 8

Participant 8 was living and working in Thailand having worked internationally for 17 years. They had previously worked in in Hong Kong, having been in a leadership role for the last two academic years in Thailand. Participant 8 was attracted to work internationally due to the poor salary in their native South Africa. Further, they felt that in their home country teachers were not as respected as much as they are in Asian countries, so this was also an attraction.

Topics and Emergent Themes

The researcher identified emergent themes based upon the initial coding which involved immersing oneself with the data identifying descriptive comments, linguistic comments, and conceptual comments. Table 2 highlights the themes that emerged from the data.

Table 2.

Emergent Themes and Subthemes

Themes	Subthemes
1. Understanding of the Concepts of School Climate and Culture	Not Applicable
2. The Importance of Culture and Climate	Not Applicable
3. The Role of a Leader	1. Recruitment 2. Measuring School Culture and Climate
4. Positive Practices	1. Open-Door Policy and Building Relationships and Trust 2. Positivity 3. Communication and modelling of the intended culture 4. Using the Mission and Values Across the School 5. Professional Development
5. Recognizing Challenges	1. Managing Expectations 2. Cultural Differences 3. Staff Changes and Retention

	4. Economic and Competition
6. The Impact of Leadership	Not Applicable

Theme 1: Understanding of the Concepts of School Climate and Culture

The participants had a firm understanding of what the terms meant and were able to articulate the differences between the two terms. Only one participant claimed to not be 100% sure of what the terms meant, but still gave an accurate definition, claiming that climate was the contextual environment, whereas the culture was the school's overall approach. Participant 3 described the culture as the unspoken expectations and norms that those in the school work by and are guided by. Participant 3 commented that the culture is the core purpose, the mission and values of an organisation with climate being the lived experience of them. One participant noted that culture is the words on the wall that send out subliminal messages as well as even the structure of the school day or the environment of the buildings, with Participant 4 stating these "should run all the way from students to teachers to the wider community." Participant 6 noted that culture is set out through a school's mission statement and another participant stated that culture is "famously called 'the way we do things here.'" Participant 3 stated that a positive climate is one where there is an alignment between what is said and what is done. Similarly, Participant 4 stated that the culture of a school is "what you're trying to set out, hopefully in line with your mission and your vision, and how you want your ethos of your school to be", differing from climate since they claimed that a school's climate is where you are in relation to that, at a point in time.

The participants also noted that climate is susceptible to change and as Participant 2 noted it is "temporal." Participant 6 noted that climate is the sort of thing that can change more regularly. Participant 7 noted that a reason for a quick change in climate might be "if leadership suddenly changes, or if you have a crisis like we have right now. Then the climate

of the school can become quite different, I think." The crisis they were referring to was the Covid-19 virus pandemic that was impacting the region at the time. The participants' responses here demonstrated their knowledge of the concepts of culture and climate and the participants were able to differentiate between the two successfully. Furthermore, clearly from the swiftness of the participants' responses (except for one participant who admitted they were not sure of the terms), it was evident that the participants were confident to discuss the concepts.

Theme 2: The Importance of Culture and Climate

The participants were asked whether they thought the two concepts of school culture and climate were important to a school, and if one was more important than the other. All of the participants felt that the culture and climate were important to a school with Participant 2 stating "it's the reason that parents will send their kids to the school; because of the culture." Participant 3 stated that since the culture of a school is what drives it and is its values, then it is important, since it influences the decisions that are made. Participant 3 stated that climate is equally as important since the climate is those values in action and as such climate is important because if those values are not being lived then "there's not a lot of point of having it in the first place." Similarly, Participant 4 stated that "I think your culture is key, but if it's actually going to be successful, the climate has to be in line with that." One participant spoke of the impact that the school culture has had on them, and described that it was:

> Something that has kept me here…the fact that we're trying to create kids who want to serve others and give back. My background is in challenging areas in the UK, so I went into teaching to support kids who wouldn't otherwise have a chance in life. And when I came here, I was immediately worried that I would be teaching a load of sport and would I get enjoyment from that? So, I think I've needed that mission statement here and our scholarship program, which is amazing. And our focus on creating kids

who care for others, so that has kept me here. I mean there are other aspects of school

culture as well that have kept me here.

With regards to the importance of culture and climate in relation to the change and

development of them, Participant 7 said that since climate is "probably more reactive than the

other in many ways [and because of this] I think it's harder…to change the path of the

culture." From the data that was collected it emerged that when asked about the importance

of climate and culture to a school all of the participants responded that they believed that

school culture and climate were important. This seemed like a significant finding to the

understanding of the phenomenon since it shows that leaders both understand the concepts

and their importance. However, how these concepts were addressed through the leadership in

the contexts of the participants' respective schools differed.

Theme 3: The Role of a Leader

The participants saw leadership as being an important part of how the culture and

climate of a school are shaped. When asked what the specific role of a leader was in relation

to the fostering of positive school culture and climate, Participant 6 stated that "a leader is the

model and guide for everyone else." Participant 5 stated that "as the leader, you promote

positive culture and climate." Participant 5 further described that as a leader one should try to

listen to others and come to decisions that benefit most of the different stakeholders of a

school since a leader's job is to make a decision which "gives benefit to most of the parties."

Participant 7 said, in relation to the role of a leader and implementing change, "I think if you

want to change the culture, you have to get right in, dig in deep, and know that it could take

quite a while for it to change direction if you want it to." This suggests that Participant 7

understood that any change in culture can take time, but a leader was important in fostering

that change.

Subtheme 1: Recruitment

Participant 6 spoke about the importance of recruitment in the fostering of school culture and climate describing that, if you are in a school where you are trying to create a certain culture, a leader must look to bring people into the school that fit the culture that is desired. Similarly, Participant 7 noted that sometimes a leader may need to 'move-on' teachers who do not fit into a school's culture or climate. They said:

> If they [teachers] are doing their job perfectly well and they're ticking all the boxes, that's fine. But if there are people that we feel are not fitting the philosophy, and the ethos, and the culture, or the climate of the school and that's rubbing against other people, then we would talk about whether or not that is the right work environment and right person for the job.

Participant 5 spoke about a conversation that they had with another leader in a different international school concerning recruitment. They said:

> They've said they want to create this family feel. So, they are looking for people who fit that family, that give a bit more time and offer holistic education. I don't think we've necessarily looked for that specific thing, other than some sort of service-related aspect. It's been more focused on our expectations for teaching and learning and do people understand what we consider to be good.

It was noted by Participant 8, too, that matching people to the school's culture is important. They said that in their school:

> Where we do have a mission and vision that's based around mindfulness, sustainability, cultural diversity, you do get people who come here for jobs and who don't stay because their whole life doesn't actually match the same mission and vision.

Despite recognising the importance of recruitment, Participant 6 insinuated that recruitment at their school had not considered the overall culture enough. This seemed to be a quite

reflective statement and something that had only just occurred to them during the interview.
Participant 6 contemplated:

> I think there's probably a bit too much of 'good teachers look like this'. And we're
> checking that the people we get, fit what we class as good teachers without trying to
> specifically look towards a certain culture.

This suggested that Participant 6 may, in future, consider the overall culture of the school
when recruiting teachers.

Subtheme 2: Measuring School Culture and Climate

One common role of the leader that was described by some of the participants was the
act of measuring the culture and climate of the school. The most common way that the
participants claimed this was done was through the use of surveys. Participant 4 said:

> There's certain functions of measuring climate in terms of we've got a variety of
> surveys that are given to all, which I think is really good, as a school, that we do that,
> and I think it's good practice and should be good practice, but I think some leaders
> might see that as being quite brave, but it shouldn't be. It should just be the norm,
> which I think is a really good standard way of doing it.

Participant 5 noted that the use of surveys in their school extended to all stakeholders,
claiming they conduct them "to see what the parents think, what students think, what teachers
think." Similarly, Participant 1 noted that their procedure where "every two years we create
separate surveys for staff members, for students and for parents and wider stakeholders."
Participant 7 also noted that:

> We do a school survey every year. We do it in individual schools, but we also do
> whole school. We do different kinds of surveys. We do one that's for the parents,
> staff, and children, which is more about the education that's provided and the pastoral
> side here. But then we also have wellbeing surveys through the school as well, and

employee engagement surveys, which picks up a lot more; also how the climate feels
to people on the ground. Which you can, in a school this size, lose touch with very
quickly. That's really helpful, I think, for gauging. People are a bit more honest when
they know it's anonymous.

Participants who stated that their schools do indeed measure school culture and climate were
probed as to how the measurement tools were developed. Only three participants could give a
specific answer. Participant 6 answered:

They are all developed by the senior leadership team. So, the Head at the time sent us
a load of examples of different surveys and we looked at them and decided which
ones we liked most. And together, we worded the questions around those.

Participant 1 said, "before each of those surveys is released, we review whether we need
additional sections or questions or statements, whether what we've used previously is still
right to use at that particular time." However, Participant 5 said:

We discussed, last time, about adapting them and changing them. There have been
additional questions added. I'm aware of that. One of the reasons, when we discussed
about changing some of the questions, was that it was felt, by the principal at the time,
that we shouldn't change, because we can't then compare against previous years.

Participants were then further probed and asked what was done with the data from the
surveys once it had been collected. A common response was that it was analysed and
reported upon and then, if agreed upon by the senior leadership team, action may be taken.
Participant 5 said:

Yeah, basically I will take that and analyse those data, and come up with maybe pages
and pages of reports. Then that's going to be discussed in the senior management team
meeting. So, of course, we would make that judgment as to what are some of the
practices that the shareholder recommends, and that it's feasible or not. Any cost

implications, whether the parents' expectations are beyond the line or acceptable, and

then we use it to make amendments to the school action plan which, let's say, try to

deliver it, or make that improvement, let's say, the following year.

Participant 5 answered simply, "we use that for continued school improvement."

Participant 8 found the data that they collected very useful as a measure of the wider

communities understanding of the school's mission and values describing that during a recent

accreditation survey, they described that it was found that "we had like 90% of our whole

community who knew the vision and the mission, which is also impressive." However, not all

of the participants had the same positivity. When asked about the usefulness of the method of

measuring the school culture and climate and the usefulness of the data that was collected,

Participant 1 said "I think as a school we're very top heavy with survey work." Similarly,

Participant 2 said:

> We collect more data here than anywhere else I've been... But it's quite quantified
>
> data. Whether that actually adds up to be meaningful is debatable. Just because we
>
> collect lots of data and we do lots of surveys doesn't necessarily mean we actually
>
> understand our own.

Further, Participant 2 continued "We sort of sit down…and last time everyone was looking

for excuses to explain and looking at the elephant in the room that's staring you in the face."

Participant 1 also questioned the use of surveys, particularly the timing of them. They

complained:

> They're always done at the same time of the year; I don't think they go out at a
>
> particularly good time of the year. I think it's time when staff are maybe particularly
>
> stressed and tired, so I think that could be re-looked at.

Despite surveys being the most common method of measuring a school's culture and/or

climate, not all of the participants measured the culture and climate in their schools.

Participant 3 said:

> We don't measure it. I wouldn't go so far as to say we're even looking at impact of it.
>
> But we talk about it. But actually, it's not cultural, it's more we talk about values and
>
> we talk about decisions being driven by values.

Participant 6 was similar in their description, claiming that culture and climate were not

things that were specifically addressed or spoken about directly. They said:

> I mean we do have aspects within the culture, so we've been looking at things. Part of
>
> our mission statement is that the kids lead to serve and do they actually need to serve.
>
> So, we're looking at doing stuff…to find out whether the school culture we're hoping
>
> to ingrain in the kids, is actually carried on when they leave and go to other places.

This suggests that whilst the participants all understood the concepts of school culture and

climate and each acknowledged the importance of culture and climate to a school, they were

not necessarily specifically addressed in their respective schools. This seemed to be in part

due to the participants not seeing their specific roles as being directly responsible for the

shaping of the overall school culture and climate. Whilst they saw leadership as being

important, they did not feel a responsibility for setting what the school culture should be,

even though some of the participants felt they had (and should) have some influence on

school culture and climate. They thought their responsibility rested in modelling the expected

culture, through recruitment and through the measuring of culture and climate.

Theme 4: Positive Practice

The participants were asked about what specific leadership styles, techniques and

practices they used to foster a positive school culture and climate. The responses were wide

ranging. Some participants highlighted some very specific practices whilst others described

more general leadership philosophical approaches. The subthemes of the emergent theme of Positive Practice are detailed below.

Subtheme 1: Open-Door Policy and Building Relationships and Trust

The participants were asked to describe in some depth the styles and techniques that they specifically use in order to foster positive school culture and climate. Participant 1 described their ideas on having an open-door policy detailing that and it allows for them to "get the read on the people that I was working with at the time." Similarly, Participant 4 noted that they had an open-door policy, too, and also related this to the development of relationships within their teams and their own capacity for emotional intelligence. Participant 4 stated that:

I've got fairly decent emotional intelligence. I'm speaking to the staff and not just about work-related [things], having that relationship with staff, and also trying to bear in mind the pressures and issues that they're going through, so not that top down approach.

Participant 7 also commented on the building of relationships and that it should come from a place of honesty since it builds trust. Participant 7 explained:

People are more likely to open up to you, because then you build trust, because people will see that you're listening, you're watching and observing, and you're not making any decisions about next steps without them being part of that process and coming along with you. I think that's really key.

This seemed like a very important part of Participant 7's leadership style and they spoke with enthusiasm regarding it. Similarly, building relationships with their staff seemed to be a common practice amongst the participants.

Similarly, Participant 2 spoke about their ideas around distributed leadership saying that those in leadership should "distribute their leadership and [if] they trust in middle

leadership, then the flow on effect of what they do will be more significant if they've got people on the ground, spreading their values." Participant 4 said:

> I think my leadership style is pretty collegial, especially with my close team. I think, because it's become a bigger school it's hard to do that wider, but I do try to ensure that when introducing something new like the wellbeing service, started off as a small group and then got bigger. Trying to ensure that when we do introduce new things there is opportunities of training and getting that feedback.

Whilst not a common theme, this can be related to the comments made by Participant 7 who, in relation to their own leadership outlined the importance of building relationships through being honest. Participant 7 believed that:

> Certainly, as a new leader coming in, I think one of the crucial things is to be a newbie, is to be unqualified, and to be open about that. Say, 'I'm the least qualified person in the room because I don't know your school yet.' Actually, to take a long time, not rush to change things before you fully understood where decisions have come from and why things have become how they have been.

The responses by the participants suggest that the process of building relationships and trust can be achieved through a variety of practices, most notably having an open-door policy, showing emotional intelligence, 'getting to know' their subordinates and being honest with subordinates.

Subtheme 2: Positivity

Participant 1 claimed that they always try to be positive, referencing the work of Sir John Jones. According to the website of Sir John Jones (2020), Sir John Jones worked most of his professional life in challenging schools across the North West of England and has a reputation for straight talking, leadership and creativity in education. Participant 1 said of Sir John Jones that:

He talks about the power of positivity and as a leader from a middle leader to a senior leader, you have to be in that positive voice that no matter what sort of day you're having you have to be that positive voice for the staff that you lead, the staff that you work with, the parents and the students that may well come through your office door.

Further adding that "you have to be that positive sponge." Participant 5 had a similar response and said:

As the leader, you promote positive culture and climate. So that's the conditions you try to build up across the board, so that it benefits different stakeholders, like student, parents, school board, teachers, et cetera. So apparently, they all have different perspectives.

Whilst not a common theme across all the participants, it seemed that for Participant 1 and Participant 5 that the power of being positive was important to them and their leadership styles.

Subtheme 3: Communication and Modelling of the Intended Culture

Most of the participants when asked what specific practices they used to foster positive school culture and climate related it to the communication of their school's mission and values. Participant 8 said that they felt the communication of the vision and values of the school help to foster a positive school culture and climate. Participant 1 claimed:

I think a big piece around culture in school is, is about communication. And within that you've got systems and structures. what do we have to communicate, what kind of methods do we use that communicate with, with parents, stakeholders, community members?

Participant 8 had similar sentiments, stating one way in which they did this was by spending time with the parents of students, in particular, the proudly stated:

We offer so many parent sessions. We offer parent sessions with the principals. We offer parent sessions with the PYP [International Baccalaureate Primary Years Programme] and MYP [International Baccalaureate Middle Years Programme] and DP [International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme] coordinators. We offer mindfulness for parents every week, and we offer it in Chinese, and we offer it in Thai, and we offer it in English.

Participant 3 explained how the values were communicated in their school:

So, there's big staff talks. We have little cards with our values on and we're supposed to reflect back on those whenever we're making decisions…So in bold there'll be keywords like relationships, empathy, integrity, challenge, whatever the words are. So, it's reinforced in that.

The communication of the values and missions was more about ensuring that they were in everyone's consciousness according to Participant 3. This was in part due them being inherited by a sister school of theirs since they do not "own them" even though they would be "ones that if we sat in a room for a week, we'd come out with similar things, anyway." Participant 3 said:

We do have reminders of our values and our vision and mission and all the various other things we've got, because we need reminders cause there's so many…we need reminding of them, actually, often, because we haven't built them, we don't have flexibility around editing them or changing them or being responsive in how they are. So, we need reminding of them.

Participant 3 continued that communication of these values and the overall mission was "just really talking about it and trying to get it embedded." However, they noted, when reflecting on the usefulness of these to foster a positive school culture and climate:

I think it's down to whether the college, as an individual organization, chooses to own it and work with it, or chooses to just say, "Well, it's there and it exists, but we're just going to put it on the shelf until we have to talk about it twice a year."

Participant 8 claimed that they go far beyond simply communicating the mission and values, and claimed:

We live the mission and the vision. It's clear to everyone. And so, I think if you create something that's visible for the community to see, and that the community's involved in the service and they see it in real life, then I think it's positive. And you have to have an excellent marketing team as well.

Modelling the expected culture and climate was a common theme described by some of the participants in relation to positive practise. Participant 1 said "I think it goes back to that sort of adage of walking the walk." Similarly, participant 3 said:

I don't think they [leaders] necessarily need to drive it, but in every interaction that they're having, they've got to model that as being part and parcel of how decisions are being made. And I guess people are looking to the school leadership teams for the example, especially in our school where it's sometimes difficult to know who to look at for how to do things, because the person in the classroom next to you might have only been there for six months or a year and everybody is still learning. So people tend to look to the people who've been there a few years or a leadership team, to say, I can take cues from there and the absence of what I do in this situation or as an explicit instruction, I can take my cues from those around me and how they're doing things. I think the leadership team is important there, that we need to do that consciously, explicitly, consistently, for whatever point in time someone might be using us as a cue to how to behave or how to be informed in a decision.

Further, Participant 7 saw the modelling of the expected culture as being extremely

important. Participant 7 said, with regard to the modelling of expected culture:

> I think it's essential. Personally, I think walking the talk and being the model of the
>
> culture, you want to see represented in the school is really important and really
>
> crucial. I've been in schools where a change of principal (who could be very far
>
> removed from your day-to-day operational existence in the school) can have a
>
> massive effect on the climate of the school overnight. People can go from being very
>
> optimistic and collaborative to being very toxic, very quickly.

Participant 6 suggested that a leader has to follow the expected culture, even if a leader does

not necessarily agree with it, and claimed that:

> Five minutes ago, I was telling a staff member that he needed to wear a tie. I couldn't
>
> care less whether the staff wear ties or not, but it's part of what has to happen at the
>
> school. And so, I do my bit to follow it and make sure we're all doing the same thing
>
> and have a happy atmosphere between people.

Based upon the participants' responses they collectively felt that having a clear unified

message was important, describing the ways in which this was communicated. Alongside

having this message, according to the participants, they also felt it was important to ensure

that they modelled the expected culture and behaviour.

Subtheme 4: Using the Mission and Values Across the School

One common theme that emerged from discussion about specific practices that the

participants use in order to foster the positive school culture and climate was that of using the

mission and values of a schools as part of any decision-making process in all areas of the

school. Participant 1 contemplated:

> I think if we're going to use our mission statement as a bit of a default in those one to
>
> one conversations with students in reflective thinking, whether it's in the classroom,

whether it's in the field, whether it's on trips and expeditions actually having a Senior

Leadership Team, having everybody live by these values is really important.

Similarly, Participant 8 felt that living by the mission and values needed to be something was

schoolwide. Participant 8 commented:

Both the staff and the students always look to us to see if we're living the mission and

the vision. So, if we're looking stressed out and burnt out and tired, they were like,

"Oh, but we're a mindful school. How come all the leaders look like they're burnt

out?"

When the mission and values are not lived across the school, according to Participant 3,

issues may occur. Participant 3 thought:

Where there's mismatch between what the leadership team is making decisions about

and their motives for making decisions and what the values say. So, I think there's

that. You've got to align with it yourself first. And then for me it is about projecting

that out and in a conversation with someone in a forum, to bring it back to how a

decision or a thought or a conflict can be brought back to, "Well if we really believe

that this is what's important, whatever is in, that's who we want to be. Is that showing

integrity, that decision?"

Participant 1 shared similar thoughts and thoughtfully stated that:

I mean I think I've certainly seen occasions where there's been a jamming point

between what we say we are as a school, our vision, this is our mission statement, to

actually some of the decisions that are made on the ground. So that can range from

staffing to looking at questions around professional development.

In relation to leadership using the mission and values as part of their practice, Participant 7

said:

I think even people who you think might not necessarily have an impact on your everyday decisions, that trickle-down effect on the decisions they make or the way they treat people very quickly ripples out. I think it's contagious. Yeah, I think as a leader you're responsible, actually, for modelling what you expect to see, but also addressing issues very quickly. Nipping them in the bud, so that if there is that toxicity, that you locate it, identify it, and sort it quickly rather than letting it go on until it's out there in the community, and building.

Constant review of the mission and values of a school as part of the fostering of positive school culture and climate seemed important to two of the participants. Participant 1 detailed:

I think tantamount to that [the vision of the school] is it has to be something that's consistently reviewed. It's something that from a leadership right through to stakeholders, community members, working with staff, constant review of where are we now as a school?

Participant 8 said that this review was done by the students in their school. Participant 8 described:

We have a run of student leaders and then we meet with them individually. Then they drop into their classes. And then actually, when we re-looked at our motto and our mission and vision, we actually called in the student council down to grade four. So we had grade four to grade 12, and they all analysed the guiding statements and whether it matched what we believed in. So, there's a lot about creating opportunities for students, leadership, student ownership, and then taking that out. And a lot of service, we put a lot of service practices into place.

The approach by Participant 8's school was unique but seemed a very appropriate way to allow students to own and become prominent stakeholders of the culture of their school. However, a common theme that the participants used in order to foster the positive school

culture and climate was to use the mission and values of a schools as part of any decision-making process in all areas of the school.

Subtheme 5: Professional Development

Most of the participants noted that professional development of staff was important part of their respective cultures. This was in the sense of educating their staff about what positive school culture and climate are, but also about having them feel that they are being worked with. Participant 1 noted that, in part, this is asking oneself, as a leader, "What can we do to make this a place where people are proud to come into school every day and find fulfilment within roles?" Participant 1 continued:

> I think the professional development framework is something that's very important. Investing in people. And without going off on a tangent, I think if you look at, I think it's a quote from Richard Branson, "If you train your staff, you should train your staff so well that they can apply for any job, but treat them so well that they won't want to." I think that's certainly something that we're starting to feed into our culture here a little bit more where professional development is a real strength of the school.

Participant 6 explained their schools' approach to professional development saying:

> We've said that we can't afford to pay staff the same as that you'd get at [rival school name] or somewhere else. So, what's going to make us stand out more? And we've said we want to stand out for developing staff. We want staff to come here because they know they're going to get better as a teacher when they're here. And then we get a certain type of staff wanting to come here because of that program as well.

Participant 7 noted that in the context of high achieving international schools that have high expectations, there are also very ambitious staff. With that, Participant 7 felt that managing staff's professional development was something that was important for leaders. Participant 7

said, "we've got very ambitious colleagues in all areas at the school who are very keen to take the next step." Participant 7 continued:

> We have a system where anyone from business support to teaching learning assistants can take on a project point in something, they're interested in. Then we're mentored and supported through that. They develop their leadership skills through it because they work with other ... They are at different levels. They'll work with other people in the school to research, develop, and present their research on that project.

Participant 7 further continued claiming that this has built up a positive culture in the school where:

> People feel that they can have a voice and can say, 'I've been reading about this. This is really interesting. We don't do it this way. Can we have a look at this?' Then giving people the possibility to try that and take the risk, I think that's really important as well.

Participant 7 felt that this ensured that people felt that continuous professional development was not something that was 'done' to teachers but instead is something that one can engage with and pursue. Participant 7 claimed that in their role as a leader it was therefore important to let staff know that they were being supported on that journey, and to try to make it as individualized and as personalized as possible rather than generic, adding to their self-efficacy. Similarly, Participant 1 said that they tried to encourage the sharing of professional development across the school. Participant 7 said that they ask staff:

> When you've been on some training, is this something that can be offered to the wider community and our inside of our professional training sessions? Is it something that can go to department? Is it something, is there a resource, an idea that could be shared that could crosspollinate to different departments?

Theme 5: Recognising Challenges

The participants were asked if they felt there were any specific challenges that leaders of international schools in their region faced. Whilst there were a wide range of responses, some common themes were identified. The participants were able give some good detail as to the challenges that they faced.

Subtheme 1: Managing Expectations

A common theme that emerged as a challenge for the participants was in relation to their managing of the expectations of both staff and parents. Participant 4 put this down to there being a mix of different cultures and religions in their school, in particular, but also due to the international school environment and context being competitive and expensive. Participant 7 described parents in international schools as "interesting" with a wry smile, noting that parents can be very demanding. Participant 7 believed this to be the case since "they're paying a lot of money, and we need to be accountable to them, I feel, in a lot of ways." Participant 4 noted that in their school the parents are "our customer, and they're a paying customer, that does have an influence on a school." This can have a negative impact on the staff according to Participant 6. They described an unfortunate situation in their current school:

> There's quite a lot of pressure from parents. In particular, in certain areas like maths, that parents see as very important. I think there's a particular issue, which I'm spending quite a bit of time on at a moment, about Singaporean staff. And basically racism towards Singaporean staff from Singaporean parents, where they've paid lots of money to send their child to an international school and not to a local school and therefore they are saying, I want an international teacher. So, if they then get a Singaporean teacher, it's why am I paying all this money to get what I had before? And I think for our Singaporean staff, it's a really difficult battle.

According to Participant 7, the demands from parents can result in driven and ambitious staff. Sometimes, this did not have a positive influence on a school since "sometimes their ambitions are a little bit larger, perhaps, than the school can cope with, or other staff can cope with." This resulted in Participant 7 claiming that managing staff members' expectations was a challenge.

However, according to Participant 7 this pressure that staff feel is often self-imposed because "if you're a school that's already in the higher echelons and doing really well, you don't want to lose that status…You're going to keep pushing, and pushing, and pushing yourself. It is a challenge." This led to them concluding that, in Participant 7's experience, the pressure does not actually come from parents. They admitted that whilst they do have some "fussy and particular" parents, for the most part, parents are "actually delightful." This suggests that the high expectations in international schools comes from teachers themselves not necessarily from the school or the parents. However, Participant 8 noted their experience in Hong Kong where there was a demand for academic excellence because "I think that those demanding parents and the Asian society put a lot of pressure on kids and teachers." Similarly, Participant 5 noted that most of their school's parents want the school to do more. They believed that this was the case since international schools are private schools and consequently the parents pay a lot to get the kids enrolled in the school. They concluded that finding a balance between parents' expectations versus the teachers' was a challenge.

These experiences suggest that the pressure is dependent on a school's context. One result of this pressure is that staff may feel overworked. And according to participant 6 they were worried that this was now part of the culture at their school. They continued that they too now feel too overworked to solve this cultural problem. Participant 6 noted that:

And it's not of course something we've specifically set out to do, to make people unbelievably busy. And we have tried specifically to change that. So a few years ago

we reduced the number of teaching a lot of people have, we reduced the class size, we've put in more admin positions, we put about 2 million pounds into just trying to reduce teacher work load.

Similarly, Participant 7 felt that managing this pressure that teachers have, whether self-imposed or from parents, was a challenge. Participant 7 noted that they try to promote a culture where:

Giving the kids a good deal is enough. You shouldn't be killing yourselves over this and getting sick, and feeling like you have to do exactly what ... If everyone else is coming in on Saturday, does not mean that you should be. That's wrong. You shouldn't need to.

The challenge of managing expectations was a common theme across the participants. They described that the expectations were partly culturally specific based upon the region, but also due to international schools being private schools and expensive. This resulted in a sense of pressure being placed upon staff. The leaders that were interviewed believed that managing this was part of their role and that it had an impact on school culture and climate.

Subtheme 2: Cultural Differences

Another common emergent theme that came out of the analysis of the data suggested that a challenge to leaders of international schools in the region of south-east Asia faced in fostering positive school culture and climate were the wider cultural differences of the surrounding society, usually that of the country which their school was in. Participant 2 noted their experience in Bali where, as a society, "anything goes" and how this had a detrimental effect on students doing their homework and such. Participant 3 noted that at their school in Singapore they have to navigate what the local, national and international cultures are, commenting that it is often different to the culture that they wish to see in their school, and in

a school that does not have a diverse student and staff body, the local culture can become dominant and imposing in the school, despite their efforts. Participant 3 said:

> We've got local staff. We have international staff, expat staff, expats who are on local hire and it does it start...You get these lines of division that make everyone see things just slightly differently because of their own context. I think we are coming at this supposedly one direction, one purpose from so many different perspectives.

According to Participant 3, this leads to them "having to navigate that and come to some kind of consensus about how we do things." Participant 7 said that at their school "they developed a different culture that is part of their community and group. Whereas, some of our business support staff, still very much part of the local culture.", causing a challenge. Participant 2 also commented on the idea of a diverse student and staff body claiming that when there is not a dominant culture it can be easier to create a common culture in line with what one is trying to achieve. They said:

> At other schools, even though you've got more nationalities and more different ethnic cultures, if you'd call it that, coming together, then they all naturally share the fact that they've all come from other international schools who've done things in a similar way.

Participant 8 also commented on the diversity within their school, noting that as a policy, their school does not allow for any more than 20% of a certain nationality within its student body so that one culture does not become dominant. Participant 5 claimed that working in Hong Kong and being able to speak both Chinese and English really enabled them to see the differing and sometimes conflicting cultural perspectives in their school. Participant 5's experiences and background were certainly not mirrored in the other participants and is arguably not reflective of the wider population, but it does represent a unique way in which their particular international school has been able to acknowledge the challenge of cultural differences.

Another cultural difference was described by Participant 6 who noted a very personal challenge that they faced which was unique to their school context, based upon its faith. They said:

> I think there are certain aspects of the Catholic ethos that I find a challenge, but I've come into a Catholic school. So, the way I look at it, I don't go into an Indian restaurant and complain that the food is spicy, so I can't come to a Catholic school and complain about their culture. But although there are certain aspects that I find quite challenging, I try and keep that to myself, because I recognize that I've come into a school knowing what it is.

Participant 6 continued:

> Most of them I've avoided, on the basis that it's a Catholic school…and I've got to fit in with their ethos, or work somewhere else. I haven't wanted to work somewhere else, so it's not an issue.

This was a good example of how cultural differences could impact the leadership styles and practices of a leader and how cultural differences might be a process of a leader finding out the existing cultures of a school and adapting the culture and climate accordingly, just as much as it is them fostering the culture that they see fit.

Subtheme 3: Staff Changes and Retention

A significant challenge that the participants noted was in regard to when there are staffing changes and in a school's ability to retain staff. In relation to fostering positive school culture and climate, Participant 4 noted that changes in leadership can have a negative impact, stating:

> I'd say one of the difficulties is if you're in a school where the leadership changes constantly, and that's going from middle leaders all the way up. If that changes and someone comes in new, and it's obviously like, 'Well, I'm bringing my ideas, we're

starting all over again', that it's important then to have that overarching culture of, 'This is what we're doing', otherwise people are coming in and saying, 'Well, this is what I did. Let's bring something new.'

Participant 4 then noted that it is therefore important to have a strategic improvement plan in place and that "everything has to connect to that." Similarly, Participant 7 said one impact of ever-changing leadership can be a layering effect. They described their school where "different leaders have come and gone. They've layered, and layered, and layered, and never taken anything away. I know all schools will feel that as well."

In relation to the turnover and retention of staff in general, Participant 5 noted that whilst their own school's turnover rate was not too high, the rising in popularity of the IBDP in Asia meant that teachers can move around quite a lot since experienced teachers are in high demand. Further, Participant 5 noted that since there are more and more IBDP schools in the region, there is strong competition for staff resulting in competitive salary packages, career advancement or a willingness to train new teachers. Participant 8 had a similar perspective claiming that at their school, where a competitive salary couldn't be offered, they found it difficult to recruit since it requires "a different set of interests when you're doing it out of the goodness of your heart." Participant 1 noted that issues with staff retainment can often be geographical. This could be in light of political situations, such as the unrest in Hong Kong that they referred to, or tensions in general and noted that:

Some schools are really struggling to retain their best staff. We just need to look at recent events in this region to just be aware of and to fully investigate when it comes to decisions that the school is making to move forward.

Participant 7 also noted that political reasons can have an impact on staff retention claiming that sometimes "it's a contextual problem with the environment that you're in, particularly political issues." Participant 1 went on to raise the point that a leader should look at "what are

we doing to really make sure that we are keeping our best staff happy, fulfilled, working well, [giving them] chance to grow." Participant 3 noted at their school they are inducting around 25 teachers every year and this can have an impact on the fostering of positive school culture and climate. Participant 3 said that:

> Every year feels very much like re-saying the same message again and again, and it's not got a momentum yet that you can walk in and see it everywhere and feel it. It's not like that yet. So, for me, we're still just really talking about it and trying to get it embedded.

Participant 7 described the process at their school in order to address this common issue:

> We always evaluate and do a survey, and meet with new staff, as well, and get feedback on induction process and things. One of the things they often say is that they quickly get this sense of keeping up with everybody, that people are so dynamic and committed, and that there's this almost presenteeism. But it's not just presenteeism, is that people just want to do the very best. The more you see that happening around you, the more you feel like you're not doing enough, and you do more.

The result of this, according to Participant 7, can be that the school might simply not be the right fit for a teacher, and they find it a "struggle." Similarly, the local contexts, outside of the school might be a struggle for teachers, according to Participant 8. They claimed that for their school in Thailand that:

> The island is very hard to live on. It's not easy to be in...Everyone wants to live in Phuket, but it has lots of issues with visas and passports and immigration. Some families don't settle, they want the city. They want more, they want public transport. So yeah, small island, those are the types of things. So, I think money would make that easier. But if you don't have it yet, you don't. When they sign [a contract], they

know what they're getting, so they stay for a good two years. But then it takes a lot to

keep them.

Participant 7 described another way to mitigate this issue was helping new staff to:

Understand the differences in the culture they find in the country they're living in, but

also with any organization that they're working in, is key to helping them to settle in

quickly, and understand how to communicate in ways that will help people to

understand what they need and what they want.

Participant 7 continued that they felt that sometimes, particularly for those coming out from

the U.K., that if the member of staff had never lived abroad before, there was a huge

adjustment that they needed to make. They also claimed that this would most likely be

similar in any organization where you have people coming from different cultures to work

together.

Participant 8 noted that in their school, one way they addressed the issue of staff

leaving, which had a negative impact on the school culture and climate, was to make the

students the advocates of the expected culture and climate. Participant 8 suggested that:

They [the students] are the ones who are leading practices, showing teachers how it's

done, getting into class and sitting down and being like oh, we need a mindful

moment before we start our activities. They're constantly reminding us that we need

to follow through.

According to Participant 8, the result of this, and their scholarship programme, is that they

have a hugely committed student body at their school and it is a very strong student-led

school.

Staff changes and retention was a common subtheme that all of the participants

acknowledged as being a significant challenge to their fostering of positive school culture and

climate. Challenges could come about through leadership changes and a new leader bringing

in their own ideas. This could be mitigated by incorporation of a strategic long-term plan.

Other challenges that the participants highlighted in this area were in relation to the growth of

the IBDP and how recruitment is becoming more competitive, with demand for teachers

being high, resulting in teachers being able to advance their careers and engage in significant

training. Further, a country's economic or political status could sometimes make a school

seem like a less attractive choice, resulting schools struggling to recruit and to retain their

best staff. The result of an ever-changing staff can be a loss of momentum towards a common

culture and sometimes unsuitable staff being recruited who find a particular school a struggle.

Subtheme 4: Economics and Competition

Participant 5 and Participant 8 both noted that there is increased competition in the

region with more IBDP schools opening. The participants felt that the increased competition

impacted their own schools' culture and climate. Most of the participants recognised that the

increased competition was a challenge for them as leaders. Participant 1 also recognised and

stated:

> We have to be mindful of the economic challenges in and around Singapore, which I
>
> think all schools here are very much full of, especially with growing competition. And
>
> that seems to be the trend, sort of south-east Asia wide.

Participant 8 noted that all the schools in Phuket are "doing very nicely." However, they

noted that one way to mitigate the threat of the competition is to differentiate yourself from

them. Participant 8 claimed that:

> I think the thing is that we just are so different to everybody. Actually, with the
>
> corona virus we've had a lot of Hong Kong families come to look because they want
>
> to see if there's something else [especially] after the protests and everything in Hong
>
> Kong. They're looking for a different life. People come and don't leave. Children stay.
>
> This is schooling that is just so forward thinking, and so cool.

Participant 1 similarly noted that with the increased competition is it important as a leader to consider the way in which a school is marketed. Participant 1 described:

> When I first joined the school, we didn't really have a marketing team, but now we've had to build an ACO [Advancement and Communications Office] team that looks at making sure that we are a school that some parents come in Singapore would then consider. And I think that's needed investment in time and commitment. Because again our school was full five years ago, six years ago. That's no longer the case.

Increased competition and the rise of IBDP schools in the region has certainly made schools consider their approach and meant that they have, according to Participant 1, engage in marketing exercises that they previously did not have to do. However, it also, according to Participant 8, has allowed parents to seek unique experiences for their children which previously might not have been available to them. The impact of this particular challenge on the culture and climate of a school was not wholly clear, however, it could be argued that the marketing of a school is partly done through promotion of its missions and values, as the participants suggested. Consequently, the fostering of a positive school culture and climate was important to the leaders as it aided with their marketing endeavours, which were becoming increasingly important.

Theme 6: The Impact of Leadership

The participants described a range of experiences along with various leadership styles and techniques that they employed to foster positive school culture and climate as part of answering most of the questions. However, one question asked them specifically about their own impact on the fostering of school culture and climate. This question seemed to trouble the participants, and they found this question difficult to answer. Participant 1 said that they hoped that they were a positive voice in their school, reflecting on their specific role and the developments that they had made to the school's co-curricular activities. They also

commented that they hoped that they had put a succession plan in place for if and when the next generation of leaders come into the school. Participant 3 spoke of how they hoped they had been able to promote a consistency in how they did things were done and the language that they used. Participant 4 said:

> I'd like to think that my leadership has provided an outlet for staff to be able to come to speak to me about the issues that they've had. I think, again, under the previous head, my influence of being able to channel those concerns from staff was very difficult, whilst now, there's certainly a free route for me to speak to the head teacher and say, 'These are the issues.' Then actually being able to sit down with that head and say, 'Well look, this is what we need to do,' and now actually plan for the future.

Participant 6 hoped that fitted in with the mission statement of the school that that they would like to think that they have contributed a huge amount over the time; from the scholarship program, to the service program, to the holistic ethos of the school. Participant 6 noted that they try to get out of their office as much as possible, go see sports fixtures, and turn up to the music and drama "things." Participant 6 said, "I'm saying this is important as a school, what we do." However, Participant 6 also worried that "we have a fundamental problem here with people working too hard." Participant 6 then reflected on their own specific role and responsibilities. Participant 6 stated:

> Certainly, setting up all of the staff development program and the professional coaching program and stuff like that. There are things that I hope I've added to the school on the whole and it's been part of my effort to change it.

This topic proved to be very reflective for the participants and most of the participants chose to reflect on their specific role and the impact that this had had on their respective schools.

Conclusion

This study used an interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) methodology to describe and explain the phenomena of international school leadership and school culture and climate. This study intended to identify key leadership strategies and techniques that can be implemented to initiate change that will foster a positive school culture and climate in international schools, specifically those that teach the IBDP in south-east Asia. This study aimed to identify the key themes of the phenomenon that can then be utilised by leaders in international school settings in order to develop organisational culture and climate.

From the data that were collected it was found that the participants understood the concepts of culture and climate and how they manifested within schools. They noted the difference between the two concepts, acknowledging that culture in their experiences this included the vision and mission of a school, whilst climate was more temporal and can change quickly. With that in mind, the participants all agreed that both culture and climate were important to a school and that they, as leaders, felt that they had an important role in the fostering of a positive school culture and climate. It was found that through their experiences that it was their role to effectively recruit staff, model the expected culture and to measure the culture and climate. However, the measurement of the culture and climate was done differently and to varying degrees in each of the participants' respective schools.

With that in mind, the participants then described the specific techniques and practices that they believed helped to foster school culture and climate. Some common themes were having an open-door policy since in the participants' experiences it was felt that this built trust and relationships between staff. Some of the participants also felt that being a positive voice in the school fostered school culture and climate whereas all the participants felt that communication of the schools' mission and values served as an important reinforcement of the culture of their schools. Similarly, the participants experienced that

using the mission and values of their schools across the school promoted a positive school culture and climate. Further, the participants felt that investing in their staff through professional development was important, too. This connects to the second dimension and third dimensions of the theoretical framework as described by Thapa et al. (2013) that guided this study that claimed relationships and support for professional relationships as part of teaching and learning are dimensions of school climate.

The participants noted that through their experiences there were some specific challenges that they faced, in part due to the international school setting and being in the region of south-east Asia. They felt that managing expectations of both parents and staff was a challenge, as were the cultural differences that they faced in relation to their schools' host countries. A common challenge that the participants experienced was the difficulties in relation to staff turnover and recruitment. Similarly, increased competition due to the increase in the number of IBDP schools in the region was acknowledged as being a challenge. A detailed interpretation of the findings will be presented in Chapter 5. In addition to the discussion, Chapter 5 presents implications, recommendations for action, and recommendations.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Within a school setting, the culture is the "set of norms, values and beliefs, rituals and ceremonies, symbols and stories that make up the 'persona' of the school" (Petersen, 2002, p.10). The climate of a school is the attitude of an organisation (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015). School culture and climate will develop over time as the members learn to solve their problems as a survival mechanism (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015). However, according to Gruenert & Whitaker (2015), everything that happens in a school is a reflection of its leadership and as such, a leader may wish to influence change to their school's culture and climate, particularly if they are not reflective of their own values and beliefs. Therefore, school culture and climate should matter to a leader especially since school culture and climate matter a school (Louis & Wahlstrom, 2011).

The international school setting is a growing market (Machin, 2017). International schools often operate in English (ISC Research, n.d.) catering for the global elite, with many wealthier families seeking schools which engage in global issues of equity and responsibility, yet also have a pull of "qualification capital" particularly to those from less developed and connected areas of the globe (Gardner-McTaggart, 2018). Yet, according to Gardner-McTaggart (2018), in international school settings school leaders face specific challenges which may impact the process and capacity for change of an organisation, particularly in relation to climate and culture.

The purpose of this interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) study was to describe and explain the phenomena of school culture and climate and leadership, identifying key leadership strategies and techniques that can be implemented to initiate change to foster a positive school culture and climate in international schools. Through an examination of the experiences of leaders from the international school setting, the researcher hoped to describe

and explain the perspectives of the participants in relation to culture and climate in international school settings. As part of this study, the researcher conducted one-to-one semi-structured interviews using voluntary participants that were sought from the researcher's contacts, professional networks and through referrals. The data was then transcribed and coded as per the guidance by Smith et al. (2009). The data was analysed for emergent themes and trends using the guidance given by Smith et al (2009) and Peoples (2020). The research questions that guided this study were:

1. How do international school leaders perceive the impact that their leadership has on the culture and climate of a school?

2. What strategies and best practices do international school leaders use to initiate change to foster a positive school culture and climate?

This chapter initially explores the findings of the study in relation to the literature that was examined and the theoretical framework that guided this study; the five dimensions of school climate (Thapa et al., 2013). Then, the implications are presented in relation to those findings. The rest of the chapter subsequently discusses the recommendations for future action and further inquiry into the phenomena of school culture and climate in international schools and the leadership strategies and techniques that best foster them.

Interpretation of Findings

The findings presented in this section of the chapter are based on the descriptions by the leaders that were interviewed in conjunction with the literature that was explored in Chapter 2. Smith et al. (2009) suggested this approach whereby the data is explored in a wider context suggesting one should engage "in a dialogue between your findings and the existing literature" (p. 112). The findings below are organised in relation to the appropriate research question. How the findings relate to the theoretical framework that guided this study are also acknowledged where appropriate.

Research Question #1: How do international school leaders perceive the impact that their leadership has on the culture and climate of a school?

It was found that the participants felt that they had positively impacted the school culture and climate of their respective schools. The participants were also able to define the school culture and climate effectively based upon their experiences and were clearly able to differentiate between the two terms. Further, the participants all felt that in their experience school culture and climate were important and that the role of a leader involved fostering positive school culture and climate through recruitment and measuring culture and climate practises within a school. Across all the findings under the first research question that was used for this study it was found that a leader needs to develop relationships and understanding in order for them to have an impact on school culture and climate.

The participants described their own experiences in relation to their specific roles in a very reflective manner. The leaders felt that they were more impacting when they were able to have autonomy in their roles and were not bound by the leadership decisions made above them. This suggests that they should have a shared understanding with those around them, fuelled by a positive relationship that allows for this autonomy. Louis and Wahlstrom (2011) claimed that principals shape the culture in positive ways when they share leadership and take responsibility for shaping classroom improvements. Burns (1978) noted that decisions are sometimes put off or actually limited due to legislature or decisions that were made prior to their leadership and that the real test of a leader is the level of intended social change that comes about. This suggests that if the leadership decisions can be shared or distributed, then they may be more in keeping with the current needs or the intended changes of the organisation.

Finding 1: Schools leaders understand and recognize the importance of positive school culture and climate in competitive international schools.

It was found that leaders of international schools understood the concepts of school culture and climate and the differences between them. It was also found that leaders believe school culture and climate to be vitally important to a school, however, it was assumed that the participants volunteered to participate in the study because they believed this to be the case. Nonetheless, the participants were clearly able to define the terms climate and culture in relation to their schools. This suggested that the participants were well versed in the importance of school culture and climate much more than the concepts simply being an interest of theirs. The participants were able to distinguish between the two terms effectively further suggesting this to be the case. The participants' descriptions aligned to the claims by Gruenert & Whitaker (2015) who stated that in schools the culture is the values and beliefs of an organisation whereas climate refers to those values and beliefs in action. The participants seemed to further connect school culture and climate to a schools' mission as well as its values. Arguably an organisation's mission is, or at least should aim to be, representative of its values and beliefs, though. This suggested that culture and climate can be much more 'concrete' than the perhaps unwritten beliefs and values that Gruenert & Whitaker (2015) suggested.

All of the participants felt that the culture and climate were important to a school which corresponded to the assumption that maybe participants volunteered to participate in this study because they thought this was the case. For example, Participant 2 stated "it's the reason that parents will send their kids to the school; because of the culture." Despite it being an assumption that the participants only volunteered to take part in the study because they already held this belief, the responses from the participants corresponded to the claims by Louis and Wahlstrom (2011) and Thapa et al. (2013) who stated very simply that school

culture matters to a school. One participant spoke of the impact that the school culture has had on them, articulating that it was a main reason for them to stay in the school for the length of time that they had. The thoughts of that particular participant align to Teasley (2017) who suggested that a school's culture provides a sense of identity. Further, Teasley (2017) suggested that a positive school culture is "conducive to professional satisfaction, effectiveness, morale, and creating an environment that maximizes student learning and fosters collegiality and collaboration" (Teasley, 2017, p. 3). This connects to a general finding that relationships are crucial to a positive school culture and climate. Despite the participants stating that they believed that both culture and climate were important, the participants did not elaborate much on why they thought that was the case. This was perhaps down to insufficient questioning by the researcher during the participants' interviews on this topic. The questions could have probed the participants more on why they thought culture and climate were important. This is also discussed in an earlier chapter.

The participant accounts illustrated that they thought leadership was important to how the culture and climate of a school were shaped. This aligns to the claims made by Gruenert & Whitaker (2015) who say that it is a leader who should transform a culture in a school into a strong and positive one since everything that happens in an organization is a reflection of the leadership (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015). Leithwood (cited in MacNeil et al., 2009) referred to principals as 'change agents' and Teasley (2017) suggested that school leaders are key to the development and maintenance of organisational culture. When probed, the participants discussed some of the key roles that they felt they had in shaping culture and climate at their schools. These were recruitment of teaching staff and measuring the existing culture and climate.

Finding 2: Human Resources and hiring practices are integral to the shaping of school culture and climate.

It was found that recruitment is important in the fostering of a positive school culture and climate. The participants firmly believed that recruitment played a huge part in the shaping of a school's culture and climate. Each of the participants acknowledged that recruitment was part of their own roles as leaders in their current positions, too. This aligns to Morrison (2018) who identified that effectively developing the human resource aspect of an organization is a very strong component for successful change management, including hiring the 'right' people. However, recruitment was also cited by the participants as being the most significant challenges of their roles, particularly in their international school setting.

Blandford and Shaw (as cited in Lee et al., 2012) asserted that a high rate of staff turnover was a challenge for leadership within international schools. According to Gardner-McTaggart (2018), "transience is a real, debilitating problem for international schools" (p. 160). However, Odland & Ruzicka (2009) argued that a moderate degree of turnover in any organization is generally deemed to be healthy and a high turnover of staff may allow for a leader to bring in their own 'people'. Similarly, according to Morrison (2018) having transient staff may allow for people to be removed quicker, and new people with the 'right' attitudes and behaviours brought in sooner.

Despite this, the participants noted that recruitment of staff often proved a challenge since there was a high demand for experienced teachers in the region. Consequently, salary packages were competitive and career advancement and training were commonly offered as an incentive. Therefore, for some smaller schools trying to recruit staff was difficult, particularly in 'less desirable' countries. This also meant that schools had challenges retaining their best staff, according to the participants. According to the participants, issues with staff retainment can often be geographical. This could be in light of political situations,

such as the political unrest in Hong Kong, that was referred to. Further, the participants stated that issues with retaining staff could be down to the school simply not being the right fit for a teacher. This could be related to the overarching finding that relationships are an important dimension in a positive school climate and culture. Yet, the participants suggested that a school not being the right fit for a teacher was particularly a struggle for those in their first overseas post. Odland and Ruzicka (2009) found that there are three causal factors were viewed as influential to staff turnover in international schools. They are administrative leadership, compensation and personal circumstances. The first of these is clearly linked to the relationships that a leader has with their staff, as per the framework by Thapa et al. (2013) that was used as the theoretical framework for this study.

Whilst the participants did not cite their own leadership as potentially being a reason for staff not being retained, they did suggest that leaders and changes in leadership can impact the culture and a climate of a school. The participants of this study felt that when there is an ever-changing leadership there tends to be constant readjustment and a layering effect of new ideas being implemented without old ones being taken away, leading to frustration and confusion thus impacting the culture and the climate of a school. Mancuso, Roberts, and White (2010) concluded that the teacher turnover rate correlated to the perception of a supportive head of school (their leader), along with other correlations that included age and satisfaction with salary. Morrison (2018) also suggested retention of staff is linked to trust in leaders. According to Mancuso et al. (2010), characteristics that defined teachers' perceptions of supportive leadership are closely linked with transformational and distributed leadership. This again suggests the importance of relationships between leaders and their staff as part of a school's culture and climate.

The participants felt that the challenges with staff changes and retaining staff meant that they often felt that they were having to 'start again' or constantly repeat the vision,

mission and values that they wanted. They felt that this meant they never really felt they gained momentum towards the desired culture and climate. According to Gardner-McTaggart (2018), forming stable spaces and enduring traditions of excellence are the biggest challenges that face leaders of international schools.

Finding 3: Measurement of a school's climate and culture are vital to continued improvement processes.

It was also found a leader should measure the culture and climate of a school as part of the continued improvement process. According to Gruenert & Whitaker (2015), having knowledge of an organisational culture and climate helps in understanding individual and collective attitudes, behaviours and performance. Morrison (2018) suggested that if a leader understands the culture of a school, then he/she can carefully cultivate it so that it grows in the desired direction (Morrison, 2018). MacNeil et al. (2009) similarly claimed that a school principal must first understand the school's culture before implementing change. The most common way that the participants claimed that they measured school culture and climate was through the use of climate surveys. Gruenert and Whitaker (2015) suggested that a survey is a useful tool in order to ascertain the current climate of a school, but they also suggested how these should be administered as part of a three-step process in discovering the overall culture and climate of the school. The methodologies that the participants described as part of the surveying that they conducted were wide ranging and the extent to which they acted upon and/or used the data that were collected seemed limited. Gruenert & Whitaker (2015) noted that that it is important for deep discussions to take place in relation to the data, using a learning mindset otherwise over emotional responses to the survey may occur. Perhaps the participants did not subsequently act upon their data due to having an emotional response to it.

Finding 4: The expectations that exist within an international school can be a barrier to a positive school culture and climate.

It was found that managing the expectations of parents and staff was a challenge and that this hindered the fostering of a positive school culture and climate. The participants described that in international schools in the region of south-east Asia that there was a lot of pressure from parents on their schools. This pressure was felt by the participants who described parents as being demanding. The participants also suggested that they felt accountable to the parents since, in this setting, the parents were a paying customer. The participants also felt that since international schools are expensive that they indeed should be held to account by the parents in some way. However, the participants described the result of this being that some teachers felt over-worked as they tried to keep up with the demands. The participants did identify, though, that this pressure might be self-imposed as staff feel like they have to offer more and work more in order to keep up with the demands. According to Blandford and Shaw (as cited in Lee et al., 2012) it was noted that in international schools there are often high but diverse parental expectations. Further, according to Gardner-McTaggart (2018), international schools often cater to the global elite, with many wealthier families seeking a school which engages in global issues of equity and responsibility, yet also has an instrumental pull of 'qualification capital' and cultural appropriation particularly to those from less developed and connected areas of the globe. This may be why the participants felt there was pressure from parents who want to maximise their 'investment'.

Finding 5. Cultural differences within an international school can negatively impact school culture and climate.

It was also found that the cultural differences within international school settings impact school culture and climate. The participants spoke about the challenge that they faced in managing the various cultures that exist in the make-up of their schools. The participants

study described that local, national and international cultural mindsets exist in their schools and managing them proved challenging, since seeking consensus between them was difficult. A study by Walker and Cheong (2009) also reported that leaders had difficulties associated with leading the learning of students from different national and cultural backgrounds. The participants of this study described two ways in which they coped this challenge. One was to ensure that no one culture or nationality amongst the students was dominant within the school. Another way this was dealt with was by having a leader who shared the cultural background of their host country but was educated in the prevailing western mindset associated to international schools. Similarly, Bailey and Gibson (2019) found that cultural differences affected the diverse relationships of school leaders with students, parents, teachers and school owners and that managing the cultural composition of either the student body and/or the teaching staff was a feature of their role as a leader, with many of the principals that were interviewed as part of their study reporting that demographic decisions were an important aspect of their role. Blandford and Shaw (as cited in Lee et al., 2012) claimed that a significant challenge for international school leaders was the cultural diversity of staff, students, and board members as well as conflicts between local and global curriculum standards and expectations.

Research Question #2: What strategies and best practices do international school leaders use to initiate change to foster a positive school culture and climate?

As part of the questioning in the interviews that were conducted, the participants described a wide range of practises that they implemented in relation to the fostering of positive school culture and climate. It was found that having an open-door policy and building relationships and trust were important to the participants. Further, communicating and modelling the intended culture and having significant professional development in place, helped to foster a positive school culture and climate. These practices all linked to the second

and third dimensions of the theoretical framework that was used in this study. This framework as described by Thapa et al. (2013) suggested that relationships and support for professional relationships (the latter under the dimension *Teaching and Learning*) can be considered the important dimensions of school climate and subsequently, culture.

Finding 6: The building of relationships and trust are fundamental to the fostering of a positive school culture and climate.

It was found that having an open-door policy and that building relationships between leaders and subordinates was a positive practice in fostering positive school culture and climate within an international school. The building of relationships, in particular, was a key finding of this study and can be considered to be an overarching finding to the phenomena of school culture and climate. This is discussed in more detail further along in this chapter. According to the participants' experiences, the building of relationships and trust can be achieved through the specific practice of allowing subordinates the freedom to approach leaders. Louis & Wahlstrom (2011) claimed that no professional community can endure without trust between teachers and administrators, among teachers, and between teachers and parents. Morrison (2018) also claimed that a leader needs to develop and maintain the trust between all stakeholders. Further, MacNeil, Prater, & Busch (2009) suggested that school principals seeking to improve student performance should focus on improving the school's culture by getting the relationships right between themselves, their teachers, students and parents. This links to the second dimension of the theoretical framework that shaped this study, the framework by Thapa et al. (2013) that states that relationships are a dimension of school climate. One element of the third dimension of *Teaching and Learning* also suggests that support for professional relationships are important, too (Thapa et al., 2013). One participant also referred to the building of trust in relation to the practice of distributed leadership claiming that if leaders trust their middle managers then those middle managers

can spread the values 'on the ground'. Kotter (2012) promoted the ideas of networks within organisations since people feel they can have a voice and be a part of change. Louis and Wahlstrom (2011) claimed that principals shape the culture in positive ways when they share leadership and take responsibility for shaping classroom improvements. They claimed that "changing a school's culture requires shared or distributed leadership, which engages many stakeholders in major improvement roles, and instructional leadership, in which administrators take responsibility for shaping improvements at the classroom level" (Louis & Wahlstrom, 2011, p. 52). This aligns to the participants' belief that distributed leadership was important to the development of a positive school culture and climate.

In terms of leadership styles and practices in international schools Gardner-McTaggart (2018) claimed that there is an orientation towards collegial models of management and distributed leadership models as a normative trend, with transformational approaches often valued by school principals. A study by Morrison (2018) also identified that being approachable, being a good communicator and having a strong ethical disposition are leadership traits that international school leaders should have This links to the theoretical framework used by this study, in particular, the second dimension of Relationships and the third dimension of Teaching and Learning in the area of support for professional relationships. However, according to Calnin et al. (2018) it was argued that context is important, and that leadership should be context sensitive (Calnin et al., 2018). Further, they pointed out that leaders in an international school setting need to have relational intelligence since the shaping of a school's culture is linked to trust and the developing a strong set of ethical principles between leaders and stakeholders (Calnin et al., 2018). The participants also felt building relationships and trust allowed for them to get to know their teams too, which, could also be a way of identifying them in terms of how to effectively mobilize them towards any desired change. Muhammad (2018) claimed that it is important to identify and

understand the distinct characteristics of teachers in a school since each will behave and interact with the school system, students and each other to create the school's culture. This also links to the second dimension of *Relationships* in the theoretical framework that was used as part of this study.

Finding 7: It is vital that a leader effectively communicates and models the intended and expected culture of a school.

It was found that communicating and modelling the intended culture of a school was important in fostering a positive school culture. The participants felt this could be done through the words that leaders use in meetings, through interactions they have with stakeholders and how they communicate the vision, mission and values of a school. Kotter (2012) suggests that having a vision is important. Similarly, in terms of those leadership characteristics perceived by international school leaders to support a change agenda, one of the top traits identified by Morrison (2018) was being able to create a vision. Kotter (2012) noted to keep the language that it uses simple, using metaphors and examples, dispensing the vision in many different forms, repeating it and to leading by example. Kotter (2012) suggested that having a vision that people can buy into is an essential part of the transformative process since it provides a clear picture of the future that provides the general direction for change, and, it can help coordinate a large amount of people. Muhammad (2018) suggested that a leader needs to successfully identify which of their subordinates are most likely to buy-in to a vision and that they should be targeted specifically. Kotter (2012) further suggested that communicating a vision once it has been created is essential in order for it to be taken onboard by a desired number of people. One participant described how in their school the modelling of the expected culture was done largely by the students. Rutledge & Cannata (2016) described systems within schools that place emphasis on students rather than only adults as the key agents in the school. Rutledge & Cannata (2016) claimed that attention

to the student is a key factor in creating a positive school culture where students can flourish, and surely, in a school, the students are the most important stakeholder.

Finding 8: Significant investment in professional development is essential to a positive school culture and climate.

It was found that professional development plays an important role in the fostering of positive school culture and climate. The participants described that having quality professional development was important to their school culture and climates. This was for a number of reasons. It was found that professional development can make staff proud to come to work since they feel valued and invested in. Further, the participants felt it was important that teachers felt professional development was something that they were a part of, and something that was not forced upon them. Also, it was discovered that in international school settings, in particular, there tends to be very ambitious teachers who need support on their professional journeys. Khourey-Bowers et al. (2004) commented that high-quality, intensive, and sustained workshops, seminars, and courses promote reform-oriented growth in beliefs, pedagogical content knowledge, and disciplinary content knowledge among teachers Peterson and Deal (1998), Robinson and Aronica (2015) and Teasley (2017) also suggested that a positive school culture is one that fosters improvement, collaborative decision-making, professional development and staff and student learning.

Implications for Practice and Theory

As a result of this study, there are several implications for both the practice and theory of how positive school culture and climate can be best fostered in international schools. It was found that relationships are crucial to a school's culture and climate. This was linked to the dimension of *Relationships* as described in the framework by Thapa et al. (2013) which was used as the theoretical framework for this study. The majority of the findings of this study are fall under this second dimension, implying that that relationships are crucial to a

school's culture and climate. Under the third dimension by Thapa et al. (2013) of *Teaching and Learning* support for professional relationships is listed as an element which also applies to the findings of this study. This is discussed further in the first implication of this study.

The second implication of this study refers to the challenges for leaders because it was found that there are several contextual challenges that international school leaders face. As such, it can be implied that a leader must navigate these challenges successfully in order for a positive school culture and climate to be possible and to flourish. Further, in the international school setting, it was found that part of a leader's role in fostering a positive school culture and climate is to measure the existing culture and climate within a school, implying that measuring the culture and climate are important to the fostering of school culture and climate, however, what is subsequently done as a result of the measurement is also important.

The third implication is that, in order for school culture and climate to flourish, an effective professional development programme is essential. This study revealed that there are a number of best practises that can further foster a positive school culture and climate in international schools, particularly when change in culture and climate is desired. It was also found that one specific positive practice is that of providing professional development. Khourey-Bowers et al. (2004) concluded that sustained and intensive professional development influences individuals and school culture, whereas Teasley (2017) suggested that a positive school culture is one where professional development happens.

The theoretical framework that guided this study was the five dimensions of school climate as descried by Thapa et al. (2013). This framework was discussed in earlier sections of this chapter as relating to the findings of this study. However, the fourth implication based on the findings of this study refers to that framework and proposes an adaption to it, making to more applicable to the international school setting and to leaders in such settings. The

findings of this study suggested that not only are relationships integral to a school's culture and climate, but also that staff changes and retention are a challenge for international school leaders and that the measuring of culture and climate are contributing factors to the fostering of school culture and climate. Consequently, this implies that the theoretical framework by Thapa et al. (2013) can be adapted to incorporate these findings making it more applicable to the international school setting.

Not all of the dimensions of school climate as described by Thapa et al. (2013) were discussed by the participants of this study. This could have been, as mentioned in an earlier chapter, due to time restraints, but it also could have been because the leaders did not feel these dimensions as being important to the fostering of a positive school culture and climate. Through using the hermeneutic cycle as part of the data analysis process in order to reach new understandings it was found that the second dimension of the Thapa et al. (2013) framework connected the most to the findings of this study. The second dimension described relationships, and this was reflected in the findings of this study, particularly the areas of respect for diversity and leadership.

Implication 1

Based upon the findings of this study, it can be implied that relationships are integral to the fostering of a positive school culture and climate. The majority of the findings of the study were in some way connected to the notion that leaders need to develop effective relationships across the school in order for school culture and climate to be positive. Whilst it was the second dimension of the framework by Thapa et al. (2013) and one element of the third dimension that was used for the theoretical framework for this study, the findings of this study imply that relationships in international schools are by far one of the most important factors in fostering positive school culture and climate in international schools.

It can be said that the relationships between leaders though their interactions with each other and the autonomy they give each other impacted the fostering of school culture and climate. Further, developing positive relationships with subordinates as part of the hiring and human resources process had a positive impact on school culture and climate, as did allowing subordinates to approach leaders freely as part of an open-door policy. Communicating a vison and modelling the expected culture also arguably is dependent on relationships being developed. Similarly, significant professional development was seen as impacting school culture and climate. However, professional development is only important for staff if they feel that professional development is something relevant and useful to them and their careers. As such, this implies that a leader must get to know their staff through developing relationships with them. Further, leaders also had to contend with high expectations in their schools and as such it can be implied that building relationships with parents would help to understand and balance these expectations. Equally, the varying cultural differences within an international school could be understood through developing relationships with the different groups so that their impact on culture and climate can be lessened. As such, it can be said that the relationships that leaders have across the school have a immense impact on school culture and climate.

Implication 2

The second implication of this study is that a leader needs to navigate specific contextual challenges in the international school setting since they impact the fostering of international school culture and climate. The results of this study suggested that the role of an international school leader is multi-faceted. If change to a school's culture and climate is desired, leaders are expected to navigate specific contextual challenges. Participants felt that it was part of a leader's role to foster positive school culture and climate; however, some of the leaders acknowledged the difficulties that they faced. They felt that recruitment and the

retention of staff, in particular, presented a significant challenge. This aligns to the views of Morrison (2018), Blandford and Shaw (as cited in Lee et al., 2012) and Gardner-McTaggart (2018).

The participants felt when staff are constantly changing it is difficult to build momentum towards a desired culture and climate. Similarly, if there are changes in leaders, then messages can become mixed and layered and the result is that staff become confused, thus impacting the culture and climate. The implication here then is that leaders of international schools need to consider their recruitment practices and how to retain their best staff if they want to foster a positive school culture and climate. However, this also implies that leaders could use the transient nature of teaching staff in order to bring in the 'right' people which aligns to the conclusions by Morrison (2018).

Other challenges that the participants described were managing the expectations within the school, largely those placed on them by parents and themselves, and the diverse cultural makeup of their schools and navigating the dominant ones. There was an implication that pressure came from parents since they are a paying customer and their demands were high, this aligns to the conclusions by Lee et al. (2012). However, this study further revealed that those pressures can also come from staff themselves as they try to keep up with the demands, despite, as acknowledged by the participants, the demands not being the same between parents and for the large part parents being 'delightful.' This could be linked to the diverse cultural makeup of the school since as Calnin et al. (2018) suggested, an international school leader requires relational intelligence alongside other skills, so understanding the specific demands of individuals could be dependent on their culture. The participants suggested that finding consensus between local, national and international cultural mindsets that existed in their schools and managing them proved challenging. Blandford and Shaw (as cited in Lee et al., 2012) also claimed that a significant challenge for international school

leaders was the cultural diversity of staff, students, and board members as well as conflicts between local and global curriculum standards and expectations.

The contextual challenges of international schools require navigation and management by school leaders. This is because these challenges can impact the fostering of positive school culture and climate. This implies that if a leader desires to foster a positive school culture and climate they must successfully manage and navigate these challenges.

Implication 3

When trying to initiate change to culture and climate, this study revealed that there are some specific practices that can foster a positive school culture and climate. According to the participants, part of the role of a leader is to measure the existing culture and climate within a school. This implies that having an understanding of the existing school culture and climate is important before any change or fostering of them can take place. Gruenert and Whitaker (2015) and MacNeil et al. (2009) suggested that it is important to have knowledge of an organisation's culture and climate as it helps in understanding individual and collective attitudes, behaviours and performance. Most of the participants discussed the surveying methods that they used at their respective schools. However, the data that was collected by the participants as part of their surveys did not seem to conform to any distinctive or set procedure and what was done with that data by the participants did not seem to be clear. The responses to the surveys that the participants conducted seemed to serve as a tool for the leaders to measure their own successes as opposed to the results being used as a measure of the participants impact as leaders on school culture and climate or to recognise potential areas of improvement of school culture and climate. The surveys were not clearly used to fuel growth and improvement. This could be due to the over emotional response that Gruenert & Whitaker (2015) claimed can happen when culture and climate surveys take place. The implication here then is that survey data should be used to inform and fuel growth and

development of school culture and climate and it should be easy to identify what changes have come about from any new understanding based on a survey. Further, Gruenert & Whitaker (2015) noted that that it is important for deep discussions to take place in relation to collected data, using a learning mindset otherwise over emotional responses to the survey may occur. It can therefore be further implied that measurement of the existing school culture and climate is important in order to understand potential areas for growth and development.

This study also revealed other best practises that can further foster a positive school culture and climate in international schools, particularly when change in culture and climate is desired. It can be implied that these are therefore important specific practises in fostering school culture and climate. They are having open-door policy, building relationships and trust, communicating and modelling the intended culture and providing professional development for staff. These practices all rely on the building of relationships are discussed in Implication 1, but individually there are some important points to note for each.

According to the literature on these practices, Louis and Wahlstrom (2011) claimed that trust is important to a school's culture and climate claiming that no professional community can endure without trust between teachers and administrators, among teachers, and between teachers and parents. MacNeil et al. (2009) and Morrison (2018) also cited trust as being important claiming that a leader needs to develop and maintain the trust between all stakeholders. Kotter (2012) also ascertained that communicating a vision once it has been created is essential in order for it to be taken onboard by a desired number of people. According to Kotter (2012) a vision is important because it allows followers to buy into any transformative process providing clarity and direction, describing the outcome and providing alignment. Kotter (2012) suggested that when communicating a vision that a leader should keep it simple, use metaphors and examples, dispense the vision in many different forms, repeat it, and lead by example. As such, the findings of this study as well as the literature that

was reviewed imply that these specific practices are useful in fostering a positive school culture and climate.

Having an impacting and engaging professional development programme in a school also helps to foster a positive school culture and climate. Professional development programmes can make staff feel supported in their professional journeys and make them feel valued and invested in. Professional development gives staff a feeling of purpose and identify. It can also be used to educate staff in the expected culture and climate. This implies that significant investment in professional development programmes will help to foster a positive school culture and climate. The participants noted that it was important that teachers felt professional development was something that they were a part of, and something that was not forced upon them. Also, it was discovered that in international school settings, in particular, there tends to be very ambitious teachers who need support on their professional journeys. With regards to professional development, Khourey-Bowers et al., (2004) concluded that high-quality, intensive, and sustained workshops, seminars, and courses promote reform-oriented growth in beliefs, pedagogical content knowledge, and disciplinary content knowledge among teachers and subsequently a positive school culture and climate.

The findings of this study imply that there are several best practices that can be used in order to foster a positive school culture and climate. They are having open-door policy, building relationships and trust, communicating and modelling the intended culture and providing professional development for staff. It can be implied that measurement of the existing school culture and climate is important in order to understand potential areas for growth and development of a school's culture and climate. Providing effective professional development, in particular, is also an important practice that fosters a positive school culture and climate. This implies that if a leader wishes to foster a positive school culture and climate that they should invest in their staff through professional development programmes.

Implication 4

The theoretical framework that shaped this study was a framework developed by Thapa et al. (2013). The framework highlighted a proposed five dimensions of a school climate which in turn are a reflection of a school's culture. These five dimensions are: safety (e.g., rules and norms, physical safety, social-emotional safety), relationships (e.g., respect for diversity, school connectedness/engagement, social support, leadership, and students' race/ethnicity and their perceptions of school climate), teaching and learning (e.g., social, emotional, ethical, and civic learning; service learning; support for academic learning; support for professional relationships; teachers' and students' perceptions of school climate), institutional environment (e.g., physical surrounding, resources, supplies) and a school improvement process. The results of this study align to the framework and suggest that relationships are significant to the fostering of positive school culture and climate. However, since this theoretical framework was not developed with international schools in mind, this study along with elevating the status and impact of relationships can also supplement to this framework and add other dimensions to it; staff changes and retention and measuring of culture and climate. This is because the findings of this study suggested that staff changes and retention are a challenge for international school leaders and that the measuring of culture and climate are contributing factors to the fostering of school culture and climate. Consequently, this implies that the framework described by Thapa et al. (2013) can be adapted to incorporate these findings and to make it applicable to leaders of international schools.

Recommendations for Action and Further Study

Based upon the findings of this study, some recommendations for action are outlined below. One recommendation is that when measuring school culture and climate, the data that is collected by a leader is used to develop and grow a school's culture and climate as part of a

continued improvement process. Another recommendation refers to the specific practices that a leader should employ when initiating change in a school's culture and climate. The third recommendation for action explains the role of professional development in the shaping of school culture and climate. The last part of this section outlines some recommendations for further study.

Recommendation for Action 1: Measure school climate and act upon the findings.

It was revealed through this study that measuring the existing school culture and climate is an important role for a leader in the fostering of positive school culture and climate. It was considered by the participants to be one of the roles of being a leader in an international school in south-east Asia. This was seen as being the main way in which leaders measured their own impact on school culture and climate. The most common way that this measurement was conducted was through the use of surveys. However, when probed, the participants could not outline any specific improvements that had come about through the creation of this data. Instead, it seemed that the participants simply used the collected data as a success indicator of 'how they had done'. If difficult conversations do not take place and change does not come about on the back of these surveys, it is argued that there is little point in having them. As such, it is a recommendation based upon the findings of this study that the measuring of school culture and climate is conducted in-depth and in a non-tokenistic manner whereby the results are used to support changes and development of school culture and climate as a continued process.

Gruenert and Whitaker (2015) provided a range of surveys in their book that can be utilised for the task of identifying a school's culture. They suggested a three-step approach to this whereby firstly a survey is administered to staff which asks participants about their thoughts and opinions about the purpose of education generally. Secondly, it is suggested that a form is completed that asks staff about the elements of their school culture such as what the

school vision is or who staff are proud of, identifying the current culture. The third step is to survey the wider school community in order to examine 'who owns what' and explore the differing perspectives of where responsibilities lie within the school and the ways in which the school culture might contribute to these differences (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015). These three tasks are based around the idea that dysfunction in schools can often be traced to a lack of ownership of certain actions (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015). The participants of this study noted that when they felt they had more autonomy in their roles they could foster a positive culture more in line with their own mission and values. However, the participants, as leaders, felt that the fostering of a positive school culture and climate also required a distributed leadership style. Yet, in this distributed style, it could be suggested that this results in a lack of ownership and relinquishes responsibility from leaders. Gruenert & Whitaker (2015) further noted that it is important for deep discussions to take place in relation to the data, using a learning mindset, otherwise over emotional responses to the survey may occur. Through the use of this surveying methodology the various responsibilities of leaders within a school would be identified and exposed. This identification and exposing of the responsibilities combined with having difficult conversations about them would highlight certain areas for development and potential change. Similarly, it would make leaders accountable for their behaviours. This, in turn, can and should be used to determine where school culture and climate is improved and by which leaders, specifically.

Recommendation for Action 2: Combine a range of best practices in order to develop culture.

This study revealed a range of best practices that were used by leaders in international schools that can help foster a positive school culture and climate, particularly when change in school culture and climate is desired. Aside from it being a recommendation that relationships are developed across the school by a leader, it is also a recommendation based

upon the findings of this study that this is done alongside some best practices that are used in conjunction with one another. As aforementioned in the first recommendation above, a leader initially needs to know what the existing culture and climate are before initiating any change. Then, a clear vision of what the intended culture and climate needs to be generated, this could be embedded within the organisation's missions and values as the participants described and not necessarily the unwritten rules that people learn as they try to fit into a particular group as described by Gruenert & Whitaker (2015). Having the mission and values align to the leader's own, or indeed to the stakeholders', makes implementation and modelling of them more authentic and they are more likely to be used across the school. The participants felt that modelling the expected culture and climate was important, aligning to the thoughts of Kotter (2012) and Muhammed (2018). Further, according to the participants it is important when considering recruitment of staff to bring the 'right' people. This surely involves getting to know them and building relationships. Based upon the participants experiences it is also the recommendation that there is a balance amongst the staff and students of different cultures so that no one culture becomes dominant as this can make culture and climate adjustment difficult. This also means that a leader needs to build relationships and get to know their staff and students. Further, this means that leaders need to have relational intelligence and an understanding of differing cultures. However, this does might impact how schools' market themselves, since, as described by Gardner-McTaggart (2018), it was found that senior leaders in international school settings share rich 'English' cultural capital, and that schools' market this feature. It is therefore the recommendation of this study that all of these best practices should be conducted in conjunction with one another but all the while with the general practice of getting to know staff and developing relationships with them being practiced, too.

Recommendation for Action 3: Invest in and develop people through professional development.

As mentioned in the previous section, a leader needs to get to know their staff and develop relationships with them. This can be crucial in the fostering positive school culture and climate. Yet, a leader also needs to develop and invest in their team for change in culture to take place. According to Khourey-Bowers et al. (2004), sustained and intensive professional development influences individuals and school culture. Teasley (2017) suggested that a positive school culture is one that fosters improvement, collaborative decision-making, professional development and staff and student learning. The participants of this study suggested that professional development was integral to the fostering of positive school culture. The participants proposed that professional development can assist in training staff as to what the expected culture and climate are, it can support staff in their own professional journeys, and it can help to build positive relationships amongst the staff and the leaders of an organisation as staff feel valued and invested in.

Recommendation for Further Study

Based upon the findings of this study, some potential further areas of investigation were identified. These are based upon the methodology that was used for this study and the data that was collected. Further investigation of the phenomenon would help to paint a fuller picture of how culture and climate exist in a school and what the relationship between them and the leader are.

Recommendation from Methodology

The methodology for this study was an interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA). IPA studies are useful for understanding personal lived experience and exploring persons' relatedness to, or involvement in, a particular event or process (Smith et al., 2009). IPA aims to capture and explore the meanings that participants assign to their experiences with

participants recruited for their expertise in the phenomenon (Reid et al., 2005). The recruitment process involved accessing potential participants via the researcher's personal contacts and professional networks through schools' associations with the International Baccalaureate (IB). Potential participants were identified if they met the criteria of currently working in a leadership position (as a senior administrators such as a principal, head or director or in a leadership role as a curriculum coordinator and/or as a middle-manager) and having been in a leadership position for at least two years in an international school in the region of south-east Asia that teaches the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme (IBDP). The region of south-east Asia was chosen because of the growth of the international school market in the region (Machin, 2017) and because the researcher was working there. However, as a consequence, the participants of the study were within the professional network of the researcher. The study could have been enhanced if the participants were from outside the researcher's professional network. This would have ensured that that participants were not influenced by the pre-existing professional network relationship in their responses.

Further, this study used leaders as participants. This study could have been enhanced by seeking the perceptions by staff, students and school stakeholders to ascertain the impact that school leadership has on school culture and climate. This data could have been cross-referenced to see if those directly impacted by leadership had the same perception as the leaders. This would have required a much larger study, or possibly the use of a case study methodology to facilitate such an approach.

Recommendation from Data

The participants of this study identified some positive practices that foster a positive school culture climate. They also identified some challenges that were unique to the international school culture and climate that limited their impact in fostering school culture and climate. Other studies have identified similar challenges (Lee et al., 2012), yet as the

international school markets continue to grow (Machin, 2017) these challenges will need constant readdressing as more schools, students, teachers and leaders enter the market. As such, further study could be conducted into the specific challenges that leaders continue to face, updating the current body of literature.

The positive practices that the participants described were wide ranging. However, these seemed to be best practices that were applied quite generally in order to foster a positive school culture and climate and not directed or targeted at specific change in culture and climate in their respective schools. As such, further study should be conducted on what are the best practises to target specific school cultural and climactic issues within a school. For example, a study could be conducted on what specific leadership practices will help to retain staff since it was identified that this has an impact on positive school culture and climate. This may produce data that would be useful for leaders who are experiencing common issues that are impacting the school culture and climate. Similarly, the general practice of building relationships could be studied to see how impacting this one practice is on the phenomenon of school culture and climate.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to describe and explain the phenomena of international school leadership and school climate and culture. It proposed to identify key leadership strategies and techniques that can be implemented to initiate change which will foster a positive school culture and climate. Two guiding research questions were identified that guided the research in order to investigate this phenomenon. An interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) methodology was chosen for this study. The researcher conducted one-to-one semi-structured interviews utilising the protocol as described by Smith et al. (2009). This study used voluntary participants that were sought from the researcher's contacts, professional networks and through referrals. The data was then transcribed and

coded as per the guidance by Smith et al. (2009). The data was analysed for emergent key themes and trends again using the guidance given by Smith et al. (2009) and Peoples (2020).

The leaders that were interviewed believed that school culture and climate are important to a school. It was found that part of a leader's role to foster a positive school culture and climate. It was discovered that it is a leader's role measure the existing school culture and climate and to foster positive school culture and climate through their recruitment practices. However, there are some significant challenges that leaders of international schools' face. The participants identified that managing expectations, cultural differences and changes in staff changes and retention of existing staff all had an impact how they fostered a positive school culture and climate. Yet, some positive practices were identified that allow for leaders to foster positive school culture and climate. It was found that the general practice of having relationships with stakeholders across the school had a profound impact on school culture and climate. The more specific practices of having an open-door policy, building relationships and trust, being positive, communicating the intended culture, using the mission and values across the school and providing professional development were all positive practices that helped to foster positive school culture and climate.

As such, this study may be useful for leaders and future leaders within international school settings in the region of south-east Asia or those within a culturally diverse school settings, similar to international schools. Further, this study might also be useful for organizational leaders within transformative settings. The types of leaders that might find this study useful would be those looking to change the culture within their organizations. The findings of this study could influence the practices and policies of international schools along with their respective leaders who may wish to, or have been tasked with, developing and transforming a school's culture.

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Appendix A:

Letter requesting for participants (Recruitment letter)

Dear Sir/Madam,

My name is Richard Webster and I am a doctoral candidate at The University of New England. I am seeking volunteers who would like to assist me in conducting research for my doctoral dissertation. You would be assisting in the research on the leadership styles and practices that best foster positive school culture and climate in international schools within the region of south-east Asia.

In order to participate you need to be:

- Currently in a leadership position (as a senior administrators such as a principal, head or director or in a leadership role as a curriculum coordinator and/or as a middle-manager) and,
- have been in a leadership position for at least two years in an international school in the region of south-east Asia that teaches the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme (IBDP).

If you choose to participate you will be required to take part in a one-to-one semi-structured interview that will last around 45 minutes at a mutually agreed time either face-to-face or online, via Zoom (or similar). The interviews will be recorded in video or audio. Your name, location, role and the data collected from the interview will be completely confidential and anonymous. Participation is entirely voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any point in time; even once the interview has started.

During the interview, I will ask you to tell me about your experiences with fostering a positive school culture and climate as a leader.

If you are interested and able to assist me with my research please reply to this email with your preferred contact information. Or, if you know anyone else who might be interested and meets the criteria for participation, do please forward them this email. If you have any questions you can contact me at rwebster1@une.edu or on +6592470169.

Thank you for your time,

Richard Webster

Appendix B:

Consent Form

UNIVERSITY OF NEW ENGLAND
CONSENT FOR PARTCIPATION IN RESEARCH

Project Title: School Culture and Climate in International Schools

Principal Investigator(s): Richard Webster

Introduction:

- Please read this form. You may also request that the form is read to you. The purpose of this form is to give you information about this research study, and if you choose to participate, document that choice.

- You are encouraged to ask any questions that you may have about this study, now, during or after the project is complete. You can take as much time as you need to decide whether or not you want to participate. Your participation is voluntary.

Why is this research study being done?
The purpose of this study is to examine the experiences and perceptions of leaders of international schools in south-east Asia in relation to the fostering of positive school culture and climate, examining what are the best practices and techniques.

Who will be in this study?
There will be between eight to twelve participants. All of the participants will be in leadership positions within international schools that teach the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme (IBDP) having been in a leadership position for at least two years.

What will I be asked to do?
You will be asked to participate in one-to-one semi-structured interviews about your experiences with fostering a positive school culture and climate as a leader. The interview will take around 45minutes. The interviews will be arranged at a mutually acceptable time for the participant and the researcher and be conducted face-to-face if possible. If not, they will be conducted via Zoom, Skype (or similar). The interviews will be recorded and at a later date, transcribed in order to assist with the analysis.

What are the possible risks of taking part in this study?
The are no anticipated risks associated with participating with the study. However, if you feel uncomfortable about participating at any point or about answering a specific question, you can choose to opt out.

What are the possible benefits of taking part in this study?
The findings of this study will add to the body of knowledge surrounding school culture and climate. There is minimal existing literature about school culture and climate within international schools specifically, and as such, the results of this study will be beneficial to

school leaders in the region who are looking to develop school culture and climate within their respective schools.

How will it cost me?
There will be no cost involved for you to participate in this study.

How will my privacy be protected?
The researcher will not disclose your identity or your status as a participant at any point. Your name will not be used in the study's findings. You will be asked not to refer to your school or organisation or any individuals by name at any point during the interview.

How will my data be kept confidential?
You will be asked to sign this consent form. This form requests for permission for interviews to be video recorded if interviews are conducted online, audio recorded if face-to-face and transcribed at a later date. In order for the recordings and transcriptions to be kept anonymous, they will be numbered as opposed to being labelled with your name or organisation. The consent forms will be kept in a secure location in a locked office cabinet with the digitally completed consent forms and collected data being stored on a secure server through use of a password protected Google Drive folder. The consent form and the data will be kept separately so as they cannot be linked. Both the consent forms and the data will be kept for two years after the completion of the study.

What are my rights as a research participant?

- Your participation is voluntary. Your decision to participate will have no impact on your current or future relations with the University.
- Your decision to participate will not affect your relationship with Richard Webster (the researcher).
- You may skip or refuse to answer any question for any reason.
- If you choose not to participate there is no penalty to you and you will not lose any benefits that you are otherwise entitled to receive.
- You are free to withdraw from this research study at any time, for any reason.
    - If you choose to withdraw from the research, there will be no penalty to you, and you will not lose any benefits that you are otherwise entitled to receive.
- You will be informed of any significant findings developed during the course of the research that may affect your willingness to participate in the research.
- If you sustain an injury while participating in this study, your participation may be ended.

What other options do I have?
- You may choose not to participate.

Whom may I contact with questions?

- The researcher conducting this study is Richard Webster.

    - For more information regarding this study, please contact him on +6592470169 or at rwebster1@une.edu. You may also contact Dr. Brianna Parsons at bparsons4@une.edu.

- If you choose to participate in this research study and believe you may have suffered a research related injury, please contact Dr. Brianna Parsons at bparsons4@une.edu.

- If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a research subject, you may call Mary Bachman DeSilva, Sc.D., Chair of the UNE Institutional Review Board at (207) 221-4567 or irb@une.edu.

<u>Will I receive a copy of this consent form?</u>
- Yes, you will be given a copy of this consent form.

GENERAL DATA PROTECTION REGULATIONS (GDPR) CONSENT

The framework that regulates the protection of personal data is the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) no. 679/2016 and applicable in the European Union. As described elsewhere in this informed consent form, during the study, data pertaining to your participation in the study will be generated and recorded. In addition, I will collect from your personal data and/or sensitive personal data. I refer to all such data as "Your Study Data," which will be specifically regulated in the EU/EEA under the General Data Protection Regulation (the "GDPR").

Your Study Data may be processed or used for the following purposes, which I refer to, collectively, as "Data Processing":
• to carry out the study;
• to confirm the accuracy of the study;
• to monitor that the study complies with applicable laws as well as best practices developed by the research community;
• to comply with legal and regulatory requirements, including requirements that data from this study, without information that could directly identify you, be made available to other researchers not affiliated with the study sponsor or with the study team. It is possible, for example, that as part of efforts to make research data more widely available to researchers, regulatory authorities in some countries may require that Your Study Data, without information that could directly identify you, be made publicly available on the internet or in other ways.

The following entities and organizations may engage in Data Processing of Your Study Data:

• the researcher: Richard Webster
• the ethics committee or institutional review board that approved this study; and I may disclose Your Study Data for Data Processing to entities and individuals located in the United States or in other countries where the laws do not protect your privacy to the same extent as the laws in your country of residence.

However, all reasonable steps will be taken to protect your privacy in accordance with the applicable data protection laws. We have entered into a data transfer agreement with [recipient], which is based on standard contractual clauses approved by the European Commission and ensures an adequate protection for Your Study Data.

The GDPR gives you certain rights with regard to Your Study Data. You have the right to request access to, or rectification or erasure of, Your Study Data. You also have the right to object to or restrict our Data Processing of Your Study Data. Finally, you have a right to

request that we move, copy or transfer Your Study Data to another organization. In order to make any such requests, please contact: Richard Webster at rwebster1@une.edu. I will retain your Study Data to comply with our legal and regulatory requirements. I will keep it as long as it is useful, unless you decide you no longer want to take part. You are allowing access to this information indefinitely as long as you do not withdraw your consent.

The recorded interview(s) will be transcribed via transcription service, Rev.com. This transcription service keeps all files securely encrypted and requires all transcribers to sign confidentiality agreements. You may withdraw your consent at any time. If you withdraw your consent, this will not affect the lawfulness or our collecting, use and sharing of Your Study Data up to the point in time that you withdraw your consent. Even if you withdraw your consent, I may still use Your Study Data that has been anonymized so that the data no longer identifies you. In addition, we may use and share Your Study Data that has been pseudonymized (by removal of your name and certain other identifiers so that the data does not directly identify you) as permitted by applicable law.

You explicitly consent to the collection, use and transfer of Your Study Data, which includes possible sensitive personal data, for the purpose of carrying out the research study and know that you can withdraw your consent at any time, and we will stop processing your personal data, except as described above.

_____

Participant's Statement

I understand the above description of this research and the risks and benefits associated with my participation as a research subject. I agree to take part in the research and do so voluntarily. I give my informed consent for the interview to be audio recorded and transcribed by a third party where it is necessary for this research study. I give my informed consent for direct quotes from the interview to be used in the research study and I understand that no personally identifiable information or characteristics will be used in the research study report.

 I explicitly consent to participate in this study.

_____
Participant's signature or   Date:
legally authorized representative

_____
Printed name

Researcher's Statement
The participant named above had sufficient time to consider the information, had an opportunity to ask questions, and voluntarily agreed to be in this study.

_____
Researcher's signature   Date:

_____
Printed name

Appendix C:

<u>Interview Protocol</u>

Interview Date:
Interview Time:

Thank you for taking the time to meet with me today. I am currently enrolled in the doctoral program at the University of New England. The topic of the study is the leadership styles and practices that best foster and positive school culture and climate. The focus of the study will be international schools, specifically ones in south-east Asia who teach the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme (IBDP).

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed and with your consent I would like to record our interview, transcribe and analyse it at a later date, and then use the findings in my dissertation.

Your identity or your status as a participant will not be disclosed to any other participants or the public. Your name will not be used in the final written findings. In order to further protect your identify, please do not to refer to your school or organisation or any individuals by name at any point during the interview. If there are any questions that you would prefer not to answer, you are not obliged to do so. Similarly, you can opt out of participation at any time.

The interview will last approximately 45 minutes and I may ask follow-up questions to gain clarification or further insight.

Do I have your consent?

Distribute the consent form at this time if not previously been collected. Ensure it has been completed correctly.

Do you have any questions about the interview or the study before we begin?

Begin recording the interview.

Firstly, I would next like to gather some background information:

- How many years have you been teaching internationally?
- How many of these years were in schools that taught the IBDP?
- How many years have you worked in the region of south-east Asia?
- For how long have you been in a leadership role in a school that teaches the IBDP?
- Were all of these years in south-east Asia?
- What attracted you to come and work in the region?
- What are the specific challenges in relation to leadership to working in this region?

Q1: I would now like to ask you what you think school culture and climate are.
   a. What is the difference between school culture and school climate?

Q2: What are your thoughts regarding the importance of school culture and climate to a school?

a. How do you think the culture of a school impacts its stakeholders?
b. How do you think the climate of a school impacts its stakeholders?
c. From in your current position, please describe an example of when the culture and/or climate of a school has had a positive impact on your school.
d. Please describe a time when the school culture and/or climate has had a detrimental effect to your school.

Q3: Can you please describe how your current school measures school culture and climate.
a. In your current school how do you assess the culture and/or climate?
b. What measurement tools or instruments do you use?
c. Where did you get those tools from?/How were they developed or adapted?

Q4: What do you think is the role of a leader in relation to the fostering of a positive school culture and/or climate?
a. Why do you think/not think that it is a school's leadership who should foster school culture and/or climate?
b. Why do you think school leaders need to pay attention (or not) to school culture and/or climate?

Q5: What specific practices have you used in your school in order to foster a positive school culture and/or climate?
a. In your experience as a school leader, what do you think are the best practices for fostering a positive school culture and/or climate?
b. What are the specific leadership practices, styles or techniques that you think best foster a positive school culture and/or climate? How have you used them?
c. Please can you describe some specific leadership strategies that you have used in order to develop school culture and/or climate? Why did you choose those strategies, specifically?
d. What was successful? What was not so successful? Why do you think that was the case?

Q6: What impact do you think your leadership has had on the school culture and climate in your current role?
a. Do you think that there needs to be a change in the current school culture and/or climate in your current school? Why/why not?
b. What was it that made you think that there needed/needs to be a change in the school culture and/or climate in your current school?
c. How do you relate the leadership practises/styles/techniques that you have used to the current culture and climate of your school?

Q7: What other specific styles, techniques or practises do you think may foster a positive school culture and/or climate what you have not employed or used?
a. Why have you not employed them?

Q8: As a leader of an international school, what are the specific challenges that you feel that you face with regards to the development of school culture and climate?
a. Are these challenges specific to your school? Or to international schools, or schools within the region?
b. How do you address these challenges?

These are all the questions that I have.

Do you have any questions that you would like to ask?

Time for questions.

Once again, thank you for agreeing to participate in the study. Your insights will be extremely useful towards my study. Once the dissertation is near the completion stage, I will share it with you so you can undertake what's called 'member checking' so that you can check the accuracy of the account and I will ask you about the findings of the study. I will do this in writing or by your preferred method of communication. Do you have a preference?

Thank you for your time.