

Abstract: What are the catalysts for a career in international schools?

[Editor's Note: The full text of Dr. Zilber's research may be found on the AAIE website, aaie.org]

What are the catalysts that send educators on a career path into international schools around the world?

What factors in their life experiences acted as a catalyst to seek out or agree to the initial opportunity or offer? What deep-seated reasons pulled at them and gave them the courage to jettison themselves into a new world? Rich and compelling quotations were incorporated giving voice to participants' experiences and the development of what this author calls the W4: wonder with the wide world.

I hypothesized that there are very specific, indelible, and early life events which influence a future wanderlust, i.e. a wonder with the wide world (W4) and/or a passion to see and experience it. These, then may become the catalysts, or pull-factors, for launching oneself into self-initiated expatriation in international schools.

Ninety-four responses answered the prompt "What were the catalysts which set you off on your international school career path? What events, observations or people had an impact in your decision-making?" Data was coded into themes that emerged through a grounded theory approach.

Of the respondents, approximately 80% grew up in, or hold passports for five English-speaking countries, and 20% were from non-English-speaking countries. In total, they held more than 16 nationalities. Participants are a mix of teachers, current, former and retired administrators. Estimated ages stretched from mid twenty to late sixty-year-olds. Respondents were equally represented by gender.

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The narratives fell into eight categories which are not mutually exclusive:

Group 1: Those who described a history as a Cross-Culture Kid (CCK)

Group 2: Those who recalled hearing stories and/or looking at artifacts from family members about their migrations, travels, and/or family history in foreign lands.

Group 3: Those who, as a result of close relationships with teachers, friends and/or colleagues were influenced by their stories and their artifacts.

Group 4: Those who were influenced by their passion for reading literature, history, watching particular TV programs and learning English

Group 5: Those whose multi-cultural school and/or neighborhood community had a strong impact on them

Group 6: Those who recounted the influence of early international travel experiences [independent of family]

Group 7: Those who were influenced by intimate relationships with a loved one

Group 8: Those who described disillusionment and/or discontentment with life-labor-career status as motivating their wanderlust

Findings may help industry leaders understand the deeply seated motivation for these self-initiated expatriates. With the unprecedented rapid growth of new international schools worldwide and the retirement of educators of the Boomer generation, schools are challenged to find enough qualified and quality educators who are willing to work outside their home countries. Implications for increasing the candidate pool for the ever-growing number of international schools are noted, as is the increasing impact of student exchange programs.

Recommendations are to establish strategies to a) identify those with the W4 characteristics in order to enlarge the pool of motivated candidates and b) establish and promote strategies to help transform those with no W4 outlook from youth, into ones with W4 wanderlust. ■

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