

**Teachers' leadership aspirations:  
Career decision-making among  
Singaporean teachers**

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**by**

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## **Abstract**

The central research problem is the insufficient supply of teachers opting for promotion to middle-level leadership positions in Singapore secondary schools, where about 66% are filled. This shortage limits the effectiveness of school management and reduces the flow of leaders aspiring to vice-principalship/principalship. The study generates a model by addressing two research questions:

- (1) *What* influences affect secondary school teachers' decision-making as to whether to aspire to middle-level school leadership?
- (2) *How* do these influences affect the career aspirations of Singaporean secondary school teachers?

Using the interpretivist paradigm, case study approach, and content analysis methodology, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a stratified sample of 20 participants. The investigation sought teachers' perceptions of middle-level school leadership (compared to teaching) and their career aspirations, and identified the associative influences on their career decision-making. Such influences can be grouped into the categories of personal, socialisation and environmental influences, with each linked to two qualitatively different categories: teaching and leadership influences.

Teachers' career decision making is affected by 'personal' influences, resulting from innate attributes and pre-service experiences. Interactions with friends, family and significant others also give rise to 'socialisation' influences. 'Environmental' influences result from home and school environments. Teachers at different career stages (beginning teachers (0-3 years), more mature teachers (3-5 years), more senior teachers (beyond 5 years)) are more susceptible to

particular influences; for example beginning teachers prefer honing pedagogical skills than doing administrative tasks. Teachers progress through these career stages and experience the influences identified. These influences affect individuals differently, for example additional remuneration may be less attractive for more established senior teachers compared to beginning teachers.

Teachers' decision-making processes regarding leadership aspirations lie at the heart of the Model of Selective Appeal, so named because particular influences on whether to opt for leadership selectively appeal, or otherwise, to individual teachers.

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# Chapter 1

## Statement of the Problem

### Introduction

There is a realization that schools cannot reach their full potential unless all the staff are involved in school development (Brundrett, 2004, p.9). This follows consistent argument by governments and academics calling for innovative restructuring of school leadership so as to improve school-based management (Dimmock, 2000a). The leadership, management and administration roles of the school leader have expanded significantly and are beyond the ability of one person or a small group of senior staff (Brundrett, 2004, p.9-10) and one way to solve the problem is to distribute the responsibilities to other school leaders (Gronn, 2000). Consequently, in most schools, leadership extends beyond the senior management team (Harris, 1999; Busher and Harris, 2000) to include middle management or subject leadership level (Harris et al., 2003, p.131). Policies may be made by senior management but it is often the middle level leaders who have to implement them (Brundrett, 2004).

Besides this, according to Busher and Harris (1999) “effective management requires staff at all levels to be involved in decision-making and policy formulation” (p.314). The middle management/leadership level, comprising Heads of Departments (assisted by Subject Heads), plays a key role in the areas of translating and implementing senior management policies, development of department culture and group identity, improvement of staff and student performance, and liaising with extra-department entities (Glover et al., 1998). Huberman (1990) suggested that the subject area or department is the powerhouse for whole-school development.

However, Singapore schools face a shortage of teachers with aspirations to hold middle-level leadership positions. Despite there being no shortage of teachers – a recent, well-publicised highly successful teacher recruitment effort by the Singapore Ministry of Education (MOE), saw the 2009 recruitment target already met half-way through the year – there is a shortage of teachers applying for, and holding, middle-level leadership positions in schools.

Recognising the important role played by school leadership in achieving good school outcomes, it is reasonable to expect that the MOE's priority would be to adequately staff all levels of leadership positions with teachers of suitable calibre. However, despite the MOE's priorities, to date they have failed to staff all potential leadership positions.

Evidence suggests that many teachers are not aspiring to leadership positions. This is the case for middle management positions of Level Head (LH), Subject Head (SH) and Head of Department (HOD), as well as the senior management position of Vice-Principalship (VP). The shortage of teachers holding such leadership positions limits the number and types of programmes that schools can mount to benefit the students. With fewer leaders available to manage and mentor the younger teachers, one would expect detrimental effects on the school's ability to fulfill its primary aim of preparing students for school-based and national examinations.

Most important, however, is that a shortage of leaders at middle-level management means that there are fewer to choose from for the higher positions of Vice-Principalship and Principalship – given the promotion pipe principle. This view is also shared by Dorman and D'Arbon (2003) who agreed that "it would be logical that there will soon be a shortage of principals due to a 'pipeline' effect" (p.28). Draper and McMichael (2003) acknowledged that difficulties in recruiting into teaching will necessarily have a knock-on effect on applications for headship. They also noted that recruitment into and retention in middle management posts

in schools are also important, for it is here that most headteachers acquire their initial experience of management.

This problematic situation prompts an investigation as to why teachers seem willing recruits to teaching, but less so for more senior positions involving leadership and management. In turn, this prompts questions about how teaching and leadership respectively, are perceived by teachers; how teachers perceive the satisfaction, responsibilities, rewards, and identity associated with each level of the profession, and how all of these affect the decision-making by teachers in deciding whether to take up leadership positions. This study focuses on the foregoing issues with respect to Singapore secondary schools.

## **1.1 Context and Background**

In this section that explains the context to the study, the general nature of teaching and leadership are briefly explored, before outlining the more specific features of Singapore's school system.

### **1.1.1 Nature of Teaching**

According to Saphier and Gower (1979), "teaching is intellectually complex, difficult, and demanding work" (p.567). Teachers have to develop the skill to undertake their tasks well but such skills are not innate and usually have to be taught or acquired. They continue, "there is more to good teaching than skill, but there's no good teaching without it" (p.3). In Singapore, as elsewhere, teachers are the direct point of contact students have with the school and how well teachers teach directly influences how engaged the students are and how well they learn. Teachers may also impact on student welfare and character development and their ability to think creatively. However, it is at least partly the case that teachers' effectiveness in fulfilling their roles depends on school leaders' support.

Good leaders can create a conducive environment for teaching and learning and the opportunities for teachers to develop their knowledge and hone their skills. As noted by Robbins and Alvy (2003), “research and experience suggest that the principal plays a vital role in collaborating with staff members to create and maintain a climate friendly to staff development and in ensuring that staff development activities address specific needs and that activities are assessed for impact” (p.180-181). How teachers find meaning and fulfillment in what they do in their school environment, and how well they get along with their colleagues, may influence their decision-making in respect to whether or not to move to a higher level, where there is relatively less teaching and more leadership.

### **1.1.2 Nature of Leadership**

School leaders need to understand what the future market requires of its workers and how the school can prepare students for that working environment. They lead the effort to tailor the curriculum to the students’ needs, and train teachers to deliver the curriculum to achieve the desired outcomes of holistic education. The leaders also build up a strong teaching staff whose abilities are more than the sum of the parts. They actively groom individual staff to achieve their potential. At the same time, they have to manage external stakeholders – higher headquarters, parents, and the community.

How Singaporean teachers perceive leaders’ ability to influence students’ educational outcomes might have an impact on whether these teachers want to aspire towards such leadership positions and in turn contribute towards a conducive environment for their own teachers so that they in turn can contribute towards their students’ educational outcomes. Although research has yet to unequivocally confirm the link between leadership and student outcomes, good school leadership is certainly a key factor contributing to successful schools (Connors, 2000). Likewise Sammons et al. (1997) and Harris (1999) agree that

“leadership is highlighted as a key constituent in school and departmental effectiveness” (Harris 2003, p.9). However, Leithwood and Jantzi (2000) argue that although transformational approaches to leadership have long been advocated as effective under these conditions, there is much less evidence available about whether these socio-psychological effects actually result in organisational change and enhanced organisational outcomes. In a survey of 1,762 teachers and 9,941 students in a large school district in the US, they found strong significant effects for such leadership on organisational conditions, but only moderate but significant total effects on student engagement.

### **1.1.3 Singapore School System**

Within the Singapore education system, all public schools are divided into four zones according to locality (north, south, east and west). Within a zone, more than 90 schools are grouped in clusters of about 13 schools. About half of these are secondary schools. The cluster superintendent leverages on the strengths of the different schools, and encourages collaboration and healthy competition. Synergies can be derived such as secondary school students helping in the primary schools’ reading programme, or pre-university students guiding the secondary school students in the running of their co-curricular activities. Economies of scale can also be derived such as purchasing a common course on leadership training for say ten selected pupils from each secondary school. Due to the close links between schools, teachers in leadership positions are expected to collaborate across schools. Teachers who do not enjoy such collaboration may eschew leadership positions.

### **1.1.4 School Hierarchical Structure**

In Singapore’s education context, as elsewhere, school leadership refers not only to the pinnacle position of principal, but also the senior management position of VP, and the middle management (also known as key personnel or KP) positions

of HOD, SH and LH. The MOE advocates the distributed leadership mode of management, and consequently all levels of leadership positions are important and shortfalls at any level, as is the case in Singapore schools, may mean that the school system may not be maximising its leadership potential. This mode of management is also advocated by Ogawa and Bossert (1995), who described leadership as:

*Not confined to certain roles. It flows through the networks of roles.... Moreover, leadership is based on the deployment of resources that are distributed throughout the network of roles, with different roles having access to different levels and types of resources (p.238).*

#### **1.1.5 A 'Typical' Teacher's Work and Workload**

In a typical Singapore secondary school with about 37 classes (8 classes each in secondary 1 and 2; 9 classes each in secondary 3 and 4, and 3 classes in secondary 5) and about 1300 students, there would be a staff of about 66 teachers. Each school is allowed to have a quarter of the staff holding KP appointments. Each of these KPs will lead their own department, level or subject. These KPs will assist the principal to set the direction for the school, and lead teachers in implementing the selected strategies and supporting programmes. They also provide leadership to teachers who must prepare students for the internal school-based as well as national examinations. In addition, through their leadership, they are expected to provide students with a holistic education, including personal development and values inculcation.

Important parts of teachers' responsibilities include co-curricular activities, enrichment programmes, and national education efforts. Teachers also lead in MOE-directed initiatives, participate in cluster-initiated programmes, and collaborate with other schools. The ultimate aim is to add value to the students' development and welfare – academically, socially, morally and physically, so that

they leave the school better equipped than when they arrived, ready to join the institutes of higher learning or the workforce. The typical teacher is thus fully extended; this raises the issue of whether many teachers feel the prospect of taking on leadership responsibilities as well, is too much.

### **1.1.6 Career Tracks and System of Career Advancement**

The MOE offers three career tracks – leadership, specialist or teaching track. Teachers who aspire for leadership positions have two avenues. They can let their supervisor know of their aspirations and both plan/work toward that. When the supervisor feels the teacher is ready, the teacher would be nominated to the principal for endorsement to attend the cluster interview panel, chaired by the cluster superintendent. If the supervisor does not support the teacher's career aspiration, the teacher can apply for a leadership position in another school, via MOE's APEX (annual posting exercise). If selected, the teacher will be interviewed by that principal and subsequently attend that cluster's interview panel.

For some teachers, it may be the supervisor or school management who notices a teacher's leadership potential and encourages the teacher to aspire to leadership positions. The supervisor then works with the teacher to develop the interest and potential to hold higher appointments. If there is no suitable KP opportunity in that school, the school leaders can arrange for the aspiring teacher to be considered for KPship at another school.

## **1.2 Evidence of the problem of insufficient staffing of middle and senior management positions**

There is evidence that Singapore schools experience an insufficiency in the number of teachers aspiring to middle and higher leadership positions. This appears as true in Singapore as elsewhere (Rhodes, 2006). Singapore statistics

(MOE, 2009) show 170 Secondary school principals supported by only 237 Vice-Principals. Secondary schools typically are allowed two VPs each, requiring a total of at least 340 VPs (full schools – both primary and secondary schools combined under one name and one principal - have more than two VPs). But in 2009, only 51 schools had two (with full schools having 18 additional) VPs. 117 schools have only one VP. Two schools have no VPs. This suggests there is a shortage of about 121 VPs to fully staff all schools. The staffing situation for the senior management (VP) positions is thus not ideal, but the staffing for the middle management (KP) positions is not much better.

The MOE's internal data (2005a) for the 355 primary and secondary schools reveals there are 4261 officially appointed KPs. This gives an average of about 12 KPs per school. Based on approved establishment, each secondary school is entitled to about 18 KPs. With about 28,000 teachers, the MOE is able to staff each secondary school with about 70 teachers, on average. This is more than the average of 66 teachers approved for an enrolment of about 1300 students, yet the MOE is unable to fully staff the KP positions. As the teacher allocation is governed by the student enrolment, the number of the lower ability Normal Technical classes, and whether the school conducts certain subjects like Design & Technology and Food & Nutrition, it is difficult to collect data to confirm the actual teacher allocation by school. Furthermore, a recent check in March 2009 with the same MOE source solicited a response from the MOE that it will not be releasing data to the public when it is still in the process of solving the underlying problem (Soh, 2009). Although the latest data is unavailable to verify the earlier 2005 numbers, this response reinforces the severity of the challenge (of insufficient teachers aspiring to leadership positions) facing the MOE and schools.

Singapore has been facing a declining population for many years, for example the birth rate has reduced from 12.75 per 1000 population in 2003 to 8.99 in 2008 (Mundi Index, 2008). This has prompted the government to be more

lenient in the award of permanent residency as well as citizenship in order to meet its intent of increasing the population from 4.7mil to 6.5mil by 2025 (Seah, 2007). Foreign student intake has thus compensated for the lower number of local students in schools. Thus total student numbers in the national school system have remained relatively constant over the years; hence a shortage in supply of able teachers aspiring to leadership positions is the problem rather than an increase in the number of leadership positions available. There is clearly a problem for schools and policy makers to address, and it is this problem that forms the focus of this study.

The above data suggests a shortage of personnel from KP upwards, but not at the teacher level. In fact, teacher recruitment has continued steadily for many years now but this has not translated to a significant reduction in the number of vacancies in the KP appointments. Schools (both primary and secondary) enjoy an excess of teachers who are put on the school's staff as "above-quota". For secondary schools, the excess teachers help to mount enrichment programmes. MOE (2009) has recently announced that its raised recruitment target of 3000 teachers for the year had been reached by June 09, largely due to the weak economy and associated poorer employment prospects outside the education sector. Some of the new teachers hired include mid-career people, many of whom have held senior appointments in the non-education sector. Whether this will translate to more people wanting to be school leaders remains to be seen.

With sufficient teachers at current teacher-student ratios, why does there appear to be a shortfall of leaders? Does the shortfall of KP mean the MOE is *unable to attract* enough teachers to aspire to leadership positions in school? It can be discounted that the MOE is trying to save on payroll as teachers can be appointed to key appointments without immediate promotion. In fact, MOE had demonstrated its commitment to beef up its teaching force and had been actively recruiting, taking advantage of the weak labour market. This may suggest an

insufficient supply of able teachers *keen to hold* leadership positions, or to hold even higher leadership positions.

### **1.3 Why teachers' reluctance to aspire to leadership is a problem**

Some teachers aspire to leadership positions while others are content to remain as teachers. For those who aspire to and gain middle leadership positions, some aspire even higher to senior positions, while others are content to remain at their present leadership levels. Schools need all three types of teachers, but for the purpose of this study, the aim is to discover what influences teachers in their decision-making, especially with regards to why many teachers are eschewing KPship.

#### **1.3.1 Implications of Insufficient Leaders in Schools**

The MOE's inability to fully staff leadership positions not only means a reduction of leadership resources than would otherwise be the case, but also that de facto, there may be a less suitable pool of people to choose from for each subsequent level of school leadership. Schools with fewer KPs than entitled will have a harder time doing the things that better-staffed schools can do. The same load and responsibilities are shared among fewer KPs and the additional burden may simply be the impetus for some of them to seek 'greener and easier pastures'. Morale may be tougher to maintain among the staff. When one or more KPs leave, the others feel an even greater load and hence there is further impact on the already lowered staff morale.

Schools with KP vacancies often provide opportunities for aspiring teachers (whose current school faces KP saturation) from other schools to transfer to. However, if the shortage school has many such vacancies, it is likely that the impending workload would be higher than normal and hence the school may be

unattractive to potential transferees. It may also be a sign that perhaps the working environment at that school is not good. This may further worsen the school's KP shortfall problem.

With insufficient KPs, and insufficient capable teachers willing to step into leadership vacancies, the school may not be able to meet MOE expectations for improvement and introduction of new initiatives. The programmes and co-curricular activities offered to the students may have to be scaled back. More importantly, there may well be lower quality academic coaching programmes to help the students excel academically. It would then be tougher for the school to secure good results in the national examinations, which in turn might lead to fewer good students wanting to join the school. With academically weaker students to work with, it would be even harder to secure the good academic results at the national examinations. This vicious spiral would be discouraging to staff as their efforts may not produce the desired results.

Even if a school has a full teacher staffing, with insufficient KPs, they would tend to be less efficient and effective in conceiving, planning and executing programmes. Teachers are generally less competent and have less experience at higher level work and thus may not anticipate problems well. They will also need more guidance. Such schools tend to make slower progress due to insufficient quality people at the helm.

With fewer teachers willing to be involved in higher level work, and consequently equipped with the knowledge and skills to operate at the higher level, there would be fewer quality people to choose from for the KPship. Furthermore, ensuring a steady and sufficient supply of teachers who aspire to be leaders cannot be left to chance. If supply of such personnel is inadequate, it would translate to a smaller pool of applicants from which to choose leaders at the SH, LH and HOD levels. Likewise, fewer KPs available mean that the pool of people from which to select VPs would inevitably be poorer. The effect on the pool of potential

principals will be felt downstream, depending on how long the supply shortage lasts.

This study investigates teachers' perceptions of middle-level school leadership. It focuses on their aspirations, and their career intentions in regard to remaining as teachers or seeking higher level positions involving leadership. It is not concerned with their performance as teachers or how well prepared they are as teachers, as these are large problematic issues that warrant separate study. Consequently, the aim of the study is to understand teachers' decision-making with regards to leadership aspirations at middle levels.

### **1.3.2 International Context to the Problem**

The phenomenon of a leader shortage in schools has an international dimension. The concern about insufficient able teachers aspiring to leadership positions is shared by Rhode's (2006) observation that "ensuring a supply of able middle and senior leaders in schools is of key strategic importance to individual schools and to national success" (p.10). The consequence of this anticipated concern is being experienced in the UK, where the percentage of schools having to re-advertise for headship vacancies continues to rise in both the primary and secondary schools. According to Garner (2009) "Headteachers' leaders said senior teachers and deputy heads were reluctant to apply for the roles" (p.4). The UK shortage of school leaders may or may not be caused by similar reasons to the Singapore context. This study will focus just on Singapore.

### **1.3.3 Possible Causes for the Problem of Lack of Leadership Aspirant in Schools**

There may be many reasons why there is lack of leadership aspirants in Singaporean schools, but it is not readily apparent which of them, or which combination of them, weigh heavily on teachers' decision-making. What

considerations do teachers weigh up when deciding whether to stay in teaching roles, or move into leadership positions (a third option is to leave the profession entirely – but this is not a focus in the present study). Answers may depend on the teachers and their individual experiences, and the support of their past and present school leaders.

A school can encourage and groom its teachers to take on the vacant leadership positions. Principals generally have two methods of raising and developing leaders among the staff. The first is to test them out by giving them opportunity to undertake some leadership roles. If they perform well, they may then be put up for the KP interviews, chaired by the cluster superintendent. Another way is to submit for KP interviews those teachers who have performed well as teachers and who have expressed interest/keenness to hold leadership positions. The latter method has the risk that people appointed/promoted to the KP position may not be fully able to hold the job, which may result in promoting the wrong people. No doubt they can learn on the job, but they may not be as effective as those who have been tested as teachers with some experience of leadership work before they are submitted for KP interviews. There is no clear guideline on which method school leaders should employ, and as such, there is risk that the best people may not be appointed. Teachers with a certain personality might fit one but not the other method of leadership selection and this may deter them from aspiring to leadership positions.

Teachers typically have a good feel for the school environment and can see how busy their KPs are. Despite the school's best efforts, some teachers may be put off aspiring to leadership positions for a host of reasons. Unless teachers are keen to take up leadership positions, they would probably not wish to be involved with higher level work. They would prefer to remain teaching and interacting with the students in preference to immersion in administration, management and leadership roles.

As the foregoing sections have argued, there is clear uncertainty as to the reasons behind the lack of leadership aspirations of many teachers. It is this uncertainty that leads to the research problem of this study.

## **1.4 The Research Problem**

This study centres on the shortage of aspiring teachers applying for middle management/leadership positions in Singapore secondary schools, a problem also faced in the USA, UK, Australia and Asia (Barnard, 1998; Howson, 1999, 2000; Jacobson, 1990; Jordan, McCauley and Comeaux, 1994; Olson, 1999; Pawlas, 1989; Pyke, 1997; Steinberg, 2000; Lawnham, 2000; Rootes, 2001). Singapore schools are staffed with only about two-thirds of the permitted numbers of VP and KP (MOE, 2005a). This VP/KP shortfall suggests an insufficient supply, relative to demand, of able teachers keen to hold leadership positions. The Singapore Government's inability to fully staff these positions also results in the more serious future challenge of having fewer suitable people to choose from for the principalship, as VPs/KPs provide the supply of future principals. Hence, the research problem focuses on the shortage of capable teachers aspiring to and applying for leadership positions in Singaporean schools. This study seeks to understand why increasing numbers of teachers are opting to stay as teachers rather than apply for promotional leadership positions. To limit the scope of the study, it will focus on secondary school teachers. This leads to the research aim of the study.

## **1.5 Research Aim**

This study aims to investigate the phenomenon of a shortage of teachers applying for KP positions. Based on a small sample of Singapore teachers and leaders, it will study their career decision-making with a view to clarify their perspectives of the relative advantages and disadvantages of teaching and leadership as career routes. The study's contribution to the field's body of

knowledge may add to the research community's understanding of teachers' career decision-making considerations/processes. The knowledge generated will apply to the participant group only; however, others in similar situations in Singapore schools and elsewhere may find at least some of the findings transferable. In addition, the Singaporean MOE may also be better informed in considering the repercussions of potential policies that directly/indirectly impact on teachers' leadership aspirations. In order to achieve the research aims, the study addresses the following research questions.

## **1.6 Research Questions**

This study has two main research questions:

1. ***“What influences affect secondary school teachers’ decision-making as to whether to aspire to middle-level school leadership?”*** and
2. ***“How do these influences affect the career aspirations of Singaporean secondary school teachers?”***

Understanding why teachers aspire or not aspire to higher leadership positions may help policy makers design policies and encourage the environment that encourages more teachers to want to hold higher leadership positions.

## **1.7 Significance of the Study**

Given Singapore's focus on, and need for, a highly skilled and educated workforce, the country's policy structure is heavily geared to education at all levels. Among its acknowledged aims is the need for leaders and good leadership in many sectors of the society and economy, including education. The MOE recognises the challenge of having insufficient teachers keen to hold leadership positions, with the attendant ramifications described above. It has sought to enhance the service terms and conditions through a slew of measures

that seek to address personal development (**G**rowth, **R**ecognition, **O**pportunities and **W**ell-being). The *first* **GROW** package was announced on 4 September 2006 and the *second* **GROW** package was implemented on 1 April 2008. These are in addition to the nation-wide implementation of the 5-day work week from August 2004. The MOE has also embarked on the **OLive** programme, (an integrated approach to developing and enhancing staff well-being). The MOE has in 2005 created the office of Deputy Director, Education Leadership Development Centre, which has since developed a competency model as well as a leadership development and training structure. Although there are many initiatives, the effectiveness of these measures has yet to translate to there being more teachers keen to hold leadership positions.

In fact, the resignation rate from January 2007 to August 2008 was 3.1%, significantly higher than the resignation rate of 2.4-2.5% from 2004-2006 (MOE, 2008). It may be too early to feel the full effects of MOE's efforts of GROW 1 and GROW 2. These numbers may or may not be an indication of the number of teachers who consequently now aspire to leadership positions but it does not augur well. Rather than wait for a few years to see the full impact of the MOE initiatives, it may be useful to understand the perspectives of the teachers on their career choices and paths as a whole, and on the attractiveness of the MOE's initiatives, in particular. Furthermore, there are influences that impact teachers' leadership aspirations that arise from the school environment, the school ethos and culture established by the school leaders, as well as the teachers' personal values and experiences. All of these may affect the efficacy of GROW 1 and GROW 2. The distinct contribution and outcome of the present research is that an early understanding of the teachers' perspective might better enable MOE to respond to the situation of insufficient teachers with leadership aspirations, in a timely manner. Being able to address these issues ahead of the lag indicators arising from GROW 1 and GROW 2 would certainly give MOE greater lead-time to anticipate and address problems in future.

## **1.8 Researcher's Positioning in Respect of the Research**

As a former VP in a Singapore secondary school, this researcher personally appreciates the national implications of there being insufficient teachers aspiring to and applying for leadership positions. Without a good understanding of the underlying reasons why more teachers are eschewing leadership positions, measures taken by the MOE may not have the desired effect. With the support from the North Zone Cluster 2's superintendent, and the cooperation of the principals of this cluster's secondary schools, teachers who met the required profile and who were willing, were proposed to the researcher to seek their formal approval to participate in the research. As there are only 8 secondary schools in the cluster, being a VP from one of these schools did endow the researcher with some privileges. With the cluster superintendent's and principals' support, there was less reluctance on the part of the respondents to speak their mind. The assurance of confidentiality based on BERA rules removed the distrust or suspicion respondents may have of someone unknown asking them personal and work-related questions.

Most importantly, as a former VP, this researcher understood the importance of there being sufficient KPs in the school driving the key projects, and the effects on the school when there is a shortfall. The researcher has also experienced first-hand the importance of having sufficient teachers with the interest to want to venture into the leadership track, and also to aspire towards leadership positions. Their quality of work and willingness to do much more than teach allow the school to take on more programmes and add more value to the students. The critical role played by the school leaders in enticing teachers to want to lead cannot be overemphasized. Methodological issues of being an 'insider researcher' with his own views and biases on the topic are addressed in chapter 3, Methodology.

## 1.9 Overview of the Thesis

This thesis comprises of seven chapters, as follows:

The *present chapter* has introduced the background to the research by providing an overview of the current situation with respect to the insufficiency of able teachers holding leadership positions in Singapore secondary schools. The chapter has also outlined the aims and purposes of the study, the main research questions, and the significance of the research.

*Chapter 2* presents the literature review structured around themes of the reasons why teachers teach; why some aspire to, and others eschew, leadership positions; the challenges they face at work and at home; as well as other influences that could affect their leadership aspirations. In particular, the chapter explores: (i) causes of insufficient teachers being keen to hold leadership positions (ii) personal influences and teachers' leadership aspirations; (iii) socialisation influences and teachers' leadership aspirations; (iv) environmental influences and teachers' leadership aspirations; and (v) gaps in literature reviewed.

*Chapter 3* discusses the methodology in detail. In particular, the chapter considers the assumptions that support the interpretivist paradigm and also Blumer's (1969) "symbolic interactionist" perspective, how they relate to this research, the research questions and why content analysis is the method of choice. The sampling methods are discussed, in particular explaining how a retrospective perspective would help corroborate the teachers' perceptions. This chapter then discusses the methods of data collection and analysis, the trustworthiness of the research, and the ethical considerations.

*Chapter 4* conceptualises and categorises the data collected. In particular, it shows the participants' profiles, and the importance of the school's context on the teachers. It shows how the main categories are derived from coding from interview transcripts and also the linkages between the main categories.

*Chapter 5* discusses the categories of "personal influences", "socialisation influences" and "environmental influences" which affect teachers' leadership aspirations. These address the first research question.

*Chapter 6* examines **how** the influences derived from the different categories in chapter 5 affect teachers' leadership aspiration. These address the second research question.

*Chapter 7* presents the Model of Selective Appeal. It also summarises the implications for teachers, school leaders and MOE and discusses what they can do to enhance the number of teachers keen to aspire to leadership positions. The limitations of this qualitative research are then discussed. The chapter also proposes areas for further research.

# Chapter 2

## Review of Literature

### Introduction

As discussed in Chapter 1, the overall aim of this study is to investigate the phenomenon of a shortage of teachers in Singapore secondary schools applying for KP positions. In addition, the study aims to develop a theory of how different influences impact teachers' decision-making with regards to their leadership aspiration. In Singapore, the LH/SH/HODship were introduced in the late 1990s. There are few if any similar studies on KPship in Singapore. As there is a paucity of Singaporean literature on the phenomenon outlined, the equivalent overseas literature is reviewed, with comparisons drawn for Singapore. The influences identified in this literature review apply to non-Singaporean teachers; there is a marked dearth of literature on their Singaporean counterparts. Their applicability to Singaporean teachers will thus only be possible after the data analysis for the present study. Even so, there is some risk, which as Dimmock (2000b) noted: "What works in one culture may not work in another" (p.13).

There are typically two purposes of a literature review, namely (1) to inform research questions already decided, and/or (2) to help decide the research questions. For this study, the two main research questions were mostly already framed prior to the literature review, which was used to refine them. The research questions are:

1. ***"What influences affect secondary school teachers' decision-making as to whether to aspire to middle-level school leadership?"*** and
2. ***"How do these influences affect the career aspirations of Singaporean secondary school teachers?"***

Hence, the purpose of this literature review is to inform these two main research questions.

To provide better focus for the study, these main research questions are further fractured into 3 specific questions:

1. How, if at all, do pre-service experience and **personal** influences affect teachers' decision-making processes and career aspirations?
2. Who are the significant others (**socialisation** influences) who impact teachers' decision-making processes and career aspirations, and why?
3. How do the school, school leaders and MOE policies (**environmental** influences) affect teachers' decision-making processes and career aspirations?

This is a qualitative study based on data collected from interviews with participants. The responses are based on how the participants *perceived* situations/considerations at specific key moments in their lives and careers. It is premised that individual teachers make sense of their experiences and make decisions based on those experiences, largely through the meanings constructed from interactions with others. Therefore this study's research design is based on Blumer's (1969) symbolic interactionist principles which proposed three premises in interpreting human experience:

1. *People act towards things or fellow humans in their surroundings on the basis of the meanings that these things have for them;*
2. *These meanings come from communicating or interacting with people; and*

3. *These meanings are managed through an interpretive process used by the person with the things he comes across according to the situation the person is in (p.2).*

Consequently, this study assumes that the meanings and importance that the participant teachers assign to their upbringing, education, pre-service experiences, and pre-service relationships with significant others affect their career aspirations regarding leadership positions. Similarly, the people with whom teachers interact at work, as well as the working environment of the school in which they work, significantly influence how teachers view leadership positions and whether they would want to aspire to hold such positions. Besides identifying the likely influences which impact teachers' leadership aspirations, this study analyses *how* these influences affect the teachers' decision-making and whether/how these influences may be linked. This study is thus guided by symbolic interactionist assumptions.

This literature review examines relevant research in the five areas directly addressing the specific research questions. Firstly, it reviews available literature on some of the more pertinent problems causing insufficient teachers to be keen to hold leadership positions. Secondly, it considers the literature on the effects of *personal influences* on teachers' leadership aspirations. Thirdly, it reviews the literature on how *significant others* can influence teachers' leadership aspirations. Fourthly, it analyses literature on how the *school environment and MOE policies* influence teachers' decision-making processes and their career aspirations for leadership positions. Lastly, it identifies gaps in the literature reviewed and suggests areas where further studies could venture into to contribute to the scholarly body of knowledge.

## **2.1 Literature on the causes of insufficient teachers being keen to hold leadership positions**

HODship was identified to be an important component in secondary school and documented as early as 1930. As Koch (1930a) noted “without a dissenting voice those who have attempted to interpret the department headship assign to it an important position in secondary-school organization” (p.336). Even then, there are fewer studies on department headship compared to principalship. As Brundrett and Terrel (2004) acknowledged “much of the work on school effectiveness...have focused on the role of the headteacher...although there has been an increasing interest in the work of the...whole school management team...extending to Heads of Department” (p.1). Consequently, some of the literature reviewed refers to characteristics of principalship which by extension covers the KPship.

There have been several studies into teachers’ aspirations towards leadership appointments. One of the earlier ones was by McMillin (1972) on the professional leadership aspirations of women teachers. A more recent study also on women teachers’ aspirations to school leadership (in Uganda) was conducted by Sperandio (2010). The third was by McNamara et al (2009) on leadership aspirations and careers of black and minority ethnic teachers. These three were perhaps less relevant in view of the differences in Singapore’s social context.

Some other studies were more general and thus relevant to this study, and will be referred to more often. D’Arbon et al’s (2001) study focused on the difficulties faced in recruiting principals for Australia’s Catholic schools in New South Wales. Their survey explored the reasons why teachers would not apply for principalship and what factors would encourage them to apply.

Watt and Richardson's study (2008) looked into the motivations, perceptions and aspirations concerning teaching as a career for different types of beginning teachers and identified their professional plans, satisfaction levels and demographic characteristics. Their study was based on graduate-entry primary and secondary teachers from 3 Australian universities.

Lacey's (2002) study was commissioned by the Victorian Department of Education and Training to investigate leadership aspirations of Victorian government school teachers. Factors that impact on leadership aspirations, and the policy and planning implications suggested by these factors were highlighted.

Collier, Dinham, Brennan, Deece and Mulford's (2002) Head of Department study where 26 HODs were interviewed with open-ended questions, yielded rich data on their reasons for wanting to be HOD, the influences on seeking the position, preparations, expectations, pros and cons of HODship, workload etc. This study provided many useful points for reference and comparison. The data on HODship's cons are probably not too significant, as they came from teachers who went on to be HODs. Perhaps what is missing is a study specifically focusing on why teachers do not want to hold official leadership positions and remained as teachers. The relevant findings are discussed in the appropriate parts in this study.

Besides these studies, many other scholars have provided insights on the problems causing insufficient teachers to be keen to hold leadership positions and these are cited below together with the equivalent Singaporean situation.

### **2.1.1 Severity of the situation**

To meet the need for sufficient school leaders requires a proper career trajectory comprising systematic identification and grooming of suitable aspiring teachers. Agreeing, Byham, Smith, and Paese (2002) believe that "the selection process

must accurately pinpoint individuals who have the right combination of skills, ability, and motivation” (p.4). When teachers see the structured grooming, systematic reward/recognition and enhanced remuneration, the challenge in transiting from teacher to leader may seem worthwhile. However, the evidence in the UK is that of those who take the National Professional Qualification for Headship run by the NCSL (2006), only 40% decide later to apply for a headship. It may be that the training and its stringent requirements turn many away from headship. It can also be seen by potential aspirants as yet another hurdle to jump in order to get promoted. The situation in Singapore secondary schools is somewhat similar – only about 66% of key personnel positions are actually staffed (MOE, 2005a). Of the 340 VP positions in Singapore secondary schools, there are about 237 VPs, providing a staffing rate of about 70% (MOE, 2009). Part of the problem could be how teachers perceive leadership and what it entails, and whether they consider they have what it takes to be a leader.

### **2.1.2 Leaders are born not made versus Leaders are made not born**

This apparent lack of enthusiasm to be a leader could arise from many causes, as this thesis investigates. According to Bush and Glover (2004), “leaders are ***made, not born***” (p.20) and “formal leadership learning should be augmented by informal development [so that] all staff have the opportunity to develop leadership skills and behaviours” (p.20). If Singaporean teachers believe that “leaders are ***made, not born***”, they need to know how they can be ‘made’. Handy (1993) stated that “learning by experience, left to itself, can be a painful and a tedious experience” (p.219). Hence, unless principals deliberately train their teachers in leadership, teachers would be quite busy just learning to be good teachers and may be quite content not to take on leadership development on their own. Teacher leadership includes three main areas of activity; leadership of other teachers through coaching, mentoring, and working groups; leadership of developmental tasks central to teaching and learning; and/or leadership of pedagogy (Harris, 2003, p.3). With these in mind, some principals do train their

staff for leadership roles. Teachers who are given such opportunity may enjoy leadership and want to consider it as a career choice.

However, Singaporean teachers who subscribe to the 'leaders are *born, not made*' paradigm, may not bother to train for and seek formal leadership positions. Even if teachers harbour thoughts about leadership, some may feel inadequate in their leadership ability. If they do not try or experience leading, they may never know they can lead or develop an interest for leadership tasks. They may even try it, with negative experience, and thus be put off from seeking further leadership opportunities. This decision could be unfortunate, since bad experiences of leadership in one situation may not indicate a lack of leadership ability in subsequent different situations; especially if one subscribes to the view that leadership is situation and context specific, and a good part of it may not be easily transferable. In Singapore, the appeal of leadership in schools as a career track is judged against the attractiveness of other career tracks, such as administration and teaching.

### **2.1.3 Competing career tracks within MOE siphons some teachers away from leadership positions**

Singaporean teachers now have a choice of three career tracks: the *leadership, specialist* or *teaching* track (MOE, 2006a). Teachers who mentor their juniors and take on coordinating roles may be promoted to be Senior Teachers (ST) along the teaching track. On 1 April 2005, the MOE approved younger teachers to be appointed as STs while remaining on the teachers' salary grade (MOE, 2007a). This initiative recognised good teachers early and fast-tracks them to the STship. Its effect is to affirm their professional identities as teachers, but not leaders. Teachers who move along the teaching track are unlikely to return to the leadership track as they enjoy special recognition without having to be in a leadership position. This policy therefore reduces the number of capable teachers considering the leadership track as a professional option. However, not

only is there internal competition for teachers as a resource in schools and the education system, teachers are also sought after outside MOE.

Career choices are also offered to teachers in other countries. In fact in Australia, as shown in Watt and Richardson's study (2008), the greater number of competitive and viable options result in fewer teachers wanting to stay on as teachers. Of the 77 people in their cluster 2 (highly engaged switchers) and cluster 3 (lower engaged desisters), 34 saw themselves moving into education-related careers, such as curriculum design and development, religious ministry, counselors, educational psychologists, research and academic careers, training education officers, etc. The other 43 teachers perceived leaving teaching or education-related careers altogether. With fewer intending to stay on in teaching, even fewer will be available for leadership positions.

#### **2.1.4 Other careers outside MOE**

In Singapore, tuition services are a lucrative tax-free 'cottage industry'. Tuition by full-time teachers for "A" level subjects can cost as much as S\$100/hr (Lim, 2004). The competitive education environment and heavy focus on paper qualifications in Singapore cause families who can afford it, to hire tutors for their children. This is particularly so for the Chinese families who believe that education success is closely linked to a better life (Ong, 2006). As Dimmock (2000b) stated: "This is well documented in Singapore, Hong Kong and Taiwan, where scholastic achievement, prized since Confucius' time and reinforced by the mandarin system, has become the obsession of most students and their parents" (p.35). With official approval, in-service teachers can work part-time for up to 6 hours/week (MOE, 2007c). Many teachers moonlight as tutors, thereby supplementing their pay. A consequence may be their reduced motivation to become leaders simply to earn more money. Moonlighting teachers may also not have time, interest or energy to become leaders.

Although less than 3% of the teacher population retires each year (optional early, or full retirement) (Shanmugaratnam, 2006), a further 2-3% of teachers resign annually. The MOE does not provide details nor are they likely to get accurate responses from all those leaving, but besides leaving for health reasons, and loss of interest, some of the teachers who leave MOE are known to have become full-time tutors. Full-time tuition allows them to teach without the school-teacher's administrative tasks. Teachers can give private tuition, or join the more than 305 accredited private schools in Singapore. This results in fewer teachers remaining in Government service and correspondingly fewer aspirants for leadership positions. Such teachers often have good content knowledge and pedagogy, but they may have weak leadership aspirations. However, even if teachers choose to stay in the formal school system, they may still not aspire to leadership positions for many reasons, one of which is the increasing complexity of leadership functions.

### **2.1.5 The increasing complexity of school leadership**

There is little doubt that leadership positions in schools are increasingly more complex, changing, challenging and accountable. Hage & Powers (1992) opined that 21<sup>st</sup> century work emphasizes complexity rather than routinisation. Agreeing, Crow (2001) acknowledged that "the changing demographics of schools, the explosion of technology, and the rapid growth and change in knowledge require individuals who can live with ambiguity, work flexibly, encourage creativity, and handle complexity" (p.2). According to Begley (2000), the key dimensions are as manager, program leader and learning facilitator, school-community facilitator, visionary, and problem-solver. Collier et al (2002) found that 13 of the 26 HODs interviewed preferred to redesign their role and reduce their teaching load, and reduce administration (12 respondents) so that they can spend more time on core business (9) and their staff (13) and students (5). Increased complexity of the HODship is further complicated in that the role is not necessarily standardized. In a study of English and Welsh secondary

schools, Turner (1996) found the department headship role to be fragmented and vague. Hannay and Denby (1994) noted that the consensus is that the role is ill-defined. Siskin (1995) noted that based on the few studies done, “the department head [is] a pivotal role, but one with a high degree of ambiguity and role stress” (p.2).

In Singapore MOE, it is recognised that the 21<sup>st</sup> century labour market requires workers with redefined competencies. Students need to connect assimilated knowledge and apply it to unfamiliar situations. They need to identify knowledge gaps and know how to fill them. Principals and VP/KP need to understand these new requirements, recognise trends, and dare to seize opportunities to deliver the desired holistic education outcomes.

### **2.1.6 Teacher competencies necessary but not sufficient for leadership**

On balance, the required leadership competencies can be daunting for many teachers who also prefer the familiarity of the classroom. Perceived wide differences between a teacher’s and a leader’s competencies may cause aspiring teachers to reassess their suitability/desire for leadership. This is supported by Fuchs (1992) who concluded that “being a good teacher does not mean having the right skills for becoming a good principal” (p.11). In his study based on a survey of 71 principals in the US, Koch (1930b) found that 32 of them cited the following as requirements for headship; “loyalty, sympathy, fine personality, ability to work with people, experience, leadership, professional devotion, initiative, and knowledge of subject matter” (p.266). As such, aspiring teachers need to acquire new competencies and not just depend on good pedagogy. Besides the leadership obstacles described above, the Singaporean society also poses additional challenges/distractions and these are discussed below under personal, socialisation or environmental influences.

## **2.2 Personal influences and teachers' leadership aspirations**

### **2.2.1 People teach to serve the community**

To understand teachers' career decision-making processes, the study must firstly understand why people become teachers, and then, why many prefer to remain teachers. People are attracted to teaching for various reasons. Brookhart (1992) noted that teachers harbour service-oriented goals; in other words teaching allows them to serve the community. Agreeing, Richardson (2006) found that many new teachers teach because of their desire to make a social contribution, besides wanting a stable career and having time for family. In Singapore, people may have become teachers for similar reasons; teaching offers people a full career and at the same time allows them to serve others. However, becoming leaders may require teachers to give up some or all student contact, especially in the classroom, and for many, this is not appealing.

Brookhart and Freeman (1992) suggested that "altruistic, service-oriented goals and other intrinsic motivations are the primary reasons teacher candidates report why they chose teaching as a career" (p.46). Their argument suggests that people join teaching to impart knowledge, imbibe values, guide character development, and help students prepare for life. Such professional work provides satisfaction and also reinforces for teachers the personal identity they cherish, that is, how they wish to see themselves in their personal lives. In support of this, Richardson and Watt (2006) conducted a survey among new teachers at three Australian universities and found that the "highest rated motivations for choosing teaching included perceived teaching abilities, the intrinsic value of teaching, and the desire to make a social contribution, shape the future, and work with children/adolescents" (p.44). Although such teachers may even see that, as leaders, their ability to influence will be enhanced, they still prefer the classroom interaction as the means. These service-oriented goals are

held by many teachers who join teaching as a first career, as well as those who join the profession from other careers and enter teaching as mid-career teachers.

### **2.2.2 Teachers' career anchors encourage teachers to remain**

Whether a teacher remains a teacher rather than seeks promotion to a leadership position, also depends on his/her career anchors. Schein's concept of career anchors (1990) allows people to understand what really motivates them, what values they uphold and how such relate to their career choice. Career anchors are personal values that one will not readily forego.

Generally, if a teacher's values do not coincide with what, say, the KPship offers, it is unlikely s/he will aspire to be one. This is supported by Lacey's (2002) findings of Australian teachers where a "lack of alignment of personal and organisational values is a factor in influencing some teachers to choose not to apply for principal class positions" (p.222). She also found that "large-scale change in policy direction and organisational values can have a significant impact on the leadership aspirations of some older teachers" (p.222). Such possible lack of alignment can be exacerbated by family commitments, especially those faced by female teachers. Such sentiments however were less shared by younger teachers in the Lacey study, who believed that given appropriate professional development, they would be able to develop the competency to manage these inevitable tensions (Lacey, 2003, p.5).

### **2.2.3 Mid-career teachers also want to serve the community**

From surveying mid-career teachers, Richardson (2005) found that "prior considerations, career fit, time for family and financial reward were the most important factors in participants' selection of teaching as a career" (p.480). Nevertheless, according to Watt and Richardson (2008), researchers who have examined the phenomenon of the career switcher into teaching have suggested

that the rewards of salary and career prestige are not a high priority for this group (Crow, 1990; Mayotte, 2003). Although not articulated, mid-career teachers also seem to enjoy interacting with students, imparting knowledge and developing students' character. Mid-career teachers are typically clearer about why they join teaching as they have experienced other careers outside teaching.

#### **2.2.4 Teachers may be unsure of what they want to be in the longer term**

Among teachers' pre-service concerns, Johnson and Birkeland (2003), found that teachers:

*Bring their own set of expectations and concerns to schooling...low pay and prestige, inadequate resources, isolating work, subordinate status, and limited career opportunities...prospective teachers face an unprecedented number of career options and the work of teachers is increasingly scrutinized (p.582).*

Furthermore, according to Watt and Richardson (2008), "among younger workers there is now an embedded assumption that they will change their career several times over the course of their working lives" (p.410). Furthermore,

*Changes in the nature of work and employment practices and a labour market hungry for tertiary-educated people, have ensured that generations X and Y have very different options and are not likely to "fallback" on teaching (Haubrich, 1960) due to a lack of career options to suit their talents and skills (Birrell, 2006).*

Literature highlights many challenges faced by younger teachers overseas regarding what they want to do after they have settled in. In comparison, Singapore teachers enjoy good remuneration and direct/indirect career attractions, but they still face competing career options and enhanced public

scrutiny. They can be distracted from appreciating the benefits of taking on leadership positions. They could also be unsure of what they want because of their career anchors.

### **2.2.5 Family commitments faced by female teachers**

As a proportion of the teaching force, females are less likely to be leaders than males. Besides work pressures, family commitments also matter. According to Coleman (2005), the “percentage of women reaching leadership positions increased from 1987-2002, but women are still under-represented in leadership roles in UK schools, compared to men” (p.2). She attributed this to the “gender-related work-life balance for which females are more likely than men to take into account” (p.3). Similarly, in Israeli schools, Fuchs (1992) noted that “while family life was perceived as complementary to professional life, most women wrote extensively on the struggle between the need and wish to be with their children more” (p.15). In Singapore, the percentage of female educators out-numbers their male colleagues. In 2004, the ratio of female-to-total *teachers* (73.8%) is higher than the ratio for KP (66.1%), VP (66.8%), and principals (62.8%) (MOE, 2004b). This is in line with Lacey’s (2003b) discovery in Australia, that “while sixty-seven per cent of teaching personnel are female, only thirty-eight per cent of the principal class are female and thirty-one per cent of school principals are female (p.1).

Like the UK and Israeli situations, the under-representation of female leaders in Singapore schools suggests that the challenge of juggling family life has dampened female teachers’ leadership aspirations. Agreeing, Lacey (2002) noted Australian teachers’ perceptions that “only single-minded and well-supported women manage to juggle the demands of dual responsibilities brought by leadership roles and family care responsibilities” (p.222). This lack of time was also cited by 14 of the 26 respondents in Collier et al’s (2002) study. McNamara (2009) also noted that “male BME [black and minority ethnic]

teachers occupied proportionately more middle and senior leadership posts than female BME teachers” (p.72). Besides female teachers, others under-represented at Singapore school’s leadership positions are non-graduates.

### **2.2.6 Disproportionately high percentage of graduates in leadership positions**

Another challenge is the disproportionately high percentage of graduate teachers in leadership positions. From MOE data, 80.8% of Singaporean principals are graduates. The percentage for VP is 90.0% and for teachers is 70.6% (MOE, 2005b). No data is available for KPs. Compared with the 29.4% of teachers who are non-graduates, it means that they are under-represented at the principal level (19.2%) and the VP level (10%). The fact that many of the current non-graduate principals belong to the earlier batches (where fewer people entered university) only heightens the situation as once this older cohort of principals retires, the percentage of non-graduates at the principal, and by extension the VP and KP, levels would be further reduced. Capable non-graduate teachers reading these statistics may assess their chances for leadership positions as low and hence not bother to aspire to them.

Besides influences that are personal, there are also influences that arise from the teachers’ interactions with colleagues, superiors and significant others. These are socialisation influences.

## **2.3 Socialisation influences and teachers’ leadership aspirations**

### **2.3.1 Social and professional identities of teachers encourage them to continue teaching**

In time, like their foreign counterparts, many Singapore teachers find satisfaction in their social identity and acquired professional identity as teachers, even if it

takes time (Tajfel (1979) and Brott (2001)). Once entrenched, such *social identity* and *professional identity* may hinder teachers in considering switching to leadership. As NCSL (2008) acknowledged:

*People come into teaching because they enjoy working with children and shaping young minds. It's the fear that they will lose that contact with youngsters and relinquish their teaching and learning responsibilities that can deter many of those who have the ability to lead (p.6).*

This could also be why many Singaporean teachers continue teaching.

As teachers mature, many no longer feel threatened by the initially-unfamiliar school/classroom environments. They progress from safety needs to Maslow's (1970) third level of belonging needs. Their needs change, and so do their attitudes, values and aspirations. Teachers interact with other teachers, with whom and from whom they derive their *social identity*. Social Identity Theory was formed by Tajfel and Turner (1979) to understand the psychological basis of inter-group discrimination. Teachers befriend each other at school/courses. Sharing common experiences, they bond socially. Consequently, some may even not want promotion to leadership positions because this would mean them leaving their circle of colleagues/friends. Such teachers, according to Barth, (2001) prefer to remain teachers and not become leaders.

There is also another aspect of this relationship between teachers that may prevent them from aspiring to leadership positions. As York-Barr (2004) discovered:

*One known challenge to teacher leadership is the changing nature of relationships between teachers when some teachers assume leadership responsibilities. Most of the reported relationship effects involve an*

*element of distancing and conflict, such as lower levels of trust and even resentment among colleagues (p.283).*

This is supported by Smylie (1992) who noted that “teachers’ relationships with teacher leaders may differ substantially from their relationship with teachers who do not hold these positions” (p.87).

According to Brott and Kajs (2001) “people entering a profession experience change....in the subjective self-conceptualization associated with the role (McGowen & Hart, 1990). This self-conceptualization can be viewed as one's professional identity” (p.1). This *professional identity* is equivalent to Maslow's (1970) fourth level of esteem needs. Teachers derive their professional identity from relationships with students/colleagues. Such relationships sustain the teachers' self-esteem and further strengthen the reasons why they continue to teach.

The above reasons likely apply across borders/cultures to Singaporean teachers. They also explain why many teachers are permanently attracted to teaching, rather than aspire to leadership positions. The supply/flow of people into teaching, plus the retention of teachers, is crucial to understanding the supply of leaders issue, since it is from the stock of teachers that leaders come. The reasons why people become teachers have been covered earlier. However, there is another set of conditions which affect teachers' career decisions in terms of whether or not to aspire to leadership positions, namely, what they learn about the roles and responsibilities of leadership positions in the course of their interactions with their KPs, VPs and Principals.

### **2.3.2 Onerous nature of leadership positions**

Besides teachers' personal values and motivations, how they perceive leadership positions (relative to teaching) through their interaction with their supervisors and

school leaders also impacts their decision whether to be leaders. For instance, Hage (1992), Crow (2001), Robbins (2003) and Normore (2004) felt that the increasing complexity/accountability of school leaders, the increased expectations of schools to produce students who can meet emergent market demands, the leaders need to adapt and manage change, besides many competing roles, may turn-off teachers who think about taking on leadership roles.

Kotter (1996) drew a distinction that leaders generally establish the direction and motivate/inspire people, whereas managers plan, budget, control and problem-solve. Still, either role (both of which leaders must embrace) may seem significantly harder than teaching and thus daunting for Singaporean teachers. Furthermore, teachers understand that effective school leaders are “inspirational, committed to the school and the local community, able to create belief in the possibility of success, consistent and fostering good teamwork amongst staff” (Keys, 2003, p.7). Agreeing, Collier et al (2002) found that interpersonal conflicts and problems between staff (7 out of 26 HOD respondents), tension between teachers and senior school management (6 respondents), having to deal with parental demands and complaints (6 respondents) were undesirable aspects of HODship. Hence, not only do school leaders need to do a good job, they need to do it to the satisfaction of the various stakeholders. Aware of these demands and expectations, many teachers may be deterred from becoming leaders.

### **2.3.3 The leader’s wide job-scope is daunting**

Teachers perceive that the principal has the biggest task and most responsibility of all school leaders, compared with the VP/KP. According to Robbins and Alvy (2003), in a changing world, the principal must adapt and learn to manage change, create a learning community, provide innovative leadership and deal with personal and professional issues. The KPs need to fully support the principal if these programmes are to succeed. Besides supervising and

evaluating teachers, they have to sustain their professional development, encourage IT-infused teaching, practise ethical leadership and manage crises. Agreeing, Harris et al (2003) feel that in view of changing school circumstances and more demanding national and parental expectations, principals need to share responsibility [with the VP/KPs], build positive relationships and offer all stakeholders opportunities to work together to improve the schools.

Besides these roles, Normore (2004) added that other “expectations of the principal’s role include instructional leader, disciplinarian, supervisor, fundraiser, public relations expert and fiscal manager” (p.2). These and other factors add up to making the principal’s role very daunting for some teachers. Principals and schools are perceived to be far more accountable to parents, government and other stakeholders than in the past. Indeed, principals are increasingly judged on the learning outcomes achieved by students in national exams. In some countries, failure to perform can often lead to dismissal; hence job security that once existed, applies much less today.

Teachers see school leaders are pressured, overworked and over-accountable. An increasing number also realise leadership roles are very different from teacher roles and require very different skills sets (having to manage budgets, sacking staff) and may not be able to see much, if any, alignment with their personal and professional identities. The leaders’ roles may be daunting but if teachers perceive them as too difficult, or worse still, not worth bearing, then it is unlikely teachers would want to be leaders.

#### **2.3.4 Being a good teacher may not be sufficient**

Keys (2003) highlighted the importance of the way the head-teacher’s skills were seen by others. Some of the required leadership qualities, which are applicable to all levels of leadership but to different extents, include: accessibility (Sebring and Bryk, 2000; Andrews and Morefield, 1991); high visibility (Andrews and

Morefield, 1991), consistency (Reynolds et al, 2001; Ofsted, 2000); integrity and an ability to engender trust (Hopkins, 2001; Sebring and Bryk, 2000); creating a common sense of purpose (Stark, 1998); setting an example (Andrews and Morefield, 1991; Biott and Gulson, 1999); energizing others (Maden, 2001); and taking a personal interest in the well-being of others (Sebring and Bryk, 2000). Many of these qualities are distinctly different from the teachers' competencies and some teachers may not feel comfortable undertaking these unfamiliar roles. In other words, being a good teacher is insufficient for leadership. This is supported by Fuchs (1992) who concluded that "being a good teacher does not mean having the right skills for becoming a good principal" (p.11). Some of these required qualities may also go against their personal natures/values. Teachers may be daunted by these qualities, and if they feel these values are unattainable, then they may not try to acquire them and thus not seek leadership positions. Sometimes, their unwillingness to aspire to leadership positions may be influenced by being a silent witness to how their leaders enact their leadership.

### **2.3.5 Effective and supportive departmental team**

Dinham (2004) noted the major role played in HOD success by having a good team of faculty/team members. Such teachers support each other, and "shared programmes, resources and teaching ideas...setting a high support climate for the individual teachers" (p.2). Collier et al's (2002) study showed that 17 out of 26 respondents agreed that a collaborative and consultative style facilitated the work of the HOD. It is likely that the presence of such colleagues have a positive impact on teachers' leadership aspirations.

### 2.3.6 Leaders' attitude – a silent witness

Lacey (2002) noted that:

*A finding not found in other research was the view held by principals that the sources of job dissatisfaction were extrinsic, visible, and well known to other members of staff, whilst the sources of job satisfaction were intrinsic, invisible, and unknown to most teachers (p.202).*

For instance, frequent 'complaining' by KPs about the difficulty of the job or the difficulty in handling some parents may mislead teachers into thinking that there is little satisfaction in leadership. The converse is also true as Schmidt (2000) discovered in one of her respondents who said that "the principal...slowly modeled for me behaviours that were inspirational" (p.836).

In a large-scale survey of Australian teacher satisfaction, Dinham and Scott (1996) found that levels of dissatisfaction in teaching were higher in department heads than among teachers or principals (Schmidt, 2000). Teachers may feel that leadership positions are not worth striving for on the basis of their own leaders' stress and enactment of the role. This effect is probably not what the KPs intend, but it is inevitable that teachers interpret for themselves what they see or hear (Blumer, 1969). This was reinforced by Dimmock & O'Donoghue (1999) who stated that, in symbolic interactionism, people assign meanings to the actions of others during social interactions. While some of the complaining may be KPs' way of releasing stress, they actually indicate the challenges and stresses of leadership positions. Collier et al's (2002) study concurred with these sentiments as 11 out of the 26 respondents spoke of the influence of HODs and 10 respondents mentioned the influence of their VP and principals, which influenced them to seek leadership positions.

Fortunately, not all teachers feel daunted by leadership positions as evidenced by the fact that some do aspire to and achieve leadership positions. This is supported by Lacey (2002), who found that:

*Those who have an appreciation of the balance between job satisfaction and job dissatisfaction inherent in the principal role are more likely to aspire to the role than those who only perceive the role to be demanding, stressful and time-consuming (p.227).*

The above is applicable for principals as well as KPs. Lacey (2003a) also cautioned that:

*Teachers made judgments on the appeal or otherwise of leadership positions from their perception of the visible roles played by school leaders. The research found that teachers did not see principals as having high levels of job satisfaction, and this had a negative impact on their own leadership aspirations (p.3).*

Not only are the leaders' work attitudes important, according to York-Barr (2004) they also play a "pivotal role in the success of teacher leadership by actively supporting the development of teachers, by maintaining open channels of communication, and by aligning structures and resources to support the leadership work of teachers".

There are, however, some silver linings and these are discussed below.

### **2.3.7 Teachers' positive perceptions of leadership as a career**

Teachers form perceptions of their leaders' roles, expectations, challenges and pressures, and also their rewards/remuneration. They are increasingly aware of how daunting it is to lead a school or department and to deliver the required

educational outcomes. The performance targets required by the MOE exert pressure on the leaders. Internal policies, such as the need to be citizens, and preference for graduates, dampen some teachers' leadership aspirations. Hence, it is not surprising that teachers, seeing the demands placed on school leaders, eschew leadership positions. However, despite these influences which seem to make leadership unattractive, some teachers still want to be leaders.

There are some attractive aspects of leadership and some teachers aspire to KPship, or VPship or even the principalship. Likely, they are people who enjoy being in control (Lillibridge, 2003). Byham (2002) discovered that the identification and grooming of suitable aspiring teachers, with appropriate reward/recognition and enhanced remuneration, may make leadership seem worthwhile. Even so, Graham (2004) felt that some teachers may just want to be KPs/VPs, but not principals; as they recognize the qualitative differences of leadership at different hierarchical levels and in particular, the loneliness of the principal. For many teachers, the change to KP or even VP, will be less radical than the change to principal for them. Singaporean teachers/KPs may still enjoy the school holidays and they can choose to work in schools close to their homes (MOE, 2007b). KPs/VPs may still feel they can have their professional belonging/esteem needs met. All these mean that although generally there appear to be more challenges than attractions to school leadership, some teachers are willing to take on leadership roles, but at a lower level than principal.

A complementary tack taken in some of the literature is the importance of the psychological needs of teachers having a bearing on career development. How satisfied teachers are with what they do is governed by how well they think they have done and also how well they feel others think they have done. For some Singaporean teachers, it also means that unless the MOE can create conditions in school for them to meet their psychological needs, it is unlikely they will see themselves as leaders and aspire to leadership positions. Such conditions are also known as environmental influences and are discussed below.

## 2.4 Environmental influences and teachers' leadership aspirations

### 2.4.1 Enhanced service terms attract more and better candidates – higher chances of getting leaders

Singapore's Prime Minister Lee, in his Teachers' Day Rally on 31 August 2006, highlighted the need to develop a strong and professional teaching staff (Lee, 2006). He argued that without sufficient competent and dedicated teachers, the MOE would be unable to deliver the required educational outcomes to prepare the youth for the future economy. Consequently, to enhance the attractiveness of teaching as a career, the MOE conducted a comprehensive review of teachers' benefits. The resultant ***GROW*** package was announced on 4 September 2006. (MOE, 2006b) This package addressed personal development (**G**rowth); **R**ecognition; **O**pportunities; and **W**ell-being. Besides repackaging some existing policies, it includes a slew of new initiatives that address the attractiveness of a teaching career.

A more attractive teaching career, compared to other options, will attract more and better people. When more people want to teach but the number of available posts remain the same, the quality of new teachers will be better and chances are more of them have leadership abilities and aspiration to lead. A more attractive teaching career can also reduce departures as some teachers may have second thoughts about leaving. Agreeing, Richardson and Watts (2006) noted that "other recent studies have indeed found that low teaching salaries and the contrasting rewards for comparable jobs do exert an influence on individuals' decisions to leave the teaching profession (Liu et al., 2000; OECD, 2004; Ramsay, 2000)" (p.51). The added advantage of retaining teachers compared to hiring their replacements is that the former are more experienced and ready for leadership roles than new teachers.

#### **2.4.2 MOE's active recruitment efforts – higher chances of getting leaders**

In line with this, the MOE is also actively recruiting teachers, intending to increase the teaching staff from 28,000 to 30,000, by 2010 (MOE, 2006b). The main purpose is to provide schools with more teachers, so that teachers can have time to focus on their areas of interest. This should, it is thought, entice teachers to continue teaching and hopefully generate greater public desire to teach. Knowing that significantly increasing the annual recruitment may result in the marginal recruit's lower quality, the MOE's measures at enhancing the teaching service's terms and conditions seek to alleviate that situation by enticing more people to apply for teaching. This increases the quality/capability of people actually recruited, with greater chances of them having leadership aspirations.

#### **2.4.3 Reduced salary gap reduces draw of KP's salary over teacher's salary**

As a consequence of the 2006 package, KP/VP/Principal's enhanced responsibilities are accompanied by higher remuneration. Kelley (2001) opined that money is the main thing to entice teachers to lead. In Singapore, while this may or may *not* be true for most teachers, the additional money is a motivating factor. Teachers can now at best be paid about half of the principals' maximum salary (MOE, 2007e). This may lure some teachers to aspire to leader positions, especially the principalship.

However, as part of ***GROW's Recognition***, the MOE introduced a new salary grade for teachers on 1 April 2007 and lifted teachers' salary cap (MOE, 2006b). The new grade is to encourage deserving teachers to remain in-service by giving them higher salaries. Unfortunately, this effectively reduced the leadership positions' salary premiums since the new salary grade (teachers') overlaps with the KP's salary. Capable teachers can now enjoy higher salaries without taking on leadership positions and it is likely fewer teachers will aspire and apply for leadership roles, especially if their main motivation is for higher remuneration.

## **2.4.4 Significantly increased requirement for teachers increase their stress**

### **2.4.4.1 Increased foreign student intake**

At the national level the government plans to make Singapore an education hub (Duhamel, 2004). The plan is to increase foreign students in-country from 70,000 to 150,000 by 2015 (EDB, 2006). Assuming half of the (annual) additional 10,000 students join the primary/secondary levels; this translates to an annual increase of 4 schools' worth of teachers (assuming no increase in class size at existing schools), and leadership appointments for teachers to aspire to. With the many international schools in Singapore significantly expanding their capacities (Davie, 2007), the pressure on government schools would be less. Nevertheless, making Singapore an education hub has accentuated the problems the MOE faces in recruiting teachers. Instead of a net additional 400 teachers annually over the next five years (MOE, 2006b), the MOE needs to hire about *another* 100-200 teachers annually for 8 years. This poses a strain on the potential teacher pool and may likely result in the acceptance of lower ability teachers. This potentially reduces the number of capable teachers with leadership ability. Also, if insufficient new teachers are hired, the increased workload and additional pressure may cause some teachers to leave. This puts even more pressure on the remaining teachers and further discourages them from the leadership track.

### **2.4.4.2 Planned increase in population**

The Singapore government is also planning to increase the population from 4.7million to 6.5million by 2030 (Lin, 2007). With 80,000 additional people, annually, and assuming one school-going child per family of four members, Singapore would have about 20,000 new students. Even with more international school places, this has up to four times the impact of making Singapore an

education hub, and creates a significant demand for additional trained teachers and leaders, thus potentially worsening the teacher and hence leader, shortage crisis.

Even if the MOE can hire sufficient new teachers to meet the needs of the education hub and increase in population, it still takes time to train them. Evidence from the NCSL in the UK is that it takes twenty years to develop a principal. Difficulties of integration mean that there is a limit to how many foreign teachers to recruit, at least in the short term. All these can result in insufficient teachers and consequently added stress on existing teachers, some of whom may choose to leave. This may result in there being less, capable teachers left keen to be leaders.

#### **2.4.5 Options allowing teachers to readily resume work**

Among many existing Government policies, some are perceived as not enticing teachers to consider leadership positions. For instance, some teachers have no qualms about leaving the service as MOE policy allows them to readily resume teaching at a subsequent time, so long as they were not sacked. Teachers can return to full-time teaching, or even part-time teaching, under the Adjunct Teachers Programme (AJTP) (MOE, 2004a) and the Part-time Teaching Scheme for Serving Teachers (PTTS) (MOE, 2006c). The AJTP encourages former teachers to return to teach. The PTTS allows teachers the option to teach part-time. Such pro-family policies mean more teachers may consider leaving to look after their young families or elderly parents, or pursue their passion, and return when the impetus for leaving full-time teaching has been resolved. Such teachers, who are prepared to interrupt their career paths, are less likely to aspire to leadership as that would make it harder to leave the service. Hence, such a policy has the unintended effect of working against efforts to enhance the number of teachers aspiring to leadership positions.

#### **2.4.6 MOE's focus on balanced family life encourages leadership aspirations**

*GROW's Well-being* recognises the importance of family time. The Singapore Government had set up the Tripartite Committee on Work-Life Strategy in September 2000 to drive the promotion of Work-Life Harmony (MOM, 2000). Some significant efforts include the five-day workweek introduced in August 2004 (MOE, 2004c) and the **GROW** package (MOE, 2006b). The MOE has also reaffirmed that it will help teachers aim for balanced work-life harmony (Gan, 2007) . These persistent efforts should, one would think, encourage teachers to think that leaders can still have a decent family life and thus develop leadership aspirations.

#### **2.4.7 MOE's Masterplan of Awards creates unnecessary stress on leaders**

The Singapore MOE has also promulgated the Masterplan of Awards (MOE, 2003) which are based on how well the school performs academically and in the extra-curricular activities. Although the MOE *encourages* rather than compels schools to strive for these awards, they are believed to unconsciously form the yardstick by which schools are measured and principals are assessed (MOE, 2007d). Such annual assessments are undertaken by the cluster superintendents and directly influence the principal's bonus and promotion prospects. Agreeing, Lacey (2002) noted that Australian principals "who are not prepared to meet externally driven performance targets have been passed over [for promotion]" (p.222). This may pressure principals to work towards some awards and further increase the already high stress they face. Within the school, any such focus by the principals to achieve the awards would directly affect their KPs and increase the pressure/stress on them.

#### **2.4.8 The loneliness of leadership positions discourages some teachers**

Analysis and interviews conducted by Heritage and Parr (2006) identified several negative aspects to being a headteacher in the UK, namely the “feeling that being a leader takes you away from learning and children; the role of head is seen as being lonely...” (p.2). Besides still wanting to teach, teachers generally feel that the principalship is lonely. Agreeing, Graham (2004) discovered that “head-teachers of successful schools [had also to] participate in networking and support activities” (p.4). For Singaporean teachers who cherish teaching, holding KP positions is a good leadership option as the KP carries a two-thirds teaching load. Aspiring teachers who eschew loneliness at the pinnacle, might thus aim for the KP position. Collier et al’s (2002) study indirectly confirms this as none of the 26 HOD respondents mentioned loneliness as a negative influence in their leadership aspirations.

### **2.5 Summary**

The reviewed literature shows several influences that discourage teachers to aspire to KPship, such as availability of competing career tracks within/without MOE. Also, the greater complexity of leadership positions does not make it more attractive for many teachers. Teachers recognise that just having good teaching ability is insufficient and they need other skills sets and aptitudes. Literature also shows that often teachers join teaching to satisfy personal service goals and there is concern that leadership positions draw teachers away from the classroom. Teachers’ career anchors coupled with their lack of clarity of opportunities beyond teaching often result in teachers remaining as teachers. In particular, for married female teachers, the family commitment seems high and competes for the teachers’ time away from the school.

Teachers who have spent some time teaching may not be keen to move away from their professional and social identities. They do not know much about

leadership roles/tasks other than what they see, and this can hinder their leadership aspirations. Concern about the difficulty of KPship and their perceived inadequacy may smother any nascent aspirations. In addition, what teachers see of KPship often reflects what KPs speak about it and how they enact their views, and is dependent on the local school/department situation.

On the other hand, the MOE's efforts at enticing more to strive for leadership is not always accurately interpreted and can often result in the teachers remaining as teachers, for instance the salary overlap between teachers and KPs, and the ease of leaving and returning to service. National policies such as increasing the foreign student intake as well as planned increase in population only make the KPship more challenging. On the other hand, MOE's focused efforts on providing teachers a balanced family life has not resulted in more teachers aspiring towards KPship. The effect of these influences on Singaporean Secondary school teachers' actual leadership aspirations in the present study can only be ascertained after the interviews and data analysis.

## **2.6 Gaps in literature reviewed**

Of significance for this study is that much of the literature refers to teachers' leadership aspirations towards principalship. More recently, there has been a growing body of studies on the middle-level of school leadership – department headship. Many of these, like those of Busher and Harris (1999, 2000) and Busher (2005) focused on what comprised middle-level leadership appointments and how to prepare for them, rather than teachers' aspiration for such appointments. The literature review has shown that few influences which impact on teachers' aspirations for KPship are studied/documentated in detail. There does not seem to be data on how the influences affect different teachers' leadership aspirations, and why they do so – whether similarly or differently. Also, literature does not show whether the impact of the influences is constant,

while some other influences change over time or as the teacher matures and becomes more experienced.

Literature does not indicate whether some influences can actually impact teachers more at certain stages of their careers than at others (in other words, are teachers more receptive/susceptible to certain influences at different career points), and how over time, and even over certain significant events in the teacher's life, the impact of the same influences may change.

This study strives to address some of these gaps in the literature reviewed and is hence distinctive. In the process, it seeks to identify the pull and push factors that belong to teacher influences as well as leadership influences. It then attempts to understand and explain the combined effects that such teacher influences have on enticing teachers to remain teachers, and the pull and push factors that leadership influences have on encouraging (or discouraging) teachers to want to hold leadership positions.

Singapore is multi-racial and it is possible that teachers of different races may react to different influences differently. This means that there may be differences in leadership aspirations of the different races in Singapore. This may not be as stark as highlighted by McNamara's (2009) study on black teachers probably because Singapore MOE policy is no longer to have teachers of a single race in any given school and the effect may thus be less than in other countries.

Finally, there is little study on teachers' aspirations towards leadership in the Singaporean societal and school culture. As Walker and Dimmock (1999) highlight: "Societal culture has not been rigorously applied to the field of educational leadership and administration....neither has school-level culture been developed as a foundation for comparative analysis..." (p.321-348). This study hopes to make a contribution towards addressing this gap in the Singaporean context.

# Chapter 3

## Methodology

### Introduction

This study aims to suggest a theory of why Singapore secondary school teachers' career decision-making processes currently seem to be leading many to eschew leadership positions and to remain as teachers. It is guided by two research questions:

1. "What influences affect secondary school teachers' decision-making as to whether to aspire to middle-level school leadership?" and
2. "How do these influences affect the career aspirations of Singaporean secondary school teachers?"

Content analysis methodology is used as the research design in this study to answer the main research questions above. In line with Blumer's (1990) symbolic interactionism, content analysis aims to understand and explain the phenomenon being investigated. This chapter explains and justifies why content analysis methodology is suited for this study and discusses the associated assumptions, methods, limitations and ethical issues with regard to the main research questions.

This chapter discusses the methodology, and in particular, the assumptions that support the interpretivist paradigm (as opposed to the positivist paradigm) and also Blumer's (1969) "symbolic interactionist" perspective. It also discusses how they relate to this research, the research questions and why content analysis is the method of choice. The sampling methods and choice of participants are discussed, in particular explaining how a retrospective perspective helps

corroborate the teachers' perceptions. This chapter then discusses the methods of data collection and analysis, the trustworthiness of the research, and ethical considerations.

### **3.1 Interpretivism versus Positivism**

A paradigm is “the entire constellation of beliefs, values, techniques shared by members of a given scientific community” (Kuhn, 1970, p.75). Usher (1996) provided a complementary definition in that “frameworks function as maps or guides for scientific communities, determining important problems or issues for members to address and define acceptable theories or explanations, methods and techniques to solve defined problems” (p.15). It can be seen that the research paradigm provides the philosophical underpinnings to research approaches and methods. It implicitly provides the reference and governs how the research is conducted, how participants are chosen, and how data is collected, organised, analysed and made sense of. It also defines the boundaries and determines whether to include/exclude outliers.

Within social science, there are two distinct epistemological traditions. The first, positivism, focuses on scientific methods and “aims at objectivity, standard procedures and replicability” (Johnson, 1994, p.7). The other, interpretivism, believes that there is no objective truth and that “all human life is experienced and constructed from a subjective point of view, and that social research should seek to elicit the ‘meaning’ of events and phenomena from the point of view of participants” (Johnson, 1994, p.7). These two paradigms are discussed below.

#### **3.1.1 Positivism**

Positivism holds that the observer/researcher is independent of the study and must not influence it (Easterby-Smith, 1994; Cohen & Manion 1994). This means that different people would reach the same truth. The researcher must be value-

free and avoid personal/observer bias; and problems can be broken down into simple elements. By focusing on the facts, ensuing discoveries allow concepts to be formulated so that the causes can be understood. Such studies involve large samples so as to understand the population's responses. Since positivist methodology is based on scientific techniques, quantitative methods are required for data collection/analysis.

### **3.1.2 Interpretivism**

According to Easterby-Smith (1994) and Cohen & Manion (1994), the interpretive world is socially constructed and subjective. It is challenging if not impossible for the researcher to be unbiased, and the observer's presence unavoidably influences interviewees' responses and data collection. The strength of interpretivism is the sense the researchers make of the data which is based on their knowledge of the field. In seeking to understand the situation from the interviewee's viewpoint, the situation/environment's totality is considered as well as the complex interplay of the surrounding environment. Small samples are thus studied in depth.

According to Habermas (1987), "social research is an interactive rather than a controlling process" (Hamilton, 1994, p.67). Interpretivists believe qualitative research may yield more telling results, as the observer interprets the situation's context and seeks to understand the complex interplay of influences, especially between the observer and the observed. Also, truth is seen as subjective, or how the observer understands it, as according to Habermas, "truth is rational agreement reached through critical discussion" (Usher, 1996, p.23). However, there are proponents of positivist styles of ethnography, such as Hammersley (1991) who argue that all studies should be judged by a set of scientific criteria, including reliability and representativeness.

## **3.2 Choice and Justification for using the Interpretivist Paradigm and Qualitative Approach**

To determine which of the paradigms best underpins and informs this study's research aim and research questions, it is useful to refer to Easterby-Smith (1994), who narrowed down *four key choices* that differentiate between the research approaches, namely the purpose of the research, the researcher's independence, the sample size, and the experimental design versus fieldwork methods.

### **3.2.1 Purpose of Research**

Researchers who want to test a theory or generalise claims across a population would seek the positivist paradigm's quantitative methods. Those who want to understand more about a phenomenon, or build a theory, would favour interpretivism, which uses qualitative methods. This research aims to determine the influences that affect Singaporean teachers' decisions as to whether to aspire to middle-level school leadership. Understanding the influences that shape teachers' decision-making regarding their career aspirations, helps address the research problem of the shortage of capable teachers aspiring towards, and applying for, leadership positions in Singapore schools.

A lack of previous research indicates that the problem of leader shortage has yet to be addressed and there is as yet no existing theory to test. In contrast, the interpretivist approach allows the researcher to search the teachers' minds, to understand why they act the way they do, with regard to wanting (or not wanting) to be leaders, and to see if there is a trend. An interpretivist study would enable the understanding of the phenomenon of why teachers choose to forego career promotion into leadership positions, thereby addressing the research questions.

This study also seeks to discover the influences that matter to Singaporean teachers regarding promotion to leadership positions and career decisions, and the way that they make sense of, and perceive, the influences and choices available. The research aims to find out how teachers' personal experiences, professional socialisation, as well as the school environment, affect their individual leadership aspirations.

### **3.2.2 Researcher's 'Independence'**

Another choice to be made is whether the researcher can be independent from the study. According to Travers (2001), many positivist writers hold that "the best hope for sociology is that it becomes a science like natural sciences....and that quantitative methods are usually held out as being more 'scientific'" (p.6). The implication here is that the researcher is detached from the subjects.

Questionnaires, for example, are often mailed out to participants so that the researcher never comes into contact with them, or with the overall context. However, no researcher can ever be truly independent from their study – not even those working in the positivist paradigm – as the researcher's influence is often seen in the designing of the questionnaire and interpretation of the findings. This research, however, seeks to understand the teachers' perceptions of the influences, and the complex interplay of how their personal values and professional upbringing affect their perceptions. It also considers the school context and the pressures and influences it places on teachers. These are highly subjective and make the adoption of the positivist paradigm where "the world is external and objective" (Easterby-Smith, 1994, p.7) unfit for purpose.

Weber (1958) believed that sociology has to address the meaningful character of social action, using interpretive methods (Travers, 2001). Furthermore, Kant (1781/1929) proposed that perception is more than seeing, and that humans perceive not only through their senses but also are affected by their mental apparatus. Hence, even if two teachers think similarly, their reasons for so

thinking could be different. Such inputs provide rich data and are likely to be lost, if they are aggregated into a collated whole as required in a positivist paradigm. Interpretive studies have a prime duty to capture the words and meanings of the participants but there still remains a lot of interpretative work to be undertaken by the researcher. Somewhat paradoxically, this is precisely the strength of interpretivism as the researchers bring with them rich experiences to interpret participants' words and meanings (emic description) into a form that others can also make meaning of for other contexts (etic description).

This study's second research question seeks to understand how Singaporean teachers perceive the attractiveness of school leadership and why they desire, or eschew leadership positions. Teachers are likely to feel differently about this, and teachers at different levels of maturity expectedly have different perspectives of higher level appointments. As such, there is a need not only to know what teachers think, but why they think the way they do. Consequently, what is clear for this study, is the difficulty of approaching the research aims by simply surveying a large sample and determining "the large-scale...phenomena" (Travers, 2001, p.7). Rather, the aim suggests and even demands an in-depth study of teachers using the interpretivist paradigm.

### **3.2.3 Sample Size**

The third choice to be made involves sample size. According to Easterby-Smith (1994) the two paradigms contrast, with positivism looking at large cross-section sampling while interpretivism requires smaller samples that are often studied longitudinally. The strength of using large randomly selected samples is that it evens out person-to-person variations, thereby allowing the characteristics of a population to be broken down and categorised, for example, by age, seniority, and many other influences. Interpretivists, however, require sampling to be purposely chosen to achieve the specific aims of the study; and then to pursue data from the sample in a relentless, in-depth fashion. They interpret and make

meaning of the findings, placing the onus on the reader to draw any relevance to their own situation. Transferability of findings is thus a shared responsibility between the researcher with obligations to report data and the context in depth, and the readers, with responsibility to make comparisons with their own situation.

According to Van Maanen (1988) “a culture is expressed (or constituted) only by the actions and words of its members and must be interpreted by, not given to, a fieldworker” (p.3). It is sometimes difficult to gain access to the subjects or participants unless the researcher devotes focused attention on his/her professional life to the pursuit (Clifford, 1983). As this study is a doctoral study and not conducted on behalf of the Singapore government, access to teachers is usually extremely difficult. However, as the researcher had spent almost 5 years as a VP, access to teachers was obtained by their goodwill. This study focuses on a relatively small sample, but tries to capture a wide range of views and opinions instead. The aim is not to randomly sample large numbers of teachers in order to generalise conclusions but to better understand the phenomenon of teachers’ aspirations towards leadership and leader positions in Singapore secondary schools. As the intent is to study the reasons behind the teachers’ perceptions of leadership roles and their aspirations to pursue, or otherwise, leadership positions, the study must necessarily understand the individual participants and their unique situations.

### **3.2.4 Experimental Design versus Fieldwork Methods**

The fourth choice to be made involves research methods. Positivist research is linked to quantitative methodology (Easterby-Smith, 1994) and often starts from the selection of a theory to be tested. The experimental design would include creating experimental and control groups, and carrying out the observations and administering the tests or questionnaires. The findings are then compared with the proposed theory to see if they support it.

In interpretivist research, there is no pre-existent theory to prove so researchers using the interpretivist paradigm usually seek to understand a phenomenon or develop a theory. Reason (1988) noted that researchers can dialogue with participants, involving them in decisions regarding the issues to be researched. This approach is known as “co-operative enquiry”. Kant (1781/1929) felt that “human knowledge is ultimately based on understanding, an intellectual state that is more than just a consequence of experience. Thus, for Kant, human claims about nature cannot be independent of inside-the-head processes of knowing subject.” (Hamilton, 1994, p.63).

Currently, there are few if any existing theories as to why some Singaporean teachers aspire towards leadership positions, while others apparently do not. Additionally, there is little empirical evidence to rely upon to support any remedial policy actions to promote leadership aspirations among Singapore teachers. Nor can it be assumed that studies of teachers’ leadership aspirations conducted overseas necessarily apply in Singapore, which operates under a different cultural setting (Dimmock & Walker, 2005). To understand the reasons why some teachers eschew and others espouse leadership, there is a need to delve into the teachers’ unique experiences, their personal needs, professional upbringing, school environment and the effects of educational policies. Hence, an interpretivist approach is more suitable for this study.

### **3.2.5 Summary of Choice of Paradigm**

Easterby-Smith’s (1994) four key choices clearly show that a qualitative research method underpinned by the interpretivist paradigm appears most appropriate, as the aim of this research is to discover what teachers think and feel about leadership positions and why they do so. Among the several strategies that support the interpretivist paradigm, case study seems well suited. As Sanders (1981) noted, case study is of value because it “depends on inductive reasoning, uses a multiplicity of data, is descriptive, specific, has characteristic value and

cannot be standardised” (p.46-47). Besides these, case study is advantageous because it allows the understanding of complex relationships, including individuals and institutions. People make sense of their social situations through shared meanings, which are interpreted and re-interpreted through interaction with others. Acceptance of these notions coupled with principles of symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1969), enables this study to explore teachers’ understanding of leadership and what it means to them. Consequently, the research design envisioned in this study is based on qualitative research methods, underpinned by the interpretivist paradigm and within a social theory framework of symbolic interactionism. Having chosen the interpretivist paradigm, we will now consider the research approach.

### **3.3 Symbolic Interactionism and the Research Questions**

Symbolic interactionism originated with George Herbert Mead (1934) and is often linked with qualitative research. It is adopted to investigate phenomena associated with individuals in their cultural and social settings. Blumer (1969) proposed that human experience tempered how people interpreted what they encounter. Symbolic interactionists believe that human beings are constantly adapting to the changing society through reflecting and contemplating on life’s situations (Jeon, 2004). Blumer (1969) proposed three premises of symbolic interactionism in interpreting human experience:

1. *People act towards things or fellow humans in their surroundings on the basis of the meanings that these things have for them;*
2. *These meanings come from communicating or interacting with people;*  
*and*
3. *These meanings are managed through an interpretive process used by the person with the things he comes across according to the situation the person is in (p.2).*

Therefore, Blumer (1969) opined that a phenomenon can be understood and analysed through the participants' interpretations of the object/person/event and their action/interaction in the social context.

Consequently, the two main research questions: (1) "What influences affect secondary school teachers' decision-making as to whether to aspire to middle-level school leadership?" and (2) "How do these influences affect the career aspirations of Singaporean secondary school teachers?" can be further expanded which help frame the interview questions:

1. What are the intrinsic/personal influences and how important are they in affecting teachers' decision-making processes and career aspirations?
2. What are the pre-service experiences and how did they influence teachers' decision-making processes and career aspirations?
3. Who are the significant others and how did they impact on teachers' decision-making processes and career aspirations?
4. What are the school environment and school leaders' influences and how do they impact on teachers' decision-making processes and career aspirations?
5. What are the MOE policy influences and how do they impact on teachers' decision-making processes and career aspirations?

The research and interview questions are founded on Blumer's first premise that people act on things according to their meaning - in the case of this research - regarding how they view teaching and leadership in the school context. Blumer's second premise is based on social interaction and hence the five expanded questions seek to discover who are the significant others and how they impact on a teacher's decision-making. The third premise focuses on the interpretive process which governs how teachers perceive leadership positions and how they decide whether they want to move along the leadership path.

### 3.4 Content Analysis Methodology

Complementing case study is the choice of approach regarding data analysis. Within qualitative research, two of the several approaches to data collection/analysis are *content analysis* and *grounded theory*. Both approaches share similar methods of data collection (interviews, observations and documentary sources). The pertinent difference between the two approaches is that grounded theory results in the proposal of the typology of participants. Both grounded theory and content analysis allow the development of theory.

This study has no pre-existing theory to test, which is often the case in education studies, especially those conducted in Asia. It also has little local literature to refer to. In this respect, the study aims to generate a theory. Owing to the limited choice of participants within the cluster where the researcher worked in, it was extremely difficult to be able to get 20 participants who share a common profile, such as age, seniority, experience, or education qualification, and who are willing to participate in the study. Without a common profile, it would be difficult to generate a meaningful typology. Consequently, this study uses the content analysis approach, which allows the development of a theory that explains how specific subjects manage their experiences. A set of substantive theories can be combined into a formal theory if the aim is to explain a phenomenon more effectively for a larger community/population, which will further advance the theoretical research in that area (Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Grbich, 1999).

The content analysis approach includes theoretical sampling, constant comparisons of data and the use of a coding paradigm to ensure the development of conceptual density (Strauss, 1987). This then allows the development of a theory. This is relevant, as according to Morse (1994), a theory offers “the best comprehensive, coherent and simplest model for linking

diverse and unrelated facts in a useful and pragmatic way” (p.25), which then enables the understanding of the research questions.

This qualitative study aims to develop a better understanding of the phenomenon of teachers’ career decision-making, especially in relation to choices between continuing to teach, and leadership. According to Ong (2006) an in-depth study “helps to establish the causal conditions or the reasons that create the phenomenon...[and] enables the researcher to identify many of the unknown components that influence the formation of the phenomenon under study” (p.45). Readers may then be able to transfer and apply the findings to their own situations. Lincoln and Guba (1985) however warned that the “burden of proof is on the user rather than on the original researcher” (p.241). This means the theory to be developed is not easily generalisable to other Singaporean schools. This position on generalisation is also taken by other practitioners of qualitative research (Feinberg, 1977; Mishler, 1979).

The selection of content analysis methodology for this study also influences the choice of sampling methods and participants, the data collection, and the data analysis.

### **3.5 The Sampling Methods and Participants**

This study seeks to understand the aspirations and choices of school personnel at a number of levels - teachers’ aspirations towards KPship; KPs’ desire for KPship when they were teachers, and VPs’/principals’ desire for KPship, when they were teachers. From Gall, Borg and Gall’s (1996) 15 types of purposive sampling, a combination of *stratified purposeful sampling* and *opportunistic sampling* is deemed most suitable.

### 3.5.1 Stratified Purposeful Sampling

To provide a cross-section of perspectives at the teacher level, two teachers who are keen to assume leadership positions, two who are not, and two who are unsure, were interviewed. Since the study seeks corroboration through retrospective perspective from KPs, and VPs when they were teachers, similar selections were repeated for the KPs/VPs regarding their perceptions. According to Patton (1990) “any common patterns that emerge from great variation are of particular interest and value in capturing the core experiences” (p.172). As Schofield (2000) advised, “heterogeneity can be obtained by searching out sites that will provide maximal variation” (p.80). Hence this study chose teachers/KPs/VPs across the cross-section of perspectives regarding desire for middle-level leadership positions.

Finally, two principals were also asked retrospectively for their thoughts on teaching versus leadership as career paths, and what they saw as the defining characteristics of career trajectories that embrace, just teaching, or teaching/leadership. This is relevant in helping to understand how teachers’ leadership aspirations change as they move up the hierarchy. Twenty participants in all were interviewed, a manageable number for a single doctoral researcher. The matrix of participants is shown in Table 3.1:

Teachers’ Leadership Aspirations	Teachers	KPs	VPs	Principals
Keen	2	2	2	2
Not keen	2	2	2	
Unsure	2	2	2	

**Table 3.1: Interview Matrix to facilitate nomination/choice of participants**

This study focuses on leadership in both curriculum and management (which falls under the purview of the KPs) and not just leadership in curriculum (which is

the purview of the senior teachers (ST)). STs are not interviewed as they do not feature in the supply pipeline for school leaders.

In order to hear balanced voices from participants with different leadership inclinations, the matrix limits the avoidable bias from having an imbalance of participants who are keen, not keen, or unsure of their leadership aspirations, and from the different leadership levels. Too many teachers who have already chosen to be KPs/VPs/Principals may skew the data as these people are probably positively predisposed towards leadership. This sampling matrix facilitates the selection of participants to ensure that a wide variation is sampled, and is not meant to curtail the richness or varied nature of the typology that may emerge from the data. This sampling approach was also useful to enlist participants the researcher does not personally know.

### **3.5.2 Opportunistic Sampling**

In order to have a range of participant characteristics, the matrix (Table 3.1) was circulated among the eight secondary school principals in the researcher's cluster (in Singapore, MOE schools are divided geographically into 4 zones each of which has 7 clusters, with each cluster supervising around 13 schools) for them to nominate staff who fit the nine combinations. Each of the nominees was approached for their consent to participate in the study. As the slots were being filled (two teachers per combination), the principals were updated, so that there was no over-subscription for any particular combination. This was accurate so far as the principals were aware of the nominated teacher's expressed leadership intent. However, it was noted during the process of interviewing the participants that the possibility existed that they may be inclined to change their views and aspirations for leadership positions. This would cause the matrix to be unevenly subscribed (that is, not having two teachers per combination) but this is deemed acceptable. According to Blumer's (1969) theoretical framework of "symbolic interactionism" – people act towards things on the basis of the meanings that

those things have for them – the participant’s interaction with the researcher at the interviews may unavoidably affect the participant’s perceptions. However, this might have benefits in helping the participant better understand and make meaning of their views towards leadership.

In the process of selecting the participants, several did not wish to participate after understanding what the interviews entailed. Three teachers declined my invitation to be involved with this study. Owing to the lack of volunteers, I had to involve one principal, two VPs, one KP and one teacher from outside the cluster of schools where I worked in. Nevertheless they still fit the criteria for selection.

One important variable that was not controlled was the length of service (and thus degree of experience) of the participants. There was great difficulty even to get the entire 20 participants from the cluster of 8 secondary schools (comprising of more than 500 teachers). This posed a severe constraint in this study’s ability to develop a typology. Consequently, the content analysis methodology was adopted, rather than grounded theory, which would have required the development of a typology. There were simply too many variables in the participants’ profiles to allow for a meaningful typology. Other than this, there are many similarities in how research would be conducted for content analysis and grounded theory methodology.

On the other hand, deliberately varying the age of the participants with sufficient sample size at each group of ages would have added a dimension that would have been beyond the ability of a single researcher. Thus the teacher’s length of service as an influence was not studied in detail.

As most teachers in secondary schools, with the exception of Mother Tongue, Home Economics and Art teachers, are graduates, the participants chosen in this study are also graduates. Hence, studying the perceptions of graduate teachers adequately covered more than 95% of the staff in secondary schools.

There was no attempt at categorising the participants according to race. As Singapore has four official major races, the number of permutations required would have been beyond the ability of a single researcher to manage. Similarly, another possible variable would have been participants' nationality. This was circumvented by deliberately choosing only Singaporean participants.

Likewise, although an attempt was made to balance the gender mix, those who participated in the study included twelve men and eight women. Women were represented at all levels except Principal. This would allow for gender issues to surface, especially issues relating to career decision-making as to whether to join the teaching service, to stay as teachers or to aspire towards KPship. The small number of participants interviewed precludes any attempt at generalisation. At best, the issues that surface give an indication of possible differences in how men and women approach career decision-making and perceive these influences. Although it is accepted that some differences in decision-making may at least be gender-related, it was not the prime focus of this study.

### **3.6 Retrospective Perspective**

The interviews asked KPs how they felt about their current job and what they felt/thought about the attractiveness of leadership positions, when they were teachers. Likewise, the VPs were asked about their perceptions/aspirations when they were still teachers. These are shown in Table 3.2. Retrospective perspectives (Spear, 2002) enable the researcher to bring the participants back to the time they were teachers and/or KPs. If there were similarities between teachers' perceptions of KP positions, what the KPs thought of KP positions when they were teachers, and what the VPs thought of KP positions when they were teachers, then such corroboration would remove the need to conduct subsequent interviews for the purpose of assessing perception changes over time. Nevertheless, it is recognised that retrospective perceptions may not

accurately reflect what actually transpired. Vidict (1994) noted that “from Nisbert’s (1976) pointed observations we may conclude that the method-in-use for the production of a finished sociological study is unique to that study and can be neither described nor replicated as it actually occurred” (p.24). Also, enquiring of KPs what they felt as teachers, would be more accurate compared to asking VPs what they felt as teachers, because of the shorter time interval and this would aid in the recall.

	INTERVIEW OF TEACHERS	INTERVIEW OF KPS	INTERVIEW OF VPS
CURRENT PERCEPTION	As Teacher	As KP	As VP
PERCEPTION AS TEACHERS	Teacher’s aspirations for KPship	KP’s earlier aspirations as teachers, for KPship	VP’s earlier aspirations as teachers, for KPship

**Table 3.2: Interview Matrix Permitting Retrospective Perspective & Corroboration**

The interview matrix in Table 3.2 highlighted the required corroborative data. Nevertheless, according to Vidich and Lyman (1994) “objectivity resides not in a method, per se, but in the framing of the research problem and the willingness of the researchers to pursue that problem wherever the data and their hunches may lead” (p.24). Even so, there may be some trustworthiness limitations to the proposed retrospective study. Having chosen the sampling strategy, appropriate methods of data collection are required.

### **3.7 Methods of Data Collection**

There are three main methods of data collection in qualitative research - *interviews*, *document sources*, and *observation*. These capture Cohen and Manion’s (1994) thinking that “the principal concern is with an understanding of the way in which the individual creates, modifies and interprets the world in which

he or she finds himself or herself” (p.8). Consequently, this study interviewed teachers, each of whom forms a case study and the schools provide the context to understand the teachers’ responses. Understanding the school is important as, according to Cohen and Manion (1994), scientific research considers “people within their social contexts” (p.40).

Semi-structured interviews provide the richness of data regarding the individual teacher’s upbringing and nurturing which have resulted in their perceptions of leadership roles and leadership aspirations. Documents could help triangulate findings or fill information gaps. However, teachers typically do not document their thoughts, systematically or partially. Hence, this source of information is not a key source of data.

Equally important is to understand the subtleties that exist in the schools where these teachers teach, the unspoken rules/regulations that either motivate or stifle initiative, and the collegiality/friendship that exists to bond the teachers and enhance their social identity. According to Barth (2001), teachers who share common experiences and bond socially prefer to remain teachers and not become leaders. Observation could allow the researcher to appreciate the rich environmental influences on the teachers. However, this would require significant ethnographic resources, especially time, which is beyond the scope of the doctoral researcher. Hence observation is not considered.

Having chosen interviews as the main method of data collection, research tools were needed to facilitate the study. Qualitative researchers typically favour the creation of an audit trail, which according to Lincoln and Guba (1985), consists of raw data, analysis notes, reconstruction and synthesis products, process notes, personal notes and preliminary developmental information. This is a documentary record of the research steps and decisions taken, moving from the raw transcripts to the final interpretation of data, and it includes memos, notes, or case summaries (Teal, 2007). Akkerman et al’s (2007) interpretation of the audit

trail included problem definition, conceptual framework, paradigm, process document and the recording of decisions taken along the research process.

Spradley (1979) and Measor's (1985) interview principles provided a useful guide. The semi-structured interview method (Taylor and Bogdan, 1984) was used as it allows the participants to discuss their lives and experiences in a free-flowing, open-ended discussion and also allows the researcher to interpret those views (O'Donoghue, 1997). Besides allowing the collection of "comparable data across subjects" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992, p.72), it also allows "sufficient freedom to explore particular issues of concern to individual interviewees" (Lam, 2006, p.66). The study is also in-depth as it is a "conversation with a specific purpose – a conversation between researcher and informant focusing on the informant's perception of self, life and experience, and expressed in his or her own words" (Minichiello et al, 1990, p.87), thereby allowing participants' interpretations of social reality.

An aide-memoire (Burgess, 1984) was developed, to assist the researcher as it provided prompts/probes, and reminders of the grounds to be covered in the free-flowing conversations. It is not rigid in that it allows "the conversation to meander according to the participants' responses and the subsequent verbal interaction between researcher and informant" (Minichiello et al, 1990, p.116). Given to participants a fortnight ahead, it helps them prepare for the sessions and provides a semi-structure for the interview. The refined questions remind the researcher regarding the information to be collected and the acquisition strategy, and they also allow for the necessary corroboration and triangulation to be planned ahead.

### **3.7.1 Interviews**

To understand teachers' perspectives/aspirations, the researcher spent time understanding each teacher's unique concerns and desires. Rather than one

long interview with each participant, the interviews were divided into two sessions, each of 1-1½ hours duration. This enabled the participants to have more time to consider their responses. The aide-memoire questions for both interviews were also combined and sent to each participant prior to the first interview.

The aide-memoire questions were tested on two teachers (who were not part of the 20 participants) in two pilot interviews in June 2008 so as to ensure that the questions were focused, properly sequenced, and directly supported the two main research questions and expanded five specific questions. The pilot interviews added significant clarity on what should be asked, how they should be asked, and also helped eliminate unnecessary or overlapping questions.

The first semi-structured interview for each participant took place from July 2008 to November 2008. These interview sessions were conducted at the participants' schools. Prior to each interview, participants were reminded that they could withdraw at any time, or not answer any particular question. Their permission was sought for audio-taping during the interview. Questions for participants included their childhood and schooling experiences, why they joined the teaching profession (Richardson, 2006), the influences of their parents and significant others in their choice of career, challenges faced during teacher training and in school, what enables them, constrains them, stresses them, motivates them (Schein, 1990), and their relationship with their students/colleagues (Tajfel, 1979). The questions covered their family roles/commitments (Fuchs, 1992), and how they felt these commitments contributed to their feelings about school issues. The aide-memoires for KP-participants, VP-participants and principal-participants included questions that addressed their current state and their perception as teachers, as per the retrospective perspective plan. Table 3.3 shows the aide-memoire for the first interview for teachers.

- Why did you join the teaching profession?
- Can you describe your schooling experience? How did it affect your career choice? Your values?
- Can you describe your family/commitments? How have they influenced your decision to teach? How has salary or the “iron-rice-bowl” concept influenced your decision?
- How has any significant others influence that decision?
- Has teaching been what you expected?
- How was your teacher/teaching preparation?
- What excites/enables/motivates you? Why? What constraints you? Why?
- How is your relationship with your students, colleagues and supervisor?
- Can you describe your pride and social status as a teacher?
- Can you describe your school? What is it like to teach there?
- Can you describe your relationship with your colleagues?
- Can you describe the support/mentoring you have from the school?
- Can you describe work-life balance in your school? And your ability to give sufficient time for both work and home?

**Table 3.3: Aide-memoire for First Interview (Teachers)**

Originally, for the second interviews, questions included how teachers perceived government and MOE policies (Lacey, 2002), and their school leaders/environment/values/climate, how they felt their school leaders have contributed to it (Robbins, 2003), how they perceived their school environment vis-à-vis work-life harmony (Gan, 2007), what their career goals were and why they harboured them, whether these goals included school leadership positions (which career strand they preferred (MOE, 2006a)) and how students’ characteristics/background contributed to them harbouring these goals, how being teachers contributed to how they perceived leadership positions (Normore, 2004) and their aspirations towards them or the lack of it, what their plans were to achieve these career goals, the adequacy of leadership training, how their experiences influenced/changed those goals/plans, and what needed to happen for them to change that aspiration. It was also important to know how the participants made decisions and the important influences/considerations. To retain flexibility, throughout the interviews, the wording and ordering were not

fixed (O'Donoghue and Dimmock, 1997). Table 3.4 shows the aide-memoire for the teachers' second interview.

- What do you think about your school leaders/environment? How have your school leaders, and immediate supervisor, contributed to the culture/environment?
- Regarding MOE policies, how have they affected your decision to continue teaching? How has the MOE and National policies impacted on your aspiration to leadership positions?
- Do you know what a leadership job entails? How different are the skills between a teacher and a leader? What aspects of leadership do you like/dislike? Why?
- Can you be a leader? Why?
- Did anyone tell you if you can be a leader/otherwise?
- What are your career goals and why do you harbour these goals?
- Have you considered taking up leadership roles? Why?
- Does anyone know of your leadership aspirations – whether you want or not want to move up? How have they reacted/encouraged you? Groomed you?
- How have your schooling experiences affected your decision-making process and your career/leadership aspirations?
- How has your relationship with students, colleagues or supervisor affected your decision-making process, your aspirations?
- How have your teaching experiences affected your decision-making processes and aspirations?
- How have your family commitments affected your decision-making processes and your aspirations?

**Table 3.4: Aide-memoire for Second Interview (Teachers)**

The successful conduct of the initial interviews meant that all questions in both aide-memoires were addressed. Consequently, for the second interview (conducted from Jan 2009 to May 2009) member-checking was done. Member-checking is the process of getting the participants to review the researchers' report for accuracy and completeness (Punch, 1998; Gall et al, 1999). An interim theory, based on analysis of the transcripts of all twenty participants was presented to the participants for discussion and corroboration. Additional clarifications were also made at the second interview to fill gaps identified from the earlier responses of particular participants. These allowed the thick descriptions to be obtained. Transcription was done after each interview and

sent to the participant for confirmation. Thereafter, the data were coded and analysed on an on-going basis. Data from the second interview, after confirmation, was coded and the new data constantly compared against the earlier data. The interim theory was modified.

### **3.8 Data Analysis**

Data analysis is subjective in that it is the “interplay between researchers and data” (Strauss, 1990, p.13). As mentioned earlier, this is in line with Blumer’s (1969) theory of Symbolic Interactionism. Although data comes from various sources such as interviews, observations, and documents, it is the analysis that makes sense of such data. As Strauss and Corbin (1990) noted:

*Although we do not create data, we create theory out of data. If we do it correctly, then we are not speaking for our participants but rather are enabling them to speak in voices that are clearly understood and representative (p.56).*

Not unlike grounded theory, according to Glaser and Strauss (1990), from the cases studied and data collected, the researcher codes the data into concepts and identifies categories and sub-categories and their properties and dimensions through a process called open coding, which involves “breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualising, and categorising data” (p.61). The aim is to uncover as many categories/sub-categories as possible. A qualitative analysis software (NVivo7) was used to systematically code the transcripts/raw data into concepts, or basic building blocks of theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p.74). Concepts that appear linked to the same phenomenon were grouped to form respective categories and sub-categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Subsequently, the relationships between the different categories/sub-categories were linked (a process called axial coding). Finally, in a process called selective

coding, the categories were grouped into a core category, which systematically relates to other categories, validating relationships and filling categories which needed refinement/development (Strauss, 1990). This process ultimately yields a developed theory, which would describe why teachers think the way they do about their careers and the reasons behind their leadership aspirations, or the lack of.

During analysis, flexibility was adopted in allowing data and concepts to switch within the three coding procedures. This flip-flop technique (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) leads to the evolution of the core category, which can then be used in the development of the theory (Punch, 1998).

### **3.8.1 Open coding**

This first stage, the open coding process, involves breaking up the interview responses and labeling each parcel of data, which is a portion of the transcript that contains a single idea, or a piece of information. The labels (or nodes) are the concepts forming the building blocks that help to build up the theory. The comparative method involves asking questions and making comparisons (Glaser, 1978). The unit of analysis used was groups of sentences containing the same idea. New nodes were constantly compared against existing list of nodes and where the data were related, the two parcels of data were combined under the common node. Where the new node was different from the ones in the existing list, it was added into the list. The list of different nodes was built up as each transcript was coded and ended when all the first twenty interview transcripts were coded. The purpose of doing this was to find all theoretical possibilities in the data which would better facilitate the generation of abstract conceptual categories and further theories.

The concepts or nodes were compared and related ones were clustered into higher order nodes known as categories. After a category was developed, the

properties and dimensions were identified (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). Table 3.5 shows an example of an open-coded transcript from a first interview.

Interview Transcript	Open Coding
<p>17. The way you think, you cannot remain as a teacher. But why didn't you stop at being a KP? Were you not happy with your friends? Why did you proceed further? What were the influences?</p> <p><u>Answer.</u> Like I said, even before we were teaching, I think not many people can say that as a trainee teacher, they organized a nation-wide seminar. Today Singapore-wide forums are common but in those days, these were not very common. And there was no internet and letters have to be individually prepared etc. Even before that, we were already talking about professionalism in teaching. So you ask me, I have that personal desire to contribute and make things better. But that is the desire part. The other part is what I shared earlier. If you don't want to take on the leadership position, then someone lesser comes to take on the leadership position, then you lost the right to complain. Because you can do the job but you did not want to do it. You let someone else do it, so if that person does it, and in your mind it is not the way you think it ought to be done, then you must take the blame, because you chose not to take on the job when you were offered earlier. So if my bosses find me capable, and ask me if I want to be considered for the job, and if they think I can do the job, I will say, why not. If they think that I add value to the organization, I will do it. So when I didn't clear my first interview, as a VP, I lost my right to complain about any principals who I think are not so solid. At least they got the courage to be a principal. But then my second interview came and I said ok, I want to be a principal. So this time I prepared for it properly. I lost my voice, I think I did better than the previous time. So if you are given the honour to lead, and you turn it down, then you also give up the right to complain.</p>	<p>Prior leadership experience</p> <p>Gap between teacher and leader</p> <p>Competence at lower level required.</p> <p>General leadership aspiration.</p> <p>Understanding own strengths.</p> <p>Incentive to move up.</p> <p><b><u>Importance of affirmation.</u></b></p> <p>Charting own MOE career.</p> <p>Aspiration only to Principalship.</p> <p>Need someone to notice us.</p> <p>Motivation to lead.</p>

Coding Memo:

**Importance of affirmation**

Bosses who reaffirm the subordinate, give the latter confidence that they are on the right track, doing the right things, the right way, working hard enough, etc. Teachers need affirmation, sometimes, even the more senior ones, like VPs. Such typically are expected to work without affirmation, but sometimes, affirmation has a great effect on some such people.

People who constantly need affirmation may experience difficulties being leaders at the highest levels. At the higher levels, there would be far fewer (if any) people who are going to give affirmation. Instead, the leaders need to GIVE affirmation, and not receive it.

At the lower levels, teachers need affirmation to thrive. How then to wean teachers from requiring affirmation to not requiring affirmation (as they get more senior)?

**Table 3.5: Sample of Open Coding of Interview Transcript**

### **3.8.2 Axial coding**

As noted by Strauss & Corbin (1990), axial coding “begin[s] the process of reassembling data that were fractured during open coding...axial coding [relates] categories to sub-categories along the lines of their properties and dimensions” (p.124). This assembling is in new ways not earlier evident from the transcripts. This helps increase understanding between categories and between categories and sub-categories, thereby creating a dense texture of conceptualization (Strauss, 1987). They also explained that the focus in axial coding is to “specify a category (phenomenon) in terms of the conditions that give rise to it; the context (its specific set of properties) in which it is embedded; the action/interaction strategies by which it is handled, managed, carried; and the consequences of those strategies” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p.97).

Through axial coding, connections linking categories and their sub-categories were made. Hypotheses were also drawn up explaining these connections. These hypotheses were tested against existing and new data as more transcripts were coded, using the flip-flop technique (Strauss, 1990). Like in open coding, code notes and memos were created to explain the connections between categories and their sub-categories (ibid, p.99). Some of the nodes identified

from open coding became categories and others, sub-categories. An example of axial coding is shown below in Table 3.6.

Category	Sub-category	Sub-sub-category		
Leadership influences	Personal influences	Reluctance to move up		
		Need for initiative and independence		
		Personality limitations		
		Professional Pride		
		Taking the leadership plunge		
		Willingness to change appointments		
		Willingness to go another school for appointment		
		Career anchors		
		Confidence at doing next level's appointment		
		Don't know how to move up		
School leaders' influence	School leaders' influence	Making tough decisions and X-factor		
		Happy with current school leader		
		High expectations of KPs		
		Willingness to take teacher/KPs from other schools		
		Leaders need to grow leaders		
		Leadership opportunities		
		Mentoring a low priority		
		Perceived favouritism		
		School leaders dislike aspiring teachers		
		Willingness to release good people		
Structural influences	Structural influences	By appointment not application		
		Career path		
		Cloning effect of potential leaders		
		Implications of failure at next appointment		
		Lack of incentives to move up		
		People join to teach, not lead		
		Teachers don't operate outside teaching		
		Unfair assessment of leadership ability		
		Teacher professional influences	Teacher professional influences	Teaching is absorbing and enjoyable
				Belonging needs
Not intellectually stimulating				
Undeveloped potential achieves nothing				
Progression must be purposeful				
Undesirability of leadership	Undesirability of leadership	Reasons for remaining teachers		
		Additional commitment required		
		Delegates to and supervising ex-peers		
		Increased accountability		
		Leadership alienation		
		Less student interaction as we progress		
		People management		

**Table 3.6: Sample of Axial Coding**

### 3.8.3 Selective coding

Selective coding, as defined by Strauss & Corbin (1990), is the “process of selecting the core category, systematically relating it to other categories, validating those relationships, and filling in categories that need further refinement and development” (p.116). It seeks to integrate the categories (developed from open and axial codings) so that a theoretical framework and consequently a theory emerge from the data. It begins with the identification of a core category, which according to Strauss & Corbin (1998) is the “conceptual idea under which all other categories can be subsumed” (p.146). An emerging story line then allows the researcher to “arrange and rearrange the categories in terms of paradigm until they seem to fit the story, and to provide an analytic version of the story” (Strauss, 1990, p.127).

This study identified a total of 245 categories, sub-categories, and sub-sub-categories. Within each sub-sub-category, the data (compiled from the various participants who spoke on that sub-sub-category) were compared. Any particular sub-sub-category could mean one thing for a group of participants but mean something different for the others. For instance, remuneration might be an enticing influence for a pre-teacher considering teaching, but might be just a neutral influence for a KP considering VPship, as s/he is probably already earning an adequate salary. The consensus/majority view was determined for each sub-sub-category which was then slotted into one of the permutations in the 3x3 matrix, as shown in table 3.7.

	<b>Eschewing Influences</b>	<b>Neutral Influences</b>	<b>Enticing Influences</b>
<b>Personal Influences</b>			
<b>Socialisation Influences</b>			
<b>Environmental Influences</b>			

**Table 3.7: Matrix of Influences**

Based on the above matrix, the initially-proposed “theory of differentiated appeal” was developed which describes how different influences affect different participants differently, and even for the same participant, it is sometimes different at different stages of his/her career. These influences were affected by the participant’s life experiences (Blumer, 1969). The above matrix and initially-proposed theory formed the basis of the second interview, where participants were requested to do member-checking, by confirming if the influences as placed in the nine combinations/boxes resonated with their lives. Changes unique to the participant were made and the second interview delved deeper into the participant’s perception of the influences and why they were enticing/neutral/eschewing. Comparisons of the outcomes of all interviews were analysed and led to the refinement of the story-line. The story-line led to the development of the fully integrated Model of Selective Appeal.

### **3.9 Trustworthiness of the research**

Trustworthiness is defined as the conceptual soundness of the research findings and four criteria, based on the work of Lincoln and Guba (1985), were used to establish trustworthiness within this study; namely, credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln, 1985, p.189). Trustworthiness is important as it allows the results to withstand external tests, as according to Strauss and Corbin (1990) the theory constructed from data derived from the study can be used to “explain and predict events, thereby providing guides to action” (p.25).

Trustworthiness is established when findings closely reflect the meanings as described by the participants (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Padgett (1998) explains that trustworthiness does not just occur naturally, but is the result of “rigorous scholarship” (p.92) that includes the use of defined procedures. He further mentioned that threats to trustworthiness can include problems such as bias on

the part of the researcher and the participant. To manage these threats, qualitative researchers must engage in a variety of strategies, which according to Lietz (2006) can include triangulation, member-checking, and an audit trail. These three have been incorporated into this study.

### **3.9.1 Credibility**

An understanding of credibility can be taken from Hoepfl's (1997) description of the positivist equivalent of credibility, that is, internal validity, which "refers to the extent to which the findings accurately describe reality" (p.60). This study seeks to understand the influences affecting secondary school teachers' decision-making and how they affect the teachers' career aspirations towards leadership positions. Hence, it is critical that teachers' perceptions are accurately captured. This was provided for in this study by triangulation and member-checking. Lincoln and Guba (1985) noted that "the task is to obtain confirmation that the report has captured the data as constructed by the informants, or to correct, amend, or extend it, that is, to establish the credibility of the case" (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p.236).

Furthermore, it helps that the data has been derived from multiple sources. This is supported by Erwin (2005) who deemed that "multiple perspectives add depth and credibility to the findings" (p.712). This study's interview matrix targets teachers (at four different levels of teacher, KP, VP and principal) with diverse backgrounds and differing aspirations towards leadership positions. These provide the required multiple perspectives.

### **3.9.2 Transferability**

Lincoln and Guba (1985) proposed the concept that transferability is dependent on the similarity between the two contexts, coining the term *fittingness*. They suggested that if the two contexts are sufficiently congruent, then "working

hypotheses from the sending originating context may be applicable in the receiving context” (p.40). The quantitative research equivalent is “external validity [which] refers to the ability to generalise findings across settings” (Hoepfl, 1997, p.61). Researchers bring with them rich experiences to interpret participants’ words and meanings (*emic* description) into a form that others can also make meaning of for ‘use’ in other contexts (*etic* description).

The significance of this study is its potential usefulness to Singapore teachers/leaders so that effective policies may ensure adequate future supplies of capable teachers keen to be leaders. To facilitate the *fittingness* comparison between the two different contexts, this study provides the base of information describing the originating context. This ‘thick description’, the term coined by Geertz (1973), will facilitate transferability (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p.219), and may even be of interest to the Singapore MOE to implement some of this study’s findings by choosing the appropriate receiving context and transferring the appropriate working hypotheses. Furthermore, the fact that interviews took place with many teachers, with multiple perspectives, improves the “transferability and generalisability of the findings about problems and the context in which they occur to other[s] in similar socio-cultural environments” (Erwin, 2005, p.712-713).

### **3.9.3 Dependability**

Dependability demonstrates that the operations of a study can be repeated with the same results (Kidder, 1981). Dependability is similar to reliability of data in quantitative research (Seale, 1999). An audit trail is laid so that others can follow the procedural steps and arrive at similar findings. Disciplined use of research tools allows the documentation of the chain of evidence. Interviews with teachers were taped (with their consent) and accurately transcribed. Thoughts and especially the analysis and deductions were captured in memos. Software (Nvivo7) was used to facilitate the coding process. These facilitated the

systematic capture of the thinking process and all these served to enhance the dependability of this study.

To enhance dependability, Sparkes (2001) also advocated member-checks or dependability audits to establish trustworthiness in a world of multiple realities. The audits however would be beyond the scope of this research as the audit requires the expertise of at least another researcher. Nevertheless, member-checks were implemented.

### **3.9.4 Confirmability**

Confirmability establishes the “correct operational measures for the concepts being studied” (Kidder, 1981, p.7-8). Confirmability is equivalent to quantitative research’s construct validity (Seale, 1999). It is recognised that teachers’ perceptions likely differed and it is important to determine where such perceptions are common/overlap and where they are different. Participants selected are not totally alike in personality and preferences. The draft findings and initially-proposed theory were reviewed by participants for verification (member-checking). Such techniques (triangulation and member-checking), according to Lincoln and Guba (1985) in their work on trustworthiness in ‘naturalistic inquiry’, are mediums to ensure an accurate reflection of reality.

At the researcher level, practical actions were taken. According to Poulin (2007) “to meet the demands of confirmability, I must establish that my findings are reasonable, not that I have maintained objectivity” (p.447). Taking Poulin’s cue, this study focuses on checking the reasonableness of the findings. Active memoing helped keep track of the assumptions and interpretive analyses as they emerged from interviews and participant observations. Such documentation provides the audit trail for subsequent confirmability audits/checks.

### **3.10 Ethical Considerations**

In the EdD (like other research projects), ethics is a critical requirement. Ethics can be defined as “a set of standards by which a particular group or community decides to regulate its behaviour to distinguish what is legitimate or acceptable in pursuit of their aims from what is not (Flew, 1984, p.112)” as quoted by May (1997). Barnes (1979) based ethical decisions upon principles/standards rather than expediency.

This study is conducted according to British Education Research Association (2004) and University of Leicester guidelines. Also, the participants are adults and not minors, and the questions do not focus on sensitive private matters. According to Berger (1994), ethical codes governing research require the participation of human subjects to be completely voluntary. The participants were told the “nature and purpose of the research procedures” and how the research may help them and others better understand their perception of leadership and aspiration of leadership positions, or the lack of it. Their “voluntary informed consents” were obtained and they were told they could “withdraw at any time”. “Confidentiality/privacy” was maintained through assigning code numbers to individuals.

### **3.11 Summary**

In order to support the selected interpretive paradigm and the case study approach, selected teachers were interviewed in depth in order to establish the thick descriptions necessary to understand teachers’ perspectives on career aspirations pertaining to leadership positions. Only when the working environments and contexts are well understood will there be better appreciation of the influences that actually influence the teachers’ perception of leadership roles and ultimately their aspiration to hold leadership positions.

Research tools such as aide-memoire enable thick descriptions of the influences and the school environment to be captured. Such tools aid the chosen content analysis methodology of data collection and analysis. The end result of using this methodology is the identification of patterns and themes that accurately reflect the influences that affect teachers' perception of leadership and their aspiration towards these positions in school.

In order for the identified patterns and themes to be robust and believable to teachers, and to aid Singapore MOE in policy development, they must be trustworthy. The four elements of trustworthiness (Lincoln and Guba, 1985), namely credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability are addressed and worked into the research design.

Most of the aide-memoire questions were asked and addressed by participants, during the first interview. Consequently, the follow-up interview was used for member-checking of the proposed concepts and storyline that were discerned after data analysis and coding. Areas which needed further corroboration were also addressed.

Chapter 4 presents the participants' profiles, and the importance of the school context. The coding and the emergence of the main categories, together with the links are also covered. These help the reader better understand chapter 5 which presents the influences, concepts and categories, and chapter 6, the analysis of their impact on teachers' leadership aspirations.

## **Chapter 4**

# **CONCEPTUALISATION AND CATEGORISING THE DATA**

### **Introduction**

To facilitate the reader's understanding of this study and its findings, this chapter covers the profile of the participants, the school context and discusses how the raw data is collated, coded, and organized. The influences, concepts and categories discussed in chapter 5 address the first SRQ, which seeks to identify the influences that matter to teachers considering leadership appointments. The analysis of why they do (or not do so) is discussed in chapter 6.

This chapter outlines the participants' profiles, and the importance of the school context on shaping and influencing teachers' decision making in regard to career track. It shows how the main categories are derived from coding the interview transcripts and also the linkages between the main categories.

### **4.1 The Participants' Profiles**

Chapter 3 explained the methodology of how 20 Singapore secondary school participants (comprising of 6 teachers, 6 KPs, 6 VPs and 2 principals) were sampled and from where they came. As per BERA guidelines, the identity of these participants was kept anonymous throughout. The stratified purposeful sampling and convenience sampling called for the eight Cluster N2 secondary school principals to nominate 2 teachers who were keen, 2 who were not keen, and 2 who were unsure - on becoming KPs. Likewise, the same combinations applied to KPs (and VPs) - the principals were asked to nominate two who were not keen, two who were unsure and two who were very sure of wanting to aspire

to leader positions. The two participant principals were keen to become leaders. The profile in Table 4.1 enables the reader to better understand the spread of responses as well as the comments made by some of them as quoted in this study.

Participant	Gender	Marital status	Age	Years in-Service	Highest education level	Mid-career?
T1	M	Married	36	5	B.A.	Y
T2	M	Single	33	6	M.A.	N
T3	F	Single	26	3	B.Sc.	N
T4	F	Married	28	6	B.A.	N
T5	M	Single	27	2	B.A.	N
T6	M	Married	34	9	B.Sc.	N
K1	M	Separated	40	14	B.A.	Y
K2	M	Married	35	5	B.Engr	Y
K3	F	Widowed	45	23	B.Sc.	N
K4	F	Married	30	7	Masters	N
K5	F	Single	41	18	B.A.	N
K6	M	Married	42	16	B.A.	N
V1	M	Married	40	16	B.Sc.	N
V2	M	Married	42	10	B.A.	Y
V3	M	Married	50	28	B.A.	N
V4	F	Single	45	24	B.A.	N
V5	F	Married	49	30	B.A.	N
V6	F	Married	50	30	Masters	N
P1	M	Married	46	20	B.A.	Y
P2	M	Married	52	29	M.Sc.	N

**Table 4.1: Profile of Participants (accurate as of Jun 2008)**

To maintain their anonymity as required by BERA ethical procedures, the 2 principals will be referred to as P1 and P2. Similarly, the VPs will be referred to

as V1 to V6. Likewise, the KPs will be referred to as K1 to K6, and the teachers will be referred to as T1 to T6. These codes will be used when citing the participants.

## **4.2. Importance of school's context on the teacher**

It is important to remember that a teacher's perception of a KP's job should be understood in the context of that teacher's school. The context includes whether that school has a new and eager principal, an experienced and steady principal who is constantly seeking out challenges to improve and be the best in the cluster, or one who is retiring soon and may prefer to move in cruise-control mode. These influences provide the context wherein the teacher perceives the other influences.

If a school's KPs are not able to win teachers over, KPship will unlikely be viewed positively. T2 shared this insight:

*If KPs are viewed as people who are competent, people who are fair, then people will look at the enticing influences. But if these are viewed as people who give work...and 'pretend' to do things, and everything is done by teachers...people will then look at the eschewing influences, and that is when they don't want to climb...[or] even if they want to climb, it would not be in that school.*

There is another aspect of school context. Teachers often seem to be given opportunities to undertake larger roles based on their good performance as teachers. They do well and are rewarded with even greater responsibilities until such time that the principal feels a particular teacher is ready for a semi-official role of coordinator, or an official role as a SH, LH or HOD. Teachers' perception of the attractiveness of leadership roles is influenced by how their leaders perceive them and the opportunities given them. According to T2, should a

teacher move to another school, the new school management would not know the teacher enough to warrant offering leadership opportunities, until such time that the teacher has gained the principal's trust, hence opportunities are unlikely to be given until that time. This aspect of changing school affects the teacher's leadership aspiration as the leadership opportunities have to be re-earned. This takes time.

As teachers move up the hierarchy, the considerations that matter to them in making career decisions may change. Different teachers are affected by different considerations, depending on the relative importance of the eschewing factors vis-à-vis the enticing factors. This perception likely changes as teachers move up to the next leadership position, hence the proposal that teachers decide whether to aspire to the next highest position, one rung at a time.

Like Lacey (2002) found in her study, the categories identified in this study show that both the organisation and the individual play important roles in helping the teacher to recognise the benefits and challenges of leadership positions. Interview data suggests that the eschewing influences have the greatest impact at the teacher level, in shaping their aspirations for the next level of leadership position, but that these lessen when the teachers are already holding KP or even VP positions. Once they become a KP/VP many of the eschewing factors no longer apply – the teachers are already comfortable doing leadership work and its various challenges. What they need to consider is whether they want to take on a greater extent of leadership work and responsibilities at the next level. Also, whether they want to aspire to even higher positions depends on the pull factors of the higher position, rather than the hold factors of the current position.

From data from the more experienced/senior participants, there are more enticing factors than eschewing factors for them. This seems to suggest that the more experienced teachers are prepared to hold higher leadership positions than teaching positions. They have already tasted leadership roles and responsibilities

and know what to expect. They are able to handle the challenges and are comfortable handling leadership roles. Whether they want to progress further depends on whether the next level of leadership position offers the added enticements. They are not worried about the difficulty of the job (or other eschewing factors).

### **4.3 Coding from Interviews**

All categories in chapter 5 are derived from systematic coding utilised in content analysis research. During open coding, the raw data extracted from the first round of interviews/transcripts of the 20 participants yielded a total of 245 concepts which have been reduced to a manageable number of categories/sub-categories, each with its own properties and dimensions. The relationships among the categories/sub-categories have been investigated during axial coding and the categories of “personal influences”, “socialisation influences”, and “environmental influences” have been formed, with each of them having links to the categories of “teaching influences” and “leadership influences”.

It should be noted that the names of the categories, sub-categories and the section and sub-section titles in chapter 5 are not derived from in-vivo quotes but are codes or labels determined by the researcher. Also, when discussing issues, if comments or views are not specifically attributed to any participant (emic account), they reflect the researcher’s views or interpretations (etic account).

#### **4.3.1 How the influences were coded**

Open coding was done on the interview transcripts of all 20 participants and 245 concepts were identified from the first interviews, and another 67 different concepts from the second interviews. Common concepts from different participants were grouped together. These 312 concepts were analysed as part of axial coding where the links between categories are discovered. Some were

identified to be the main categories, some to be sub-categories, and the rest to be sub-sub-categories. An example can be found in Table 3.6. During the process of selective coding, the categories, sub-categories and sub-sub-categories were reviewed and clustered into 5 main categories. The details are discussed below.

### **4.3.2 How the influences were categorised**

Within the first interviews which lasted for one hour to 90 minutes, there was a limit to the number of influences identified which a particular participant could surface. When these influences were aggregated and compared for different participants, the same influence was found to affect a participant one way, and another participant in another way. Or it may have no impact on another participant at all. The strategy selected was to give the participants voice by identifying all the influences that affected each of them (influence footprint), and determine where the influence footprints overlap. Points of overlap indicate common influences that affect teachers' leadership aspiration. For instance, if out of the 20 participants six felt pre-service leadership experience was an enticing influence, and three felt otherwise, the influence of pre-service leadership experience would be labeled as an enticing influence.

It cannot be assumed that if only nine participants spoke of this influence when first interviewed, it was not relevant to the other eleven participants, because they may not have thought about the particular influence at the first interview. Consequently, the views of the other eleven participants were sought during the second interviews where member-checking was conducted. The responses of all participants on all identified influences from the first interviews were similarly aggregated and placed under the category most participants felt a particular influence belonged to.

In the coding done on the data from the first interview, the influences derived from the data were then grouped and categorised. They generally fell into whether they discouraged and prevented a teacher from aspiring to KPship (eschewing influences), or encouraged the teacher to aspire to KPship (enticing influences). Some of them had neither effect and were neutral influences. An example of the influences and their relationships is in Table 4.2, which shows the influences on teachers' leadership aspiration to KPship.

	<b>Eschewing influences</b>	<b>Neutral influences</b>	<b>Enticing influences</b>
<b>Personal influences</b>	Join to be teacher not leader; Not sure what they want; High family commitment; Risk adverse; Concern over failure; Incorrect view of leadership; Greater accountability; No career planning; At mercy of school leaders grooming; People join to teach, not lead; Work-life balance;	Progression must be purposeful; Aspirations unclear; Inertia leaving MOE for greener pastures; Higher KP salary; Esteem needs met;	Prior leadership experience; Importance of affirmation; Work-life harmony; Finding meaning in KPship; Bored or dissatisfied with remaining teacher; Desire to go beyond; Desire to do things differently; KPship offers challenges; Competition;
<b>Socialisation influences</b>	Older teachers content to remain; Need to manage; confront, discipline; supervise ex-peers; Reluctant to have less student contact; Dislike greater contact with unreasonable parents; Effects of cloning;	Collegiality; Leadership alienation; Influence of family members; teachers an friends; Social identity of teachers; Career identify; Teachers' social status; More demanding parents; Desire to help kids;	Peer pressure and influence; Open door policy of reporting officer; Teachers need good leaders to grow - impact of good, nurturing and understanding leader
<b>Environmental influences</b>	Need for independent thinking and initiative; Higher expectations of KPs; Few opportunities; Highly dependent on RO's spotting and mentoring; Ease of leaving MOE; Poorer work-life balance; Lots of admin work;	Leadership grooming not universal; KPship has wider span and deemed administrative; NIE teacher training no prep for KPship; GROW 2 as incentive; More demanding career now; NIE does not prepare people for leadership; Iron-rice bowl; Better alternatives unavailable;	KPship offers good mix of management and teaching; KP still has domain ownership; Off-loading; Safe & forgiving school culture, Presence of friends; Teaching becomes routine;

**Table 4.2: Influences on Teacher's Leadership Aspiration to KPship**

The influences in Table 4.2 show the 'averaged' views (inclusive of outliers) of the 20 participants based on the first interviews. These are unavoidably subjected to the researcher's interpretations. Based on the inputs of the 20 participants, it would be natural that the influences that matter to each participant may matter in different ways and even when some ways are similar, they may affect the participants to different extents. For example, for one participant the perceived higher teacher's salary may be an enticing influence, but for someone more senior and earning more, it may be a neutral influence. Likewise, younger

teachers may be concerned about having to manage difficult parents but more senior and experienced teachers probably take this in their stride. But to the participants, these perceptions and experiences are based on their perceived reality. They help the reader understand why some teachers make the decision to step up to the next leader level or stay where they are. Consequently, the influences for all participants were compared and where the frequency of occurrence was highest, that position in the column/row combination was selected as representative of most of the participants.

It must be remembered that these influences are not exhaustive. They are only the views from 20 participants compared against the entire teaching community of about 30,000 teachers in the MOE. These views were captured just to give a sense of what were the various influences, as captured under personal, socialisation or environmental influences. As P1 rationalised:

*All these are real, we have been talking about it. There are some people who have got the quality of a senior teacher but the eschewing influences are the environmental influences. Innately they have it, socialization they are doing it (they are working with their peers very well), but the environmental influences stop them. So if I cannot overcome the environmental influences, then I cannot convince the person to make the jump to Senior Teachership. Similarly, the same applies to the KPship.*

These tables were shown to each participant at the second interview for member-checking to ascertain whether the influences resonated with them and whether each influence was perceived to be in the 'correct' column/row. As these views were culled from 20 participants, it meant that many of the influences were not articulated by every participant. Even if the influences were mentioned by all participants, they may not be in that particular column/row as shown above.

While considering each influence and whether it was (or was not) relevant to the individual participants, they may have encountered influences that they did not consider earlier at the first interviews, but which actually featured in their experiences and influenced their decision-making with regards to leadership aspirations. For this reason, outliers were included as they sometimes triggered the participants' thoughts or they might simply resonate with them.

At the second interviews, the participants also took the opportunity to express their thoughts on many of the influences, and relocated some influences to the 'correct' column/row as they perceived them to be. As the researcher was not familiar with most of the respondents at the teacher and KP levels, the first interviews were more restrained and answers given were perhaps more "correct". However, the ice was broken by the second interview, owing to the checking of transcripts and flurry of email exchanges and resulted in more vocal and open dialogue. The second interviews also allowed the participants to share their views on issues of leadership and leadership aspirations that they had not mentioned at the first interview. They also discussed how some of these influences impacted them at different stages of their careers as teachers. These interviews were transcribed and after checking by the respective participants, coded in accordance with content analysis procedures. Categories identified were compared with the earlier 245 categories/sub-categories and 67 new ones that were added to the list.

Organising the influences in the manner shown in Table 4.2 has two key benefits. Firstly, it allows the researcher to identify the influences that generally did not matter, encourage or discourage a teacher from aspiring to leadership positions (neutral influences). This enables the study to focus on the influences that generally matter to the 20 participants and not be side-tracked by influences that did not matter to them. Secondly, it allows the researcher to concentrate on the transition of teacher to KP, which is the focus of this study.

It should be noted that there were only 19 participants in the second round of interviews as one of them went on no-pay leave to pursue an overseas Master's degree. It was decided not to include written responses from this participant as the second interview consisted mainly of member-checking of the data followed by open-ended discussions on how the participant perceived leadership roles and leadership aspirations. Written responses to the questions would not have allowed for the interactive questioning that took place at the other interviews, where rich descriptions were required.

At the second interview member-checking stage of Table 4.2, most of the participants at the teacher and KP levels had time to go through all, and even discuss some, of the influences that applied to them. In total, 13 out of 19 participants conducted detailed member-checking. There was difficulty in doing this for the more senior participants who did not have time to go through in as great detail as they had more to say and preferred to speak about their views of teaching and leadership. The 13 participants adjusted or corrected the influences according to whether and how these resonated with their own situations. The location of each influence was adjusted in the Table and the refined list of influences for the teacher to KP transition is shown in Table 4.3.

	Eschewing influences	Neutral influences	Enticing influences
Personal influences	Join to be teacher, not leader. High family commitments. Not sure what they want. Risk averse. Concern over failure. Incorrect view of leadership. Greater accountability. No career planning. At mercy of school leaders' grooming. Poorer Work-life balance.	Progression must be purposeful. Inertia leaving MOE for greener pastures. Higher KP salary. Esteem needs met.	Prior leadership experience. Importance of affirmation. Work-life harmony. Finding meaning in KPship. Bored or dissatisfied with remaining teacher. Desire to go beyond. Desire to do things differently. KPship offers challenges. Competition.
Socialisation influences	Older teachers content to remain. Need to manage, confront, discipline, supervise ex-peers. Reluctant to have less student contact. Dislike greater contact with unreasonable parents.	Collegiality. Leadership alienation. Influence of family members, teachers and friends. Social identity of teachers. Career identity. Teachers' social status. More demanding parents. Desire to help kids.	Peer pressure and influence. Open door policy of reporting officer. Teachers need good leaders to grow and impact of good, nurturing and understanding leader.
Environmental influences	Need for independent thinking and initiative. High expectations of KPs. Few opportunities. Highly dependent on Reporting Officer's spotting and mentoring. Ease of leaving MOE. Lots of admin work.	Leadership grooming not universal. KPship has wider span and deemed administrative. NIE teacher training no prep for KPship. GROW 2 as incentive. More demanding career now. NIE does not prepare people for leadership. Iron rice bowl. Better alternatives unavailable.	KPship offers good mix of management and teaching. KP still has domain ownership. Off-loading. Safe and forgiving school culture. Presence of friends.

**Table 4.3: Refined Influences on Teachers' Leadership Aspirations (to KPship)**

### 4.3.3 Selection of influences that matter in this study

All 20 participants could express thoughts on that transition (teacher to KP), whereas only 14 senior participants (KPs, VPs and Principals) could comment on the KP to VP transition. Likewise, even fewer participants could comment on the VP to principal transition (the 8 VPs/Principals). The teacher to KP hurdle is perhaps the most significant transition, as once teachers hold KPship, they will tend to know what leadership entails and are likely not to be affected by as many considerations as the teacher to KP transition phase. This was affirmed by K1 who said:

*That means to say that if a teacher goes on to be a KP, chances are that he or she would want to go up, because there are fewer hindrances.*

*There are a lot of hindrances or eschewing influences for a teacher to be a KP. Once he becomes a KP, there is less resistance to move up.*

As this study focuses on teachers' leadership aspirations, it makes sense to focus on the teacher-to-KP transition. This thesis will therefore focus in detail on the influences that affect that transition.

The first research question asks about the influences that affect teachers' decision-making with regards to leadership aspiration, and hence the eschewing or enticing influences were further studied. The neutral influences (centre column in beige) are perceived not to affect teachers' decision-making and hence are given less attention. It is however useful to list the neutral influences so that researchers and the MOE can perhaps focus less attention on them as they are deemed less important when teachers decide on their leadership aspirations.

The above influences were initially categorised into personal influences, socialisation influences or environmental influences. They can now be further re-organised/refined into the categories of teaching, or leadership, as shown in Table 4.4.

Categories	Categories			
	Teaching influences		Leadership influences	
	Enticing to remain a teacher	Enticing to move on to KP	Enticing to move over to KP	Eschewing to move over KP
Personal influences	Join to be teacher, not leader; High family commitment; Not sure what they want; Risk averse; concern over failure; No career planning; At mercy of school leaders' grooming	Prior leadership experience; Importance of affirmation; Work-life harmony; Bored or dissatisfied with remaining teacher; Desire to go beyond; Desire to do things differently; Competition	Finding meaning in KPship; KPship offers challenges	'Incorrect' view of leadership; Greater accountability; Poor work-life balance.
Socialisation influences	Older teachers content to remain; Effects of cloning	Peer pressure and influence; Open door policy of reporting officer; Teachers need good leaders to grow – impact of good, nurturing and understanding leader		Need to manage, confront, discipline and supervise ex-peers; Reluctant to have less student contact; Dislike greater contact with unreasonable parents
Environmental influences	Highly dependent on Reporting Officer's spotting and mentoring; Ease of leaving MOE.	Safe and forgiving school culture; Presence of friends; Teaching becomes routine	KPship offers good mix of management and teaching; KP still has domain ownership; Off-loading	Need for independent thinking and initiative; Higher expectation of KPs; Few opportunities; Poor work-life balance; Lots of admin work

**Table 4.4: Influences (re-organised) on Teachers' Leadership Aspirations (5 categories)**

Besides member-checking of the influences that arose at the first interviews, many other hitherto unidentified influences surfaced at the second interviews. These probably arose because of the greater researcher-participant familiarity which resulted in more open and richer dialogues. These influences were coded and used to reinforce the earlier identified and categorised influences, shown in Table 4.4.

It can be seen that the category of "teaching influences" has two contrasting effects on teachers' leadership aspirations. Some influences encourage a teacher to remain a teacher and are termed "enticing to remain as a teacher". Other teaching influences encourage a teacher to aspire to KPship and are

termed “enticing to move on to KP”. Likewise, the category of “leadership influences” also has two contrasting effects on teachers’ leadership aspirations. Some encourage teachers to move over and join the KP fraternity. Some discourage teachers from aspiring to KPship. Consequently, it makes more sense to reorder the columns so that adjacent columns of influences either encourage or discourage a teacher from aspiring to KPship. These influences will be discussed in detail in Chapter 5.

<b>Categories</b>	<b>Categories</b>			
	<b>Teaching influences</b>	<b>Leadership influences</b>	<b>Teaching influences</b>	<b>Leadership influences</b>
	<b>Sub-categories</b>			
	<b>Enticing to remain as a teacher</b>	<b>Eschewing to move over to KP</b>	<b>Enticing to move on to KP</b>	<b>Enticing to move over to KP</b>
	<b>Column A</b>	<b>Column B</b>	<b>Column C</b>	<b>Column D</b>
<b>Personal influences</b>	Join to be teacher, not leader; High family commitment - females have family commitments; Not sure what they want; Risk averse; Concern over failure; No career planning; At mercy of school leaders' grooming; Rather let people pick them than volunteer;	'Incorrect' view of leadership; Greater accountability; Poor work-life balance.	Prior leadership experience; Importance of affirmation; Work-life harmony; Bored or dissatisfied with remaining a teacher; Desire to go beyond teaching; Desire to do things differently; Competition; Needs change with age;	Finding meaning in KPship; KPship offers challenges
<b>Socialisation influences</b>	Older teachers content to remain - leadership interest may drop as one ages – Effects of cloning - also Interview panel's mindset;	Need to manage, confront, discipline and supervise ex-peers; Reluctant to have less student contact; Dislike greater contact with unreasonable parents	Peer competition and influence; Open door policy of reporting officer; Teachers need good leaders to grow – impact of good, nurturing and understanding leader	
<b>Environmental influences</b>	Highly dependent on Reporting Officer's spotting and mentoring; Ease of leaving MOE. People who decline often no second chance;	Need for independent thinking and initiative; Higher expectation of KPs; Few opportunities; Lots of administrative work	Safe and forgiving school culture; Presence of friends; KPship interview is at cluster level - easier;	KPship offers good mix of management and teaching; KP still has domain ownership; Off-loading

**Table 4.5: Refined Influences on Teachers’ Leadership Aspirations (to KP) (5 categories enhanced by second interview / open dialogue inputs)**

## 4.4 Emergence of the main categories

This study focuses on how the 20 participants considered influences that affected their decision-making on whether to aspire or not aspire to KPship.

Considerations that are important and influence the decision-making at one stage of a career may not be as important at a later stage for the same teacher. Or they may influence the teacher's decision-making in the same way but to different extents. There is no single influence or group of influences that feature prominently – it is the aggregated effect of the separate influences that causes individual teachers to decide one way or another, regarding leadership aspiration.

Influences that impact on teachers' decision-making can be grouped into the categories of "personal influences", "socialisation influences" and "environmental influences" with each of them having links to the categories of "teaching influences" and "leadership influences". These five categories are based on data; their labels are *etic* labels and were not based on in-vivo codes. These are broadly described below but the detailed supporting evidences are described in chapter 5.

### 4.4.1 Category of "Personal influences"

Personal influences result from personal characteristics and experiences while schooling, before the teacher joins the teaching profession, and even during the early years of teaching. This period is subject to the influences of significant others such as family members, teachers and friends. These unique-to-person experiences (hence the term personal influences) interact to shape the character and desire of teachers regarding their career intentions. Some influences affect some teachers but not others, even when two teachers seem to come from similar backgrounds. Even if they do influence teachers from similar backgrounds in similar ways, they may not influence them to the same extent, for

in all likelihood, no two teachers share identical experiences. Since each influence affects two teachers differently and/or to different extents, the complexity of the combined effect of different influences on these two teachers can be significant. Super (1953) and Holland (1997) noted the reciprocal influence of an individual's personal attributes on personal identity, relationships, decision-making processes, and career trajectory. According to Lam (2006), attributes "exert a significant influence on a person's career trajectory" (p.91). Lam defined attributes to be "powerful determinants of personal behaviour" (p.91).

#### **4.4.2 Category of "Socialisation influences"**

Socialisation influences typically reflect the relations, interactions and the experiences the participants have with others at home, work or outside work. While individuals may form their own subjective realities and perspectives of work situations, they are likely to be influenced by others (Blumer, 1969). Furthermore, according Dimmock & O'Donoghue (1997):

*The present values, beliefs, behaviours and practices of school leaders can only be fully understood by taking cognizance of their past life experiences – including particularly influential people with whom they have come into contact, such as relatives, friends, former teachers and professors (p.65).*

Teachers interact with significant others who impact on how the teachers think, their values and their desires. Some of these significant others could be the family members (parents or relatives), or teachers, or even friends. Such people could be their reporting officers, colleagues/peers and even students. The influences in this category do not generally influence teachers in the same way or to the same extent as they are highly dependent on the context of the interaction as well as the depth of the relationship the participants have with these

significant others. That is, people make sense of their social situations through interactions with those around them (Blumer, 1969).

#### **4.4.3 Category of “Environmental influences”**

Environmental influences arise from the teachers’ perceptions of school/working environment, school policies, assessment, and even MOE policies. These influences include the nature of teaching, the working and teaching environment at school, and conditions of service in the MOE. All Singapore teachers undergo training at the National Institute of Education. They teach in a controlled and predictable school environment. However, for whatever reasons new/mid-career teachers have for wanting to teach, and whatever initial aspirations they have of wanting to hold higher leadership appointments, once they join a school, they are greatly influenced by the school environment and culture. Like the earlier two categories, environmental influences affect different teachers differently as teachers have different personalities and come from different family backgrounds. How a teacher perceives a certain influence is again governed by that teacher’s experiences, beliefs and value system.

#### **4.4.4 Category of “Teaching influences”**

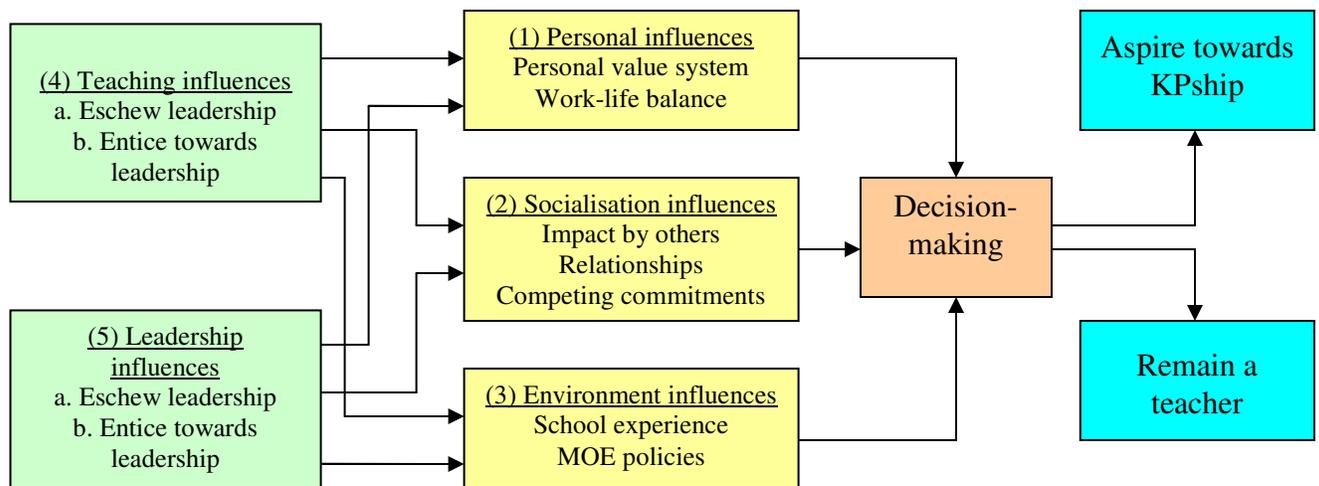
This category of teaching influence belongs to each of the above three categories. It comprises of three sub-categories of influences; first are the influences why people join teaching, cherish it, and typically want to continue teaching. It also includes possible influences or push factors that explain why some teachers quit teaching after having taught for a while. The third sub-category includes influences that encourage successful teachers to look beyond teaching to leadership roles. In this study, we focus on the first and third sub-categories.

#### **4.4.5 Category “Leadership influences”**

Similarly, this category of leadership influences belongs to each of the categories of personal influences, socialisation influences and environmental influences. It comprises of two sub-categories; the first exerts a pull factor for teachers who are able to look beyond teaching to the possibility of undertaking leadership roles. These influences include the attractive and challenging attributes of leadership positions. Yet there is another sub-category of influences that actually put teachers off wanting to be leaders. For some teachers, these include the difficulty of these roles and at times, also, the loneliness of the leader.

### **4.5 Links between the Main Categories**

Selecting people for teaching, and subsequently selecting teachers for leadership positions are in reality complex processes. They are complicated by the fact that teachers are what they are because of influences experienced during their childhood/schooling days, during their careers as teachers, in interacting with family members and friends (Blumer, 1969). The factors identified from the open and axial coding were grouped and the resultant 5 categories and 2 sub-categories, as shown in Figure 4.1. Within each of the categories of (1) personal influences, (2) socialisation influences, and (3) environmental influences, there are two other categories, namely (4) teaching influences, and (5) leadership influences. Categories (1), (2) and (3) are discrete while (4) and (5) are common to each of them.



**Figure 4.1: The Linkages between the main categories (1 to 5) and sub-categories (a and b)**

Teachers are affected by teaching influences that encourage them to stay on as teachers or encourage them to move beyond/away from teaching. They are also affected by influences that encourage them to take on leadership roles or to shy away from them. It is not so much which category has more influence, but rather the aggregated impact on the particular teacher is what matters. Whether the aggregated effect encourages or discourages a teacher also depends on the experience of that teacher.

Some of these influences feature more prominently when teachers are new in the service while others become more significant when teachers are more experienced and know more colleagues in the teaching fraternity, or when they are simply more familiar with life in school. All the categories are connected in that teachers are affected by different influences as a result of their unique combination of personal, socialisation and environmental influences, and that even the combined effect of these influences has different effects on the teachers.

## **4.6 Summary**

This chapter has captured the profile of the participants and also discussed the impact of their school context on their leadership aspirations. It has also shown how the concepts were determined from the interview transcripts and how coding enabled the identification of the concepts into categories and finally into the main categories. How the influences actually affect the participants' leadership aspirations will be covered in chapter 5.

## Chapter 5

# THE INFLUENCES AFFECTING TEACHERS' LEADERSHIP ASPIRATIONS

### Introduction

This study investigates the influences that affect teachers decision-making as to whether to aspire (or otherwise) to leadership positions in Singapore secondary schools. This chapter discusses the categories of “personal influences”, “socialisation influences” and “environmental influences” which affect teachers’ leadership aspirations. These address the first Specific Research Question: ***What are the influences affecting secondary school teachers’ decision-making as to whether they aspire to middle-level school leadership?***

This chapter focuses on the respondents’ (emic) voices. The relevant literature and researcher opinion (etic voices) are included in chapter 6, which seeks to anchor the emic voices with existing literature and the researcher’s comments. The themes in chapter 6 generally match those in this chapter.

### 5.1 Category “Personal Influences”

The sequence of influences discussed match the influences shown in Table 4.5 (page 98). In this section on personal influences, those influences which encourage teachers to remain as teachers (columns A and B) are discussed, followed by influences which encourage them to become KPs (columns C and D).

### **5.1.1 Influences that encourage teachers to remain as teachers**

There are 10 influences in this sub-category which encourage teachers to remain as teachers, and perhaps the most significant is that the respondents joined the service to teach, not to lead. Consequently, higher appointments which reduce their classroom contact time are not welcome.

#### **5.1.1.1 Join to be a teacher, not a leader**

From their responses, all 20 participants joined teaching because they wanted to teach, not because they wanted to lead. This was the case for all 20 participants, but this finding may not be generalisable to all entrants to teaching – in Singapore or elsewhere. Eighteen of them had some experience of helping their classmates in school or university, giving tuition or performing relief teaching. They enjoyed it when students they helped understood what they were teaching. They liked the feeling of being able to help others and continued to enjoy it as full-time teachers. As K3 passionately explained, “That was the first reason we came into teaching. I like to have that contact”.

The participants did not consider leadership possibilities, as only the teaching track was advertised at that point of joining. As K2 responded when asked whether he had ever considered joining as a leader:

*No, that would defeat the purpose for coming in. You join for the students. Not to come in for power. I mean personally I met some young teachers who said that they come in for power, they want to be a HOD within how many years and so on. But I think it would distract from what is essentially the essence of this profession.*

Even those with strong leadership experience prior to teaching did not consider anything else other than teaching. For instance, P1, who was a commissioned

officer during his national service days, reminisced, “I think at that time we didn’t have [alternative] career tracks so we just joined as teachers”.

Since they focused on doing well as teachers, often they did not see the need to undertake leadership roles. In fact, they saw such opportunities as encumbrances. Unless their school leader has specially put in place a system of testing all teachers and giving all a chance at leadership tasks, it is likely that teachers who are content to remain teachers do not volunteer for leadership tasks, and often end up not getting any such opportunities. They then remain as teachers, and retire as teachers. As T4 (who had been a student leader but decided to keep a low profile as a teacher) opined:

*The question I want to ask is, “how many people who join teaching really want to lead?” I think if you ask all of them, 100% of them will say they want to teach. But some, only a few of them would say they want to teach and continue to want to take the leadership track. A lot of them would not. I am not sure why. It could be because if you wanted to be a leader, if you are passionate, to be a leader in the first place, teaching may not be something you may want to do.*

#### **5.1.1.2 High family commitment – females have greater family commitments**

In the MOE as in society, the females are expected to carry the major load on the home front. K3 attributed this to society’s expectations: “I am not sure [if it is a face thing], but probably. It is the expectation of the society that the men bring home the bread”. This being the case, the wives’ careers are thought to provide a supplementary income to the husbands’ and can play second fiddle if the family situation calls for it. This expectation seems to be part of the psyche of even our teachers, as K4, a newly-wed wife, confessed:

*After getting married, my priorities have changed. I am still in close contact with my parents as I try to go back home everyday, then after that I will go back to my new home so that when my husband comes back, I am actually at home already.*

When the kids are born, the mother looks after the children initially. Some women return to work after the maternity leave is over. Some others actually quit work to look after the children, full-time. As K3 observed:

*I see that in my church, the women want to have children, they then quit and stay at home...I have a number of friends who work as teachers and quit to stay at home to look after their kids because the family comes first.*

Agreeing, P1 noted that: "Somehow in some family make-up, the husbands still require the wives to look after the kids, they are still traditional. When the kids start attending school, there are other challenges. P1 observed among his teachers regarding their leadership aspirations:

*We find a capable person, but the person is apprehensive, maybe doesn't want to do leadership, then of course we explore what are the eschewing influences that hold her back. If she says "my kids are young, very naughty" from experience we say we understand and you can remain as a teacher.*

Health also plays a part on teachers' leadership aspirations. Of course if the teachers' health is not good, then they would prefer to remain as teachers and have less stress. As P1 recognised: "For some people, their health is not so good". Besides personal ill health, which affects both genders, parents or parents-in-law can be in ill health and the female teacher sometimes may not have a choice but to look after the family member, even on a full-time basis, if a workable alternative is not found.

In the unfortunate event of the demise of a spouse, the female teacher in all likelihood has to carry on working to bring home the income. But as in the case of K3 (recently widowed with kids), she carried on as a KP but certainly could not invest as much time in her work as she had previously done and thus stopped aspiring to VPship. For teachers in such a situation, it is unlikely they aspire to KPship with its heavier load.

### **5.1.1.3 Not sure what they want beyond teaching**

As teachers, the participants interacted mostly with their students and to a lesser extent, their peers. They spent about 6 periods (of about 35 minutes each) everyday with their students and found this fulfilling. During curriculum hours, they often rushed from class to class. After curriculum hours, they spent time marking their students' work, coaching weaker students, supervising or running co-curricular activities, performing committee work, planning for school events or improving their lessons. They were often caught up with their work and did not have the opportunity to find out more about career progression.

It was noticed that teachers generally interacted with their LHs/SHs or HODs but not the VP or Principal. Generally, they were seldom exposed to possibilities beyond teaching. Faced with fewer opportunities to be aware of other options, it was often inevitable that teachers only saw themselves as teachers. Such concerns were voiced by T4, who had initially harboured thoughts of becoming a KP and had also accepted the chair of the school Welfare Committee, but subsequently decided otherwise in regard to aspiring to KPship:

*Today, most teachers do not know what they are working towards, they have no career path. Quite aimless! We seem to be working hard with no reason or end state in mind. Not sure ultimately where we are going. Might as well not work as hard. Then it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.*

*Also when they see their KPs, and the commitment required, they have second thoughts. Maybe for the first few years, they will strive hard to get ahead. But after a while, things become tiring. It is repetitive every year.*

### **5.1.1.3 Risk averse**

Based on data, it appears that one of the considerations why many participants (e.g. T1, T4, K2, K3, K4, K6, V3, V4) joined teaching was because it was perceived to be a safe career, often recession-proof. The researcher believes teachers can concentrate on teaching and not have to worry about being retrenched, at least not in Singapore where all mainstream school teachers are civil servants and the civil service has not had to retrench civil servants in times of recession. Hence, teaching offers a stable career up to retirement, or as long as health permits. This means that teachers often may not want to undertake risks that may jeopardize this stable career. If teachers do not want to risk taking on leadership appointments, there is a ceiling to what they can earn, which for many is acceptable. Being risk averse may also resonate with the younger teachers as there is the possibility that they have not been working long enough to have accumulated sufficient savings to provide them a buffer for rainy days.

If teachers who are promoted to KPship find they are not doing well or cannot cope, they can ask to step down and revert to teaching. But this often entails a “loss of face” which the typical Singaporean teacher, being Asian, would find hard to accept. Thus if teachers are unsure of their leadership affiliation, they may not want to try higher appointments and risk being asked to step down. As K3 confessed:

*I am quite a risk-averse person...I would rather go steady, go slow. [If you don't succeed] then you have to step down. I hate that kind of situation where you cannot move on and you have to move down. I hate that kind of feeling.*

KPs who step down can actually go to another school. As K4 suggested, “if you go to another school, it would not be as much of an issue because people in the next school don’t know you so well”.

Hence unless the school leader affirms a teacher’s leadership potential, often that teacher may not want to take the risk. This results in fewer teachers aspiring to leadership roles, not because they cannot do the job, but because they think they cannot do a good job. As K6, a contented father of two pre-teens, said:

*You know the reason why I took up this appointment? Because I felt I could do it and deep inside me I knew this was something I am capable of and that is why I took it. If I felt that I wasn’t capable, I probably would have turned it down and not done it. I am a thinking person, and when I know I can, I can, and if I can’t, I can’t.*

But K6 also offers an alternative perspective - “no one will ever know when they are ready. You have to go and do it and then.... When you are put into that position, my philosophy is that do more than what is required.” But he also thought that “my standards are high because if put into that position, I would like to give it all that I have, and then make it work. Otherwise I wouldn’t do it. Sometimes gut feel...” However, this is not shared by others, who prefer to play it safe.

#### **5.1.1.4 Concern over failure**

This researcher’s view is that teachers recognise that there are consequences for not being able to perform well as KPs. They think they may rank poorly relative to their peers and get little or no annual performance bonus and bring home less money. They may rationalise that as teachers they are likely to be at the top of their cohort in the school and may be better off remaining a teacher

than be a KP and fare poorly. This concern over failure is also the result of the Singapore society which overly rewards success and frowns upon failure. From primary school days, they have seen that success is rewarded and failure is not.

When teachers are more concerned about possible failure than possible success at the higher appointment, it results in fewer teachers aspiring to leadership positions. As K1 aptly puts it: “This is a concept of fear. Fear of the unknown or fear of the known”. Yet there is another kind of concern for failure. V4, who had climbed through the ranks albeit reluctantly at each stage, declared, “and the fact that I might not do a good enough job tells me I should not even try it. There is no such thing as trying, for me it must be good enough”. She explained that her concern over failure is not because of possible impact on her career but the possible repercussions on the students’ learning and consequent examination performances, should she fail.

#### **5.1.1.5 No career planning**

Data show that teachers typically focus on their teaching (both in terms of content and delivery), and worry about preparing their students for their semester and end of year examinations. This they do year in and year out and are ensnared in the school’s effort to improve its standing in the national tables. Consequently, unless there is some attempt by the school leaders to point the teachers to the possibilities beyond teaching and grow the teachers’ potential to be able to hold these jobs, it is unlikely that many teachers are able to plan their own careers. As P2 reminisced:

*So I was one of the first few in MOE HQ to be tracked. But actually nothing was done about it other than sending you for your Masters. It was 6 years later, when one of the Permanent Secretaries called for a report on where all these people were, that they realised that a lot of these people did not move on to be leaders in schools.*

The researcher believes that there may be a reason why there seems to be no clear career planning in schools to groom more teachers – teachers perceive that there are only so many leadership positions in a school and if too many teachers are groomed, then there would certainly be many unfulfilled aspirations. This perception is of course not correct nowadays as leadership is seen to be cultivated at all levels, including teacher leaders where teachers hold unofficial leadership positions. However, this study focuses on teachers' aspiration to middle-level leadership positions. As K4 lamented:

*I was posted here as a trainee teacher, so from there, there was no proper mentoring, sad to say. So I was dumped into my classes...after the task was over, no one actually sat down with me and conducted a debrief. Actually I needed a mentor at that time, because I was actually very young. I didn't know if I was actually heading in the right direction...I am beginning to be frustrated because I don't have a mentor so I don't know what I am doing.*

This lack of systematic mentoring is often not the only challenge facing young aspiring teachers. It appears that teachers in more senior positions typically frown on young teachers who express that they are keen to progress to leadership positions. The former would prefer that teachers move up when they are identified to be ready to do so. V1 gave an 'old school' take on this issue:

*During my time, I worked hard and if I worked hard, my leader would spot me. If I don't get spotted by my leader, then I will just keep on working. And if I worked hard enough, I get spotted and I didn't get spotted, it could be that I did not work hard enough. That is my philosophy. I will not go and knock on my principal's door and ask why he has not appointed me HOD yet. But today, young people are different. Those who want to really move up, they seem to be in a hurry.*

#### 5.1.1.6 At mercy of school leaders' grooming

Due to the need to prepare teachers to be able to hold leadership positions, school leaders do identify some of them and try them out on some leadership tasks. There are two models for this and both are practiced depending on the philosophy of the principal. The first is that teachers should want to be leaders and actively seek out leadership opportunities. Such teachers are then appointed as subject coordinators - which is just one level below the official KP positions. Teachers who do well as coordinators and who still want to be leaders, would then be sent for promotion/appointment interviews chaired by the cluster superintendent. The other model is that school leaders identify some teachers who can be leaders and who are interested to be leaders, and then send them for the promotion/appointment interviews for KPship.

Teachers who have been identified are likely to be those who have done well as teachers and who are then given some leadership tasks to try out. It is likely that teachers who do well, but perhaps not as well as the top-tier teachers may not get the same opportunities. This may be in spite of them possibly having stronger leadership affiliation/potential and interest. Consequently, the teachers' career opportunities are very dependent on what their school leader thinks are important qualities and this might vary from school leader to school leader. Hence some teachers with the potential to be leaders may not be given the opportunity to be groomed. This can be seen from the contrasting views of V2 and V1:

*In my area of work, I do encounter one or two staff coming forward quite eagerly, and they are young, to take up leadership positions. Normally what I do is to openly discuss with them the demands of the job, certain weaknesses I see in the person, I will mention to him or her, and certain competencies that you need to have in order to hold this position. (V2)*

*As a deputy school leader I should be open to letting my heads sit or stand on my shoulders. Let them see further and so on. That was my philosophy of development. But when I looked back at the deals that I have, I feel cheapened. And the manner in which some people respond to this offer to step on my shoulders is not encouraging. They trampled. So I don't see why I should let that be...when I have this thing called dignity.*  
(V1)

K1, in agreeing with the need for the reporting officer to lead in this grooming process, also felt that how the reporting officer did it is important. He revealed that:

*I do not know whether I was being groomed or not. If my boss never told me and just gave me work, I would just take it that I am just doing work for him. He should tell me, when I am given work. He should say "I am giving you this work because I feel you can do it. I am giving you this work because I think you are the right match for it, and these are things that I am hoping to see at the end, not target wise, but I expect you to grow. Because I think you have the ability." Then suddenly I realise that I have, and as I do the work, there is an extra motivation involved.*

#### **5.1.1.7 Rather let others decide about their leadership potential**

Many respondents (e.g. T2, T5, T6, K2, K3, K5, V1, V2, V3) prefer to have their superiors identify that they have the ability to hold leadership positions rather than to volunteer themselves for such positions or take the initiative themselves. Teachers are often not sure they have the ability to hold leadership positions. Being typically risk averse, they prefer to minimise the risk by having superiors affirm their ability through nomination. When nominated, those who are keen to hold leadership positions will normally agree to take on more leadership tasks.

At work, they may be quiet or proactive but whether they are offered the leadership roles depends on their principal's leadership grooming philosophy. If it matches, then they progress. If not, they can actually wait indefinitely without being given any chance to demonstrate their ability. P2, who has been a leader for many years, noticed that:

*People don't want to make that conscious move, being Asian or whatever, but if people offer it to them, generally they would say, "OK, I will give it a shot". So I think a lot of people tend to follow that kind of norm. So they may well have the ability, but in terms of strong leadership interest, not really strong, but interest in the sense that if they are offered, they would take up the challenge. So the interest is not the kind where you actively pursue leadership roles.*

K5, who took on KPship after many years as a teacher, affirmed this view:

*I also feel that they must recognize you, otherwise you wanting it is not enough. Because there are people who said that I want to be a leader and you know that that person is not cut out to be a leader. So you don't want people to think [of you] that "this person wants to be a leader [but] she can't make it". So I would rather people pick me, choose me and decide if I have the ability.*

This view is also shared by K2, who states: "I think I will wait for people to spot me." Such people will probably rise to the call if their superiors affirm them by actively spotting and develop their leadership affiliation and nurture their leadership interest.

#### 5.1.1.8 “Individual perspective” of leadership

This study found some influences in this category that make it unattractive to aspire to leadership positions. Similar to influences in the sub-section above, these influences are the result of the personal experiences and idiosyncratic views on leadership held by the individual teacher.

Often teachers’ impressions of what KP positions entail are derived from what they see their LHs/SHs/HODs do or not do. But this is only if the teachers are sufficiently observant to perceive the KP’s job, whether they think they do a good job, and in the right way, or perform them poorly. Most teachers may not be able to fully comprehend the KP’s job especially when they are young and new or just busy trying to be good teachers. As T6 (who does not have the privilege of having a mentor in his professional life) regrettably confided:

*I think to be a SH or HOD, I may not be a form teacher and I don’t have a problem with that. But my point personally is that I don’t have a good idea what a HOD and SH is. Because what I can understand is that in any school or any management, if they think there is this fellow with the potential, they move him up slowly, and expose him. Of course, but if the person is willing, they expose him. And if that person likes it, he sees a bigger picture. But for someone who has not tried it out, it is not a case of whether you are willing or not. You don’t even know what it is like.*

Therefore, teachers often need their KPs’ help to see beyond teaching. K1 had the benefit of proper guidance and grooming during his days as a teacher and advocates that “KPs should not be too busy, so as to be able to see things clearly and plan properly, and interject with assistance when their supervisees need help”.

This influence of incorrect view of leadership also has another angle. Teachers typically do not see beyond the KPship towards VPship or even principalship. When asked, all the teacher-participants either did not want to consider leadership or only are prepared to consider KPship. None looked beyond one rung. Even the KP-participants only looked towards KPship, when they were teachers. Likewise, the VP or principal-participants did not consider VPship or principalship, as teachers. They did not consider the possibility that VPship/Principalship was something more enjoyable and meaningful than the intermediate and challenging position of KPship. As V1 reminisced how challenging the HODship was and was glad he had already held that appointment. The lower level of satisfaction of KPship was recognised by P2, who acknowledged that KPs only lead as much as the school leaders allow them. On balance, even if VPship and Principalship are easier and more enjoyable than KPship, it will not make the KPship less unattractive.

#### **5.1.1.9 Greater accountability**

Teachers typically are responsible for the teaching and learning in class. Some of them can become quite used to this and may not be prepared to be responsible for other teachers' performances, as a LH/SH or HOD would unavoidably be. Some people are prepared to work hard and be responsible for their own performance rather than that of their subordinates, over which they have less control. As a leader, the teacher would have a wider scope of work and be in charge of bigger projects than most teachers are generally held accountable for. This greater accountability is uncomfortable for some teachers and they would thus shun leadership roles and not aspire towards them. When asked about what aspects of a KP's job would entice teachers, P2 (an experienced principal) answered:

*Not worth it! The person may not be like the one I mentioned because now the circumstances I mentioned are different. The people out there*

*will probably work as hard if not harder than the teacher. So to the teachers, if the main consideration is pay, even if the consideration is not pay, they will ask, "Why do I want to suffer and pick up more of the burden? I have enough of it as a teacher". I see the strain. I know it is going to get worse as teachers move up.*

#### **5.1.1.10 Poor work-life balance**

It is the desire of most people to have work-life balance, whatever that may mean. This is the case in Singapore as elsewhere in the world. It is also with this in mind that the 5-day work week was first implemented for the Singapore civil service in Nov 2004. It is thus with the same expectations that teachers view work-life balance as important to their overall health. Consequently, this also features highly on the list of career requirements of the respondents. Where necessary, they try to find a balance by making adjustments or establishing a coping mechanism, such as seeing less of friends (e.g. T1), not aspiring to higher leadership appointments (e.g. K2), having a supportive spouse (e.g. V5), not bringing work home (e.g. V3), joining a gym for the discipline and therapy (e.g. K5), or having a co-curricular activity (that teachers are required to lead) they truly enjoy (e.g. T6), and deliberately not staying back late in school (e.g. K6). But some teachers find they cannot finish their work in school and have to take work home (e.g. K4 and K6).

Sometimes the problem is not just the increased work but the increased family responsibilities. T1 has a young daughter and since his spouse has night blindness, he has to feed the baby at night. K4 was recently married and decided to make time to nurture the family. K3 was recently widowed and has to juggle being a single parent. P1 cited factors such as "if the leaders who lead them are obstacles, or the staffroom culture is not there, or they marry husbands who expect them to be at home, or some have children who are very difficult or

have ill-health” then such teachers would likely not want to aspire to leadership positions.

The consequences of poor work-life balance can be poorer spouse relationship (e.g. K1) and severe frustration (e.g. T3). V2’s advice is noteworthy:

*As I said, I believe in dividing the personal commitment, your personal family lives, and the school needs to make it very clear. On the occasion when the family requires you, then you have to think carefully, can you fulfill the school needs and organization needs? If you cannot, it is better for you, to actually speak up with your superior or management to arrange for alternatives, rather than avoiding [the issue].*

Teachers see the workload of their LHs/SHs or HODs and how much busier they are compared to teachers. Furthermore, if the LHs/SHs/HODs demonstrate that they are not fully able to cope, it would exert a dampening effect on the desire of the teachers to aspire to these leadership positions. Teachers may perceive that if they LH/SH/HOD cannot fully cope, perhaps that appointment is not worth aspiring to as they too would likely be unable to cope. Teachers who value work-life balance, because of family commitments or a desire to pursue other interests in life, would unlikely want to embark upon leadership positions and suffer the poorer work-life balance. For instance, K3 (a widow with 4 kids) shared that “the priority is still my family”.

Similarly, when asked if she went out with her teacher colleagues, K4 (who is newly married) replied:

*After work, usually not on a regular basis. Previously, yes. But after getting married, my priorities have changed. I am still in close contact with my parents so I try to go back home everyday, then after that I will go to my new home so that when my husband comes back, I am actually at*

*home already. So in terms of leisure outings that I have with my colleagues, I think that has been cut down quite a bit, after I got married.*

Likewise for teachers who are anticipating greater commitments, T4 (who is trying to start a family) conceded:

*Yes, I am just content with what I have now, and with the pay I am having. I think we can make do with it. And if I was to have a family, then my family has to come first. So I don't mind sacrificing or foregoing that [leadership]...I am afraid that as a leader, I may have to sacrifice time with my family. Hence, I have not considered taking on leadership roles.*

On the other hand if the teacher's LH/SH/HOD manages the higher appointment well, it is likely that the teacher may be prepared to give it a try. Teachers who have gone through it see it as a matter of getting used to the heavier workload. As K1 encouraged:

*So has being a leader taken a toll on my family life? Initially yes, it has. I think when you move into anything that is new, you will find imbalance. You will be off-balance. But as you gain experience in your new capacity, in your new position, you will find that you will find another balance. You work on your routine, you work on becoming a better decision-maker. You work on making systems and processes that actually work for you and that leaves you time for other things.*

### **5.1.2 Influences that encourage teachers to aspire to leadership positions**

Teachers who have experienced teaching for a while and have learnt how to deal with the basic requirements of the job, are able to see beyond just teaching. They can appreciate what leadership roles are about and what leadership positions have to offer. As a result of teachers' personal experiences, some

influences do seem to entice them to aspire towards leadership positions. These are the enticing (personal) influences and are discussed below.

#### **5.1.2.1 Prior leadership experience**

It appears that teachers who have some prior leadership experience, such as a leadership role in co-curricular activities, or have led a team in achieving something special, tend to be keen to also take on leadership tasks and aspire to leadership positions. As K2 (a mid-career teacher who was very active during his schooling days) confided:

*I would say that having been in leadership positions in my extra-curricular activities previously and in national service, they taught me essential things about leadership because I feel that teaching is about leadership. It is not just going to class and teaching the students. It is leading the students, getting them to be interested, motivating them to be the best they can be. It is all about leadership, you just can't tell them and expect them to model. It is a lot more than that. So it is the leadership aspect that I value most that has helped me a lot in the preparation.*

T1 concurred and explained how his CCA appointment as a student conductor in secondary school and junior college helped him; "It gave me the confidence to speak with people and just be myself in front of people, there is no fear. So it helped me though my adult life".

Male teachers who have held some leadership appointments in the armed forces during their conscript national service, tend to be keen to rely on such leadership skills. They have good experiences and know that they are capable of leading others. They are thus eager to do the same in school. V3 agreed with this:

*I mean it is easy. Basically it is because I was an officer in the Army. They identified me as a leader from CCA days in school. You are a Captain, or you are a school prefect, so whatever it is...they know you have that. So when they asked me to do this, it was not out of the blue. You say, yes, you are a leader and don't mind trying it out although the work is different. So you try it out for a few years.*

V1 acknowledged that his national service experience (which however is not offered to female citizens) provided leadership training and opportunities which helped in the school context; “If I may just add to it, Singapore Armed Forces definitely helped. To get things moving then, you need to move people and so forth. Leadership [is required] there”.

This is also the case of mid-career teachers who held leadership roles in the private or non-education public sector. Such teachers would more readily aspire to leadership positions if given the chance, as compared to teachers who did not experience/enjoy such prior leadership experience. As P2 noted:

*So in a sense, second career people who have held leadership positions are being considered although their first degree was not in the mainstream school subjects. So for these people, I take it the panel would look at them from that perspective.*

### **5.1.2.2 Importance of affirmation**

Affirmation is generally welcome as it indicates that the teachers are doing their work well, and their superiors appreciate their efforts and outcomes of their work. Such affirmation would be encouragement that the teachers are doing well and have the ability to undertake higher appointments. This feeds a reinforcing loop which then motivates the teachers to work even harder as they feel they have hit on a correct formula in their work. Teachers who work under superiors who do

not provide such affirmation may need to find within themselves the motivation to excel despite the lack of such affirmation. Of course some people need affirmation to produce good results, while others do not require such motivation or require them to a much lesser extent. Such self-motivated teachers tend to do well continually as the uncertain element of their superior's ability or willingness to provide the affirmation is not required. Generally, affirmation has a positive influence as it serves to encourage most people to want to aspire to higher appointments. As P1 shared:

*So if my bosses find me capable, and ask me if I want to be considered for the job, and if they think I can do the job, I will say "Why not?" If they think that I add value to the organization, I will do it.*

However, affirmation can also be negative in that it may be a necessary ingredient for some teachers in order to give even more of themselves. As V1 confessed:

*For my kind of profile, normally we thrive in affirmation. So when bosses say "good job", that is when we thrive. When I was younger, as a HOD, it really helped that my principal was appreciative and encouraging. I moved from a top junior college to a mid-range neighbourhood school...so there was a lot of stress in the transition. But I remembered enjoying my time. Somehow these days, I don't find as much affirmation. Either because of that or other reasons, I am finding the stress a bit higher. For example, when I do something well, my principal does not say anything.*

### **5.1.2.3 Work-life harmony**

Sixteen of the 20 participants value work-life harmony to a significant extent and they recognise that if they are unable to achieve work-life harmony, even if they perform well in the higher (leadership) appointment, they would unlikely want to

do it for any significant period. The lack of work-life harmony would affect their home environment, family time, and often even their health. Most teachers would put this influence at a higher priority than others. This influence is also covered under 5.2.2.3. But teachers who are able to achieve work-life harmony may consider aspiring to a higher appointment. V5 attributed her ability to cope with her leadership appointment to her very supportive husband who was there for her when she repeated her “A” level studies and even attended university (on a part-time basis) while teaching and running a household. His support was instrumental in her agreeing to take on leadership appointments. Sharing the view that work-life balance is very important, V3 acknowledged that:

*At the end of the day, I still spend time with family members - I bowl, I play tennis and badminton. No doubt work is important, certain times you have to work overnight, [but] you cannot do this on a daily basis.*

Having work-life balance does not stop a teacher from aspiring to leadership positions. However, it does not mean the teacher will be encouraged to do so. It depends on the other influences. Hence work-life harmony is a necessary but not sufficient requirement in a teacher’s decision to aspire to KPship.

#### **5.1.2.4 Bored or dissatisfied with remaining a teacher**

After having taught for a while, teachers may find that it is difficult to imagine having to go through the same annual routine, year in and year out, for the next few decades. Consequently, they begin to wonder if leadership positions may be for them, as those may open up another channel for them in which to develop and grow. KPship also provides new and different challenges that would prevent them from stagnating in their professional knowledge. Such teachers are more amenable to aspiring to KPship.

The participants who are KPs had good experiences and performed well as teachers. In the midst of their teaching, they realized that they could do more than just teach. They became aware of the limitations of the role of teacher and unless they aspired to and undertook leadership roles, they would have to continue to do more of the same until retirement. They saw beyond the teaching horizon and did not relish the idea of having to do the same thing over and over again. Such people are willing to aspire to leadership roles, because of this push influence. As K1, who is approaching 40 years old, confided:

*The funny thing is that it is starting to become a chore, to go into the classroom everyday. But I find that I have half a career left, and going to do the same thing over and over again, there we have the problem that...in 10 years, I am going to be such a jaded teacher that I will not be of service to the service.*

#### **5.1.2.5 Desire to go beyond teaching**

Similarly, some teachers (e.g. T2, K1, K5, V5, P2) who have been successful, know they can do even more. They want to stretch themselves in ways that teaching alone cannot offer. Such people would want to do something more challenging and different from the daily task of teaching. One way is to leave the teaching service to do something different, and the other is to aspire to leadership positions. T2, who has always wanted to be a leader but who has not yet been recognised as a potential KP, revealed that:

*I want to be a leader so that I can influence people. And of course I feel that I have some kind of leadership quality because I have been told by my reporting officer, even my principal. I seem to have this strong group of friends in the school...and whenever I want something to be done, if the task comes from me, chances are that I get things done pretty fast.*

This pull influence can be harnessed by school leaders by recognising such teachers and providing opportunities for them to experience leadership roles.

#### **5.1.2.6 Desire to do things differently**

Some teachers (e.g. T2, K1, V1, V4, V6, P2) have the talent to be able to engage their students by doing things differently. Some others just want to do things differently so that their students would not be bored and lose focus on their studies. Their ability to do things differently depends to a significant extent on their superior's willingness to let them try. Some superiors may not be prepared to take such risks and thereby inadvertently hinder the teacher's desire.

Teachers who are allowed to do things differently tend to thrive. Teachers who are not allowed to do so tend to become frustrated. Both types recognise that their ability to do things differently would be enhanced if they took on leadership positions and ran their own small teams. Hence, teachers who have the desire to do things differently would likely want to aspire to KPship, if they have the ability. They could be encouraged to do so even when they are young teachers so as to nurture this desire in them. As T3 confessed, "Sometimes, teaching becomes very routine.... Even now, sometimes I just can't take it...just keep marking and marking".

#### **5.1.2.7 Competition**

It seems to the researcher that teachers (e.g. T1, K1, K2, K5, P1) who have leadership affiliation may welcome the element of competition. They are proud of their work and desire to do better than their peers. Healthy competition (which has elements of collaboration and cooperation) that exists in a school spurs each teacher and KP to greater heights. This then inspires teachers to aspire towards leadership positions. As P1 explained regarding why he felt he worked hard when he was younger and why he wanted to lead:

*If you ask me, I think it is good to have these types of colleagues around you, because it spurs you to do things better, to do more things, to do things differently, [it is important to have] all these people who are like-minded. So we are not alone.*

#### **5.1.2.8 Needs change with age**

From the data, if a teacher is offered a chance at leadership when s/he is not ready, there are several reasons to decline the offer. The teacher could be unsure of their aspirations and may not want to commit. Or the teacher may feel inadequate and want to shore up in the areas of content as well as pedagogy. The teacher could have some family commitment or impending commitment that makes it difficult to also manage the more onerous leadership position. Whatever the reason, a "no" now, can be a "yes" later. K6 aptly summarised this: "I always believe if the time is not right, don't force it. Because when I am ready, I am ready, and when I am not ready, I am not ready".

The teacher may eventually attain what the earlier decline of leadership offer sought to achieve. Or the teacher may be faced with a greater appetite to contribute to education at a higher level later on – with more experience to help them (providing age is not against them). The teacher may be enticed by the higher remuneration of the KP. Whichever the case, needs may change with age and maturity. V5 strongly agrees:

*[Teachers] can change their minds. It depends on what you see as the motivation. If let's say the motivation is money, then if they think that the money is not good enough now...they might say "yes" to [a later] offer to hold leadership positions.*

But if school leaders are not constantly aware of this, they can easily forget to seek another opportunity to approach that teacher regarding leadership aspiration. This point is also addressed in section 5.4.1.3.

#### **5.1.2.9 Finding meaning in KPship**

Some enticing influences arise because some characteristics of leadership positions resonate with the personal preferences and values of teachers and attract or exert a pull-factor for teachers to cross from teaching to KPship.

The participants are aware that KPship would take up more of their time and their energy, and possibly leave them less time for their families, and their other pursuits. The higher remuneration is attractive but not a decisive influence as the salary scales of teachers and KPs overlap. Consequently, teachers need to be convinced that they have a higher calling to the leadership positions, that they can contribute more and better to society than as teachers and that they are better able to meet their personal reasons for joining the education service in the first place. If teachers are unable to connect to a higher meaning, they are unlikely to want to take on the more onerous task of a KP. As T5 rationalised:

*I think they have more responsibilities, they make more decisions, and they can affect things more. So that is the leadership track. So if you want to achieve something or really make a difference in something, I think the leadership track...can make a lot of impact compared to the teaching track.*

Helping teachers find such meaning, and these might differ for different individuals, would be key to enticing more to want to be leaders.

### **5.1.2.10 KPship offers challenges**

Some participants felt that KPship offers exciting challenges (e.g. T5, T6, K1, V1, V4 and P2). Unlike teachers who are just answerable for their lessons and the results of their students, KPs are responsible for much larger areas of work. Some are in charge of entire subjects (for example Humanities), and some others are in charge of levels (for example lower secondary). These are much broader than just teaching and allow the incumbent to determine to a certain extent the desired school goals and how to achieve them. These may be seen as exciting responsibilities, allowing KPs to stretch their abilities and grow in capacity. Teachers who relish such responsibility would aspire to leadership roles. As V4 explained, she took on KPship because “for me the challenge is important, I don’t like doing the same thing every year. There must be differences, changes, improvements, and I must have my Principal give me the space and time to come up with ideas”.

## **5.2 Category “Socialisation Influences”**

Potential teachers are often affected by significant others in their decision to be teachers. However, significant others who influence teachers’ leadership aspirations generally come from within the education service. Teachers interact with them and are influenced by them. Such influences fall into the socialisation category.

### **5.2.1 Influences that encourage teachers to remain as teachers**

Some of these socialisation influences promote the status quo as teachers, and thus discourage a move to leadership.

### 5.2.1.1 Contented older teachers – leadership interest may decline with age

From the data, it appears that if teachers do not aspire towards KPship when they are young or early mid-career, it is likely that as they grow older, they become comfortable and rooted in their teaching roles – a process that can be seen as classroom familiarity. More importantly, they have made good friends with other teachers and thereby gained social and professional identity, and thus it may be difficult to entice them to leave their group of friends especially to do a different level of job with a significantly wider scope, and with far greater accountability than they are used to as teachers. It is therefore less likely that they will aspire to KPship as they get beyond a certain age. Hence the more familiar and comfortable they are with their friends (and their work as teachers), the greater their preference to retain the status quo and the less likely they can be enticed to aspire to KPship. As T4 observed:

*The older ones, once they hit a certain age, they are contented to just remain teachers...about 40 [years old]. After that if you are still a teacher, from what I see, they would be happy being what and who they are, and what they are doing.*

This is affirmed by V1 who noticed that:

*I can feel once you have passed your 30s, you are on to your 40s, they have certain issues. Their pace slows down a bit, and oftentimes you talk to them about challenging themselves, they don't want to, they are more or less comfortable where they are.*

Also supporting this view is V6 who felt that, “Too long a wait, the potential leaders will look elsewhere or are distracted with other things like starting a family”.

According to V2, lower levels of energy could result in a reduction in leadership interest as one ages. But K5 thought older teachers were not always content to remain as teachers. She offers an alternative perspective:

*I get this impression that opportunities are given to younger teachers. So older teachers are in the way; they may not be directly told that, [but] from the actions that school leaders always pick the younger teachers to be KPs, and in some situations and some schools, older teachers are asked to step down, from being HODs to become senior teachers, to give way to the younger teachers to be KPs...definitely when you are an older teacher, if you know that, then your aspiration to be a leader will be curtailed in the plan. We know that MOE wants the younger teachers to be the ones to hold the appointments. Once you are older, after a certain expiry date, not much you can do.*

#### **5.2.1.2 Effects of cloning – and mindsets of interview panels**

The selection process within the MOE, whether it is the selection of pre-teachers for the service, or the selection of teachers for KPship, are conducted by interview panels comprising of MOE principals and VPs for the former, and by cluster superintendent and principals for the latter. For the KP interview for teachers, the assessment centres round the candidates' assessed professional knowledge, ability to handle the KP job, ability to manage stakeholders and the like. Within each criterion it is left to the panel to interpret the extent of the candidates' possession of the requisite qualities. This may result in a cloning effect – as those who are already leaders choose new aspirants like themselves - and leads to an inherent disadvantage – which is that the leaders do not have many divergent views. Teachers with divergent views may not be able to clear the interviews, as P1 clearly articulated:

*Sometimes the fault with bosses is that you look for people who are like you, there is the danger; we should not look for people who are like us. In the interview if you already have a certain bias and mindset, then other people who do things differently and not the way you do it, then you would consider them as [unsuitable].*

P1 further shared a personal experience:

*Some bosses place a high premium on a teacher's administrative ability in assessing that the teacher can be a leader. But other bosses look for different things, e.g. for a visionary. Sometimes it depends on the boss. So if you have a boss who believes that a leader must be a visionary and you are a visionary, although administratively you are not very strong, then the boss would rate you as having strong leadership affiliation. But if you have a boss who thinks that filing and making sure your "i"s are dotted and "t"s are crossed, and you make no mistakes, that would make you a good leader.*

The researcher believes this cloning effect can begin much earlier. When school leaders assess their teachers in the annual performance ranking, the assessments are influenced by the principals' personal values system, what they perceive are important and what they think KPs should have. Even as part of succession planning when they identify potential leaders with the intent of testing them at leadership tasks, they would likely give the opportunities to those who think and act like they do, or at least when they did when they were younger. V6 vehemently shared very strong views on this:

*So where is this fairness? There are too many blind spots and too much cloning. Too much control. You are cloning the same type of people (like yourself) that you hope to see. I am like that, and I hope to see more*

*people like me. And therefore if we are thinking alike, we can hold onto our power. It is a 'dynasty' thinking.*

V5 also wistfully agrees: "They use mental models. I agree. So some may lose out because of that". V3 also supports this thinking: "First, to respect, to obey, not to question why, and then after that they say you are worthy of moving up".

### **5.2.1.3 Need to manage, confront, discipline and supervise ex-peers**

Some eschewing influences arise because of the responsibilities and characteristics of leadership positions that require supervisory relationships with others – for some teachers, this requirement makes leadership unattractive.

Teachers are leaders in their classrooms. But in the staff room, they often work autonomously, and undertake peer collaboration where necessary. Unless asked to be leaders and showing a disposition for leadership, they would be more comfortable being just one of the teachers. In agreeing that it is harder to control peers than students, K1 explained: "It is easier to lead students because the students know less than you. To lead your peers...that is why you need to be above-average in your teaching, otherwise you cannot lead".

This means that teachers treat other teachers as colleagues/peers and should the former be promoted to be LH/SH or HOD, they would subsequently need to manage their ex-peers. The thought of having to confront ex-peers, supervise and if necessary discipline them, does put some people off leadership aspirations. As V5 confessed:

*I felt very uncomfortable because these were formerly my peers...telling them to do things. So that was one of the difficulties I had in this school because we were fellow teachers, and now I have to tell them to do this, do that.*

It appears that the longer teachers work with their peers and enjoy each other's company, the harder it is to entice these teachers to aspire to KPship which would require them to manage these ex-peers. Agreeing, P2 felt that:

*I do agree that...first acceptability among your own colleagues. That is something that is social in nature. I think if you are too long with them as colleagues, then all of a sudden you move into that kind of position and you say "I have to look at people, punish them and discipline them". In a sense these are some of these influences that people have to take into consideration.*

#### **5.2.1.4 Reluctant to have less student contact**

Many teachers (T3, T4, K1, K2, K3, V1, V3, V4, V5, V6, P1, P2) join the profession to be teachers not leaders. They fully enjoy being with their students, teaching them, guiding them, counseling them and basically helping prepare them for examinations and for life. They are aware (since they can see their KPs at work) that taking up a leadership position would necessarily require them to give up some student contact. Nevertheless, teachers also know that KPs still enjoy classroom/student contact time and this balance may be acceptable to some who value the management opportunity that leadership positions offer. But some eschew this. For instance, when asked if she would not want to give up direct links with students, T3 affirmed: "Correct, it is something I really treasure as a teacher...and would probably not want to be an SH because I'll have less contact with kids".

Such a sentiment however is less important with KPs, VPs and principals as they would have already accepted the reality of having less student interaction as they move into leadership positions. But for teachers, many still feel they join to teach and hence are less prepared to have less student contact.

### 5.2.1.5 Dislike of greater contact with unreasonable parents

Parents partner teachers in developing children holistically, but in Singapore often the unreasonable demands and expectations of parents make it hard for teachers to function effectively. Teachers typically like to teach but are not so keen to deal with parents. Most do not relish the idea of having to deal with unreasonable parents. Teachers also realize that KPs have to deal with more parents than teachers, and this makes this task even more onerous. As P2 shared:

*Currently you have to be very sensitive to the public, parents and so on. Right now there is more of that than back then. So that may be one consideration. Why do we have to answer to these people? So if I had gone up through the rungs, I would have seen a lot of these things, and they may have put me off.*

Agreeing, K1 (who handles many parents in the course of his work managing behaviorally-challenged students) lamented:

*Parents, the public - now demand the very best for their children. It is very hard for teachers today because there are parents who suddenly feel that teachers are not doing enough, and who demand, quite unreasonable things if you ask me, of teachers.*

Teachers feel that if they remain as teachers, they would face fewer such occasions to have to manage difficult parents compared to KPs. This makes KPship less attractive to them.

## **5.2.2 Influences that encourage teachers to aspire to leadership positions**

Teachers who have taught for quite some time have generally settled down to teaching and know more people through their daily interactions, compared to beginning teachers or those just settling in. They have the opportunity to benefit from such interactions and some of these provide encouragement for them to aspire towards KPship. Such influences are discussed below.

### **5.2.2.1 Peer collaboration, competition and influence**

With capable teachers, peer collaboration and competition serve to bring out in them the desire to do even better than their peers. When such teachers cooperate, they see the potential of collaborative power and are encouraged to do even more. When like-minded people meet, this could open up their desire to want to do more and take on leadership roles. This is supported by P1 who shared that:

*I think it is good to have these types of like-minded colleagues around you, because it spurs you to do things better, to do more things, to do things differently. So that we are not alone. Everything we do, we set a new benchmark.*

The corollary is also true that colleagues/friends who are nay-sayers bring negative energy. Such peers serve to dis-incentivise teachers from wanting to do more, to do better. P1 also noted that:

*The environment, the classroom and the circle of friends...I won't mention the name of a particular school, you find that the culture is not good. People discourage others from working hard. For example, "Why do you want to spoil the market?" "Why are you working so hard?" Many examples of young teachers coming in, very efficient and very inquisitive.*

*But given that kind of environment, they may also become one of the crowd.*

#### **5.2.2.2 Open door policy of reporting officer**

The reporting officer (usually KPs for teachers) is in a good position to influence the aspirations of teachers. When the reporting officer practices an open door policy, it allows teachers to readily approach to ask, clarify and share. This provides good learning and tutelage. The job of a KP may appear less difficult, more manageable and more meaningful. Such open door policy by the reporting officer serves to encourage more teachers to aspire towards KPship. K1 ventured:

*I try to have an open door policy; like I say, I try to bridge the I-am-your-superior-you-are-my-subordinate kind of thing. I just be myself and hope that my subordinates are able to pick up those signals and come forward. With every opportunity to work with my subordinates, if the meeting or if the project is successful, they are more likely to trust. When they are more likely to trust, they are more likely to come back.*

K2 agreed:

*I find it is important not to get carried away with a position of authority. You are still doing the job on the ground, you still have to empathize with them, able to get things done at the same time. I mean I don't position myself as someone who drives you and you have got to do your job. I will try to understand your point of view and if you have problems, I will step in to help you and I'll make sure you get the credit...I am here to get things done and to help them, and they grow as a process.*

### **5.2.2.3 Teachers need good leaders in order to grow - Impact of good, nurturing and understanding supervisors**

Significant others in a teacher's life prior to their becoming a teacher might well be expected to influence them in their decision to join teaching. However, as these others are probably not fully cognizant with what school leadership positions entail, they are unlikely to be an influence in a teacher's decision on whether to aspire to KPship. Hence, teachers would benefit from the advice and guidance of others who can enlighten them regarding KPship. This second group of significant others are usually their reporting officers or other more senior teachers at school. The presence of good, nurturing and understanding leaders would certainly help teachers decide to want to aspire to KPship. K5 recalls:

*As a subject head, I am involved with a lot of planning, not just for my department but for the whole school. So I think because of that, I am very involved with the decision-making. I feel involved. So that is the big difference. My comments and my views are taken into consideration. As a teacher, I would only just be teaching but now I am involved in the decision-making of many school-level programmes. Most of the time, the principal asks for our views. I feel involved. In that sense I enjoy that. That is why I probably want to be a leader too and I don't want to take the back seat. I enjoy contributing my ideas and stuff like that.*

Even if teachers have prior leadership experiences, they are usually of a different kind and a different level. They cannot take on the role of a KP as is and need a process and a period of learning and growing. Teachers are busy and often have little time to take on additional tasks, much less leadership tasks. They are not sure how to prioritise their work, or when they meet obstacles, how to overcome them. Unless they have someone to mentor and guide them, they would usually spend time inefficiently trying to solve the wrong problem or to solve the right problem but the wrong way. However, teachers with good leaders would seek and get the correct guidance so that time and effort are not wasted

doing things unproductively or doing unproductive things. Mentors would be able to point teachers to the correct way and could possibly point the way towards a leadership position. As K1 urged:

*Not only must the reporting officer test the teacher, but the teacher must be told these things about them. The leader should be able to tell the teacher "I see that you made a good decision. I see you helping other teachers". If you break it down into small parts, actually the reporting officer is able to show that these are actually the elements of leadership, and the teacher can buy in.*

K6 attributed his interest and growth as a leader to his principal:

*The principal had a lot to do with it. Prior to her coming in, I was teaching. I didn't really aspire...I told her no, it was not my cup of tea. I just wanted to remain in teaching. When I told the new principal this, she offered me ideas and options.*

Some teachers are fortunate, if they meet leaders such as P1 who "give honest feedback...you are always better off, if the feedback is honest. For instance, I tell you there is a gap...it is my job as your boss to help you close the gap."

V4 provided a further insight, as follows:

*It is about recognising that there may be some of them (teachers) who join but might not realise that they have that leadership interest, then the school leaders, effectively look out for them when they are beginning teachers...but how often do we come across leaders who encourage such teachers?*

The lack of a common desire/motivation by all leaders that they need to grow other leaders may be the artificial cap on how many leaders can be groomed from among the teachers. V4 also suggested that:

*MOE can give more help, leeway and support to the school to see how they can come in to help the principals to spot and groom teachers. Because school leaders might not take on this role automatically just because they are school leaders. Depending on their own beliefs, maybe they think that the young ones, better don't spot them, better don't groom them too soon.*

Grooming leaders should not be the principal's responsibility alone, as the KPs have direct and frequent contact with the teachers. Again V4 offered that:

*A lot depends on whether the KPs are spotting them and giving them enough responsibilities to showcase them. So it is still the middle managers who need to come very actively into the role. But they will only move if the leaders think it is important...MOE starts asking for more potential leaders, we find that we are starting from scratch because we have not been doing this for many years.*

K1 sums it up nicely as follows:

*A high percentage of a teacher's time is focused on being a better teacher. Who is looking at leadership? It is actually the reporting officer. The reporting officer [should] look at the capability of the teacher, the current estimated potential. The reporting officer should put the wheels into motion.*

## **5.3 Category “Environmental Influences”**

Teachers who have served in their schools for a few years are typically more aware of the school-specific conditions which influence their leadership aspirations. They are also more cognizant of the implications of policies from the MOE headquarters which affect their desire to be KPs or otherwise. These are known as environmental influences.

### **5.3.1 Influences that encourage teachers to remain as teachers**

Teachers who have taught for a while better understand what teaching entails. Some who have taught in more than one school can even make comparisons between school environments. Some enticing conditions to remain a teacher are also the result of MOE policy and affect all schools. Teachers are aware of the influences in this category in deciding whether to aspire to KPship.

#### **5.3.1.1 Highly dependent on reporting officer’s spotting and mentoring**

In a typical school, teachers do not have frequent direct access to the VP or Principal and mostly work under their KP. This means that their fates are highly dependent on the ability of their KP to spot their talent, nurture that talent, encourage the teacher to aspire towards leadership positions, and the ability to convince the Principal and VP of the teacher’s strengths. Some teachers do not like to be in a situation which requires them to voice their career intentions to their reporting officers. As T6 indicated:

*For me it is still very much an Asian mindset. I may want it. If it is not offered to me, I won’t open my mouth. It is different from what I see of the younger teachers, they will fight for it. Why am I like that? Because my teachers taught me that way, [it is] very hard to change. You don’t ask but you accept what is given to you. That was the philosophy I had as a*

*student, but in these competitive times, it does work to my disadvantage. But it is not in me to say, I want.*

Affirming this, K1 said: "I am fortunate, very fortunate. I never knew I had the ability to lead until somebody told me I did and from that he planted the seed and see it grow into me becoming a HOD".

V6 did not like the fact that in Singapore, achieving the next higher appointment is by appointment, not by application. She added: "It is very subjective. Why? The reason being it is dependent on the reports of the person above you. There is this element of subjectivity as it is dependent on your supervisor".

### **5.3.1.2 Ease of leaving MOE**

The ease of leaving MOE is designed to encourage people to join the teaching service without the concern that they are bonded for a long time if they so choose. Therefore teachers are allowed to leave the service at any time, and can return, so long as they were not asked to leave the service. Some teachers do consider the options of leaving the service to try out other careers and under these circumstances, they would be unlikely to want to take up KPship as it would make it more difficult to leave. Teachers who are prepared to consider venturing outside MOE would likely be those who may not think they want to remain a teacher for life but they may value the ability to return to teaching, should the stint outside MOE not work out. This influence does not encourage teachers to aspire to leadership positions. Agreeing, T4 felt that:

*I know that if I resign and want to come back, it is not that tough. Perhaps if it is not so, it would definitely affect my decision. I still enjoy teaching. The reason why I want to go part-time or adjunct [teaching] is that I still want to keep in touch with the syllabus. And I am told that if I quit and I cannot come back, then I would seriously think about not quitting. After 5*

*years in the service, and I have put in much effort, I wouldn't want to give it up so easily.*

### **5.3.1.3 Declining may not lead to a second chance**

Teachers who decline a Principal's overture for KPship may not often get a second offer. This influence is different from the earlier influence which indicates that teachers who leave the MOE can readily rejoin, as teachers. As T6 acknowledged: "There are only so many opportunities that each school can offer, and there are so many people". This is accentuated by the fact that in Singapore, teacher mobility is low. Seeking a position in another school means uprooting from a familiar working environment and friends, and possibly working further from home. Unless it is for a choice appointment, teachers would likely prefer to remain. Principals on the look-out for teachers with leadership potential would likely offer the more promising ones first and if the offer is not accepted, would go down the list until they encounter a positive response. In the event that there are no takers from the school, the Principal would likely advertise in the intranet for applicants from other schools than to bear the gap. Work would still need to be done even with the vacancy unfilled and hence the natural inclination would be to accept an applicant from another school. Once the position is advertised on the intranet, it is likely that the Principal's attention is focused in that direction.

K5 had a personal experience of this. She was actually offered the headship of the English Language Department in the previous school but she declined.

Reminiscing, she shared that:

*At that time, I didn't want to be in the leadership track. So I said "no". In retrospect, I think I made a mistake by saying "no" then. But at that time, I was thinking that there is so much work a KP has to do and I just want to be a teacher, and that is it. I didn't want to be a KP. I was thinking about*

*the workload. That deterred me, the KP's workload. Maybe I wasn't ready then.*

It took her many years in the current school before she was again noticed and offered a SH position. She was fortunate to get a second chance. T6 wistfully shared some anecdotes:

*Do you know that another aspect is that if you talk to the older staff, you will find that many of them regretted not becoming KPs. [We] must consider the aftermath for those people who initially think they are able but unwilling. The unwillingness led to regret later on.*

He further proposed: "In 5 years' time, they should review the people who had earlier shown little interest. They may have changed their interest". Agreeing, V5 conceded that if a teacher declines a principal's offer, the principal may never make another offer to that same teacher a second time. This may mean that delayed leadership aspiration may not be fulfilled when the teacher is finally ready.

#### **5.3.1.4 Need for independent thinking and initiative**

With the perceived constant pressure by MOE and parents to deliver good student outcome/results, teachers are hard pressed to demonstrate that their teaching strategies are effective and competitive. In order to meet these challenges, teachers are aware that KPs have to be able to think independently and often have to think creatively. The use of initiative is not something teachers practice on a daily basis and teachers are often not comfortable with this.

Teachers are concerned that the KP's job requires them to be rather independent, requires much initiative and has to deal with unfamiliar situations. As T4 mused:

*For a teacher, I think being competent in teaching is critical. On the other hand, apart from subject mastery, a leader must have foresight and have the ability to envision for the team. A leader must be able to gain the respect of his team as well.*

P2 agrees with the need to see beyond just teaching:

*You may have thought about it. How you broach a subject. You may well have done it and later tell the P. That is fine. You also have to be smart enough to size up this thing yourself, no need for principal's clearance. If you cannot size up, then you are not a good leader/manager.*

But P2 felt that this stress is more on the Principal/VP, and less so on the KPs:

*Definitely on the VP and P. Because the KPs can always defer, since the main decision makers are the P and VP. They determine the direction of the school, not the KPs. The KPs are managers. You can say all you want, but the middle layer [teachers] are not leaders in the critical sense. They are leaders as and how the P and VP allow them to lead. It is not true that a person can lead, just like that, in the school context. Because finally the path that the school charts is determined by the school leaders, [even] more so the P than the VP.*

### **5.3.1.5 High expectations of KPs**

Teachers recognize that KPs have necessarily larger job scopes than teachers and also need to supervise them. Some teachers are not comfortable with this constant pressure and thus eschew leadership positions. The high expectations of KPs is a disincentive, especially for those who are not so good at managing their time. As V1 confided:

*Because I tell you, frankly, I was fortunate. I completed my KPship in my 30s. But the KP's job is not simple, you have got to teach. You have got to deliver [exam] results and over and above that, have to administer this and that. It is a high energy job.*

P2 also provided an interesting observation; “a teacher can swap duties, but a KP is on his own. A teacher can cover for each other, there is that option”. This also means that because KPs own different areas of responsibility, for instance there is only one HOD for Science, and it tends to be lonely in that there is less opportunity for consultation for subject-specific issues.

### **5.3.6 Few opportunities**

Teachers recognize that in a typical school of 1300 students, there can be up to 10 KPs, out of the 60 to 70 teachers on full-time staff. Often a school has only 66% of KP posts filled, so that there are typically about 3 or 4 KP positions vacant. A teacher would usually need to be trained in the relevant subject if they were to be KP. Hence unless the immediate supervisor/KP is not staffed, teachers realize that their chances of moving up in the same department would be slim. Unless that KP retires or is promoted to a VPship, it means that the teacher may not be able to hold a KPship for that department within the same school. They can consider applying for other schools, but principals usually prefer to promote KPs from among the staff (so as to reward the staff, or s/he has a better understanding of the new KP's ability, or because the new KP understands the school culture) means that they would be less willing to take in teachers from other schools.

Such teachers can be considered for leadership appointments that are not subject-based, such as SH/HOD (Pupil Development), SH/HOD (Student Welfare). In all, it still means that such teachers may not have suitable positions to aspire to, in the same school. Ultimately, many do not bother to aspire

because they feel opportunities are few as schools typically have only a few KP vacancies and these are often subject-specific.

But from the voices of the participants, it appears that occasionally opportunities do occur which are unplanned for and unexpected. T3 agreed, saying: “I am not [that good], just had the opportunity”. Because such opportunities often are not anticipated, it makes it harder for teachers to plan for and work towards such appointments. When teachers perceive that opportunities are few, they stop working towards them.

#### **5.3.1.6 Lots of administrative work**

Although the main preoccupation of teachers is teaching, they also have administrative work (exam marking, writing accountability reports, and involvement in committee work organising events or programmes for the school). Some consider administrative work mundane and only tolerate it as a necessary component of their work. They recognize that KPs have a lot more administrative work, having to manage the curriculum for the department as well as managing the teachers and students taking the subject. Hence, teachers who feel strongly about this might well eschew leadership positions. As K4 lamented:

*But when it comes down to being a HOD, there is a lot of admin work. So it really drains you out and you go to a class, you want to give it all, but you are so tired from all the admin, so bogged down by all the issues. As HOD you deal with all the bigger exam issues. All these things cloud your mind, and when you try to give it all, somehow there is something holding you back. There is only so much time you have. You really want to plan a lesson well, but you don't have the time to do it. So every time when I go out of a class, I think I should have done it like this, but I didn't have the time to do it this way.*

### **5.3.2 Influences that encourage teachers to aspire to leadership positions**

When teachers have been in service for quite some time, they are better able to appreciate the environmental influences such as the service benefits the MOE and the school environment have provided, and how these environmental influences encourage them to aspire to KPship.

#### **5.3.2.1 Safe and forgiving school culture**

A school with a safe and forgiving culture would encourage teachers to experiment with new ways of teaching. Teachers would also be more prepared to take on additional tasks as they are not afraid to make mistakes since their reporting officers would not penalize them. Teachers in schools that are more critical would be less likely to want to take on additional roles, as mistakes would mean they are not ranked well at the end of the year. Such teachers would then prefer to play it safe and just do what is required, not more. As K5 explained why he liked being a teacher because; “school is a relatively sheltered place. Out there it is not so sheltered. So while the pay may be better outside, you get other problems as well. I compare notes with my friends outside”.

Likewise T6 was glad that:

*The school management [allows] me to try out new things all the time. So over the years, I am given that kind of freedom. But I have to deliver. You cannot fail too many times. But you also cannot succeed all the time. We learn because we make mistakes.*

#### **5.3.2.2 Presence of friends and colleagues**

Teachers feel that when they move on to higher appointments, they leave their friends behind, unless their friends are similarly promoted. They take comfort

that they would be able to make new friends of the KPs who may previously be their superiors. It is not often that two teachers within the same academic department can be promoted at the same time, unless one of them moves up to hold a non-academic leadership appointment, such as SH/HOD for Pupil Development, or SH/HOD for Discipline. But the presence of a friend within the ranks of the KP would be a strong incentive for a teacher to want to aspire towards leadership position as this makes the higher position less lonely. On the other hand, teachers who have close colleagues who aspire to higher positions may want to aspire to KPship too. P2 ventured that you will make new friends from the new level of appointment. He said:

*Nowadays society has changed a bit. So I don't know to what extent that friendship holds. But you can tell from our people that friendship is more with people from the same level or status, and maybe because they came in at the same time.*

This last statement – if true – tends to suggest that leadership positions appear less lonely than some claim, although loneliness probably increases with seniority – the principalship being most lonely.

### **5.3.2.3 KPship interviews/appointments at cluster level**

KPship interviews are conducted at cluster level, chaired by the cluster superintendent and assisted by two other principals who form the interview panel. The interviewees are often known to the panel and are strongly recommended by their respective principals. Also, the cluster superintendent visits each of the cluster schools' annual ranking deliberations and hence is aware of or even familiar with the more promising teachers in each of the cluster schools. This level of awareness and at times even familiarity makes the cluster interview panel less threatening than a panel which does not know the

interviewees at all. Procedures at the KP level are hence easier than the MOD-level interviews for all the higher grade promotions (for instance from KP to VP).

Another advantage for teachers aspiring for KPship who have been unsuccessful at the first interview is that the candidate's name can be resubmitted by the sponsoring principal. As V1 neatly summarized:

*For the KPs' interview, it is different. The interviews are done at cluster level, the principals would be interviewers, and you can get a second go at it, another chance. So it is more controlled, more predictable.*

#### **5.3.2.4 KPship offers good mix of management and teaching**

KPship allows a teacher the opportunity to continue to maintain contact with students (for which most teachers join teaching in the first place) and yet venture into a management role. This opens a range of work that can sustain the interest of teachers, especially those who are beginning to, or are already bored with just teaching. And when they find that they have the capacity and ability to do much more than just teach, a further incentive is added. Similarly, teachers who want to do more than simply follow instructions would find that KPship offers more flexibility to do things their way. As K3 enthused:

*I don't mind middle management roles...because I like doing a bit of admin which you can use to impact the school, like planning the timetable, drafting invigilation timetable and exam. At the same time, I would like to impact on students in the classroom. I feel satisfaction is greater when you have direct contact with the students.*

### 5.3.2.5 KP still has domain ownership

Teachers who do not want to relinquish contact with their subject would find KPship a good position to aspire to. KPs still retain domain ownership over their subject areas including the grooming and managing of a team of teachers for that subject. KPship offers a good blend of management tasks as well as subject ownership. Some find the KPship attractive because they can have greater impact on both the good of the school and the students. As V1 ventured:

*You have a fair amount of control as KP. You are in charge of your instructional programme domain. You have many teachers who report to you, not just as RO (reporting officer) for SAR, but also because you are their instructional leader. You are supposed to guide them and direct them. You are the expert.*

### 5.3.2.6 Off-loading

KPship can also be enticing to teachers who want to undertake tasks besides teaching but cannot find sufficient time to do a good job in both areas. The KP only carries two-thirds of a teacher's full teaching load. This allows the KP more time to undertake the management tasks. Teachers who are keen to both teach and do some administrative work are thus enabled in their aspirations for KPship as they are given compensatory time to undertake their dual functions. As K1, who holds multiple portfolios in school, reflected:

*Even before considering to offload a teacher to entice him/her to take on the role of KP, it is first critical to see whether that teacher is indeed ready for KPship in terms of the following: (i) capability (ii) mentally (iii) lifestyle e.g. family responsibilities, life priorities etc. Offloading, whilst being an incentive, MUST be factored in, not for incentive sake but to allow the KPs*

*to perform their more important job-scope properly e.g. planning, conceptualising, rolling out projects, monitoring processes.*

Agreeing, T3 felt that “as a leader, you are off-loaded and thus have more time for administrative work....I think time-wise one is already being compensated.”

## **5.4 Summary**

This chapter presented the summary of data collected from interviews with the participants. The influences were identified from open, axial and selective codings. They are grouped according to the 3 main categories of personal influences, socialisation influences, and environmental influences with each of them linked to two other, common, main categories of teaching influences and leadership influences.

The analysis of the influences and how they address the second research question and how they relate to the relevant literature, will be discussed in chapter 6.

## Chapter 6

# HOW THE INFLUENCES AFFECT TEACHERS' LEADERSHIP ASPIRATION

### Introduction

Based on coding and categorising procedures associated with content analysis methods, Chapter 5 presented the key influences that matter to the 20 participants as to whether to stay on a teaching track or opt for a leadership career path. These influences need to be understood within the context of the Singapore school system which was discussed in chapter 1 (sub-sections 1.1.3 and 1.1.4). The career options available to teachers were also explained in chapter 2 (sub-section 2.1.3).

This chapter examines *how* the more significant influences derived from the different categories in chapter 5 affect teachers' decision-making with regards to their career aspirations, according to the categories of: (1) Personal; (2) Socialisation; (3) Environmental; (4) Teaching; and (5) Leadership Influences, and sub-categories of (a) enticing, and (b) eschewing influences, and how these interact and address the second specific research question (SRQ) of: **How do these influences affect the career aspirations of Singaporean secondary school teachers?** This SRQ is expanded and addressed in the following sections:

6.1 *How* personal influences impact teachers' decision-making processes and career aspirations.

6.2 *How* socialisation influences impact teachers' decision-making processes and career aspirations.

6.3 *How* environmental influences impact teachers' decision-making processes and career aspirations.

In section 6.1, sub-section (6.1.1) provides the analysis of the personal influences that encourage teachers *to remain as teachers*. Sub-section (6.1.2) offers the analysis of the personal influences that encourage teachers *to aspire to leadership positions*. Available literature on these influences will be used to anchor the findings to the existing body of scholarly knowledge. Likewise, sections 6.2 and 6.3 comprise sub-sections which analyse the socialisation (6.2.1) and environmental (6.3.1) influences that encourage teachers *to remain as teachers*, and also the socialisation (6.2.2) and environmental (6.3.2) influences that encourage teachers *to aspire to leadership positions*.

From the analysis, a model is proposed as desired key outcome for this study.

## **6.1 How personal influences impact teachers' decision-making processes and career aspirations**

### **6.1.1 Influences that encourage teachers to remain as teachers**

This study has identified five main personal influences that encourage teachers to remain as teachers. Some are similar to James and Whiting's (1998) six factors that they found had influenced the career decisions of assistant principals not to seek headship, namely: role overload, contentment with current job, negative impact on the individual's family, self-doubt, concerns over public accountability, and external factors such as the scale and pace of bureaucratic initiatives (p.13).

#### **6.1.1.1 Join to be a teacher, not a leader**

From the data, all 20 participants joined the MOE to be teachers, not leaders. In their early days as teachers, the participants preferred to spend time preparing to be good teachers and did not consider, nor wish to be considered, for leadership roles. For instance, according to T5:

*Because I want to teach so my interest in leadership is not high...I find that teaching can take up quite a fair bit of time. So unless I really can cope very well in my teaching, I would not volunteer myself so readily for other things.*

When asked why she did not wish to consider leadership appointments, T3 replied: "I think it is because I am contented with my current job". Both T3 and T5 are relatively new teachers, having less than 3 years of service and their preoccupation with building up a good teaching foundation is natural. But unlike T5 who has not been given leadership tasks thus enabling him to focus on teaching, T3 had to take up some additional leadership tasks. For example, she is in charge of running the Students' Council and grooming student leaders. This leaves her less time to focus on teaching and could have resulted in her frustration at not having sufficient time for that.

Such sentiments were also felt by the more senior participants when they were still teachers. When she was still a teacher, K5 very much preferred the classroom experience and did not relish taking on leadership roles. She wanted to be true to her calling to teach and she took it to mean just teach. She had earlier been offered a KPship in her 6th year of service (at her previous school) but she declined. K5 explained:

*Actually when I was in primary school, my principal had already offered me a leadership role. She wanted me to take on the HOD of Media. But I was going to go overseas to study so I gave up that idea. When I came back, I wasn't sure I was going to stay on in Singapore so I didn't take on any leadership role.*

Similarly, V4 was reluctant to take on KPship earlier on. She was happily teaching Humanities and later English and her love for teaching was at odds with

having less time to teach as a KP. Such teachers shunned or delayed the lure of official leadership roles. She very reluctantly took up KPship because her principal impressed upon her the school's critical need. She exclaimed:

*I was about 2–3 years in the school. At that time, we did not have Subject or Level Head. It was just HOD and the rest of us would be coordinators. If you ask me, it was because the turnover rate was very high, even in those days...I think it was because there was no one else around at that time.*

Such sentiments are supported by what Schein (1990) called 'career anchors', which help people understand what matters to them, their values, and what motivates them, which ultimately determine their career preferences. Many of the participants wanted to continue teaching because they felt that to be their calling. Their main interest is to teach. Many simply want to focus their efforts on becoming good teachers. They also have good friends among their fellow-teachers. Such sentiments are not unlike Lacey's (2002) findings among Australian teachers, some of whom chose not to be principals because of "lack of alignment of personal and organizational values" (p.222).

The participants' original universal intent of joining MOE to be teachers may become a preventative block to teachers' aspiring to KPship if it is too strong. It can be balanced or even overcome by the combined impact of other influences, otherwise teachers seem to be happier just to remain as teachers.

#### **6.1.1.2 High Family Commitment**

T4 just had a baby girl (after the second interview) and had converted to part-time teaching in the same school. She was even prepared to go on no-pay leave had the school not approved her application to work part-time. She had decided all along to put her career on hold and focus on the family. K3, widowed

recently, felt she had no choice but to re-prioritise her career to a lower level, even though she was now the main income earner. She had to bring home the bacon as well as bring up her 4 children. Understandably, she has little energy to pursue a higher leadership appointment. Married female participants such as T4 and K3 simply did not wish to or could not aspire to higher leadership. Not all participants could juggle many hats like V5 who as a teacher, was also a daughter, a wife and mother and also pursued a degree programme on a part-time basis. In this regard, perhaps the single participants had more time and energy to put into their career. This was also affirmed by K4, who was recently married and had begun to go home to prepare dinner every night for her new spouse before he returned from work. She realised she could not continue to spend long hours in school. She expressed how she felt, thus:

*But after getting married, my priorities have changed. I am still in close contact with my parents so I try to go back home everyday, then after that I will go to my new home so that when my husband comes back, I am actually at home already.*

High family commitment at an early stage of a teacher's career may make it harder to want to aspire to leadership positions. The examples mentioned are of female teachers. Male teachers also had family commitments although to a lesser extent than female teachers. But even male teachers suffer if they are unable to juggle both well. K1, separated from his wife, had perhaps put in too much time at work. He confided:

*I am a 24/7 teacher; it is ingrained in me. I love being a teacher and after school, you will see me. I am one of those teachers, you will see me lock the gates...So, I think by and large over the last 15 years, I have not found a balance that people are happy with. I have found a balance that I am happy with. Has being a leader taken a toll on my family life? Initially yes, it has.*

Even K5, who is single, felt that “sometimes I wonder, if I was married, I don’t know how I would handle having to be a wife and having children. I really salute all these women who have husbands and children and they are able to cope with the workload.” Recognising the need for more family time for all, Singapore has implemented the 5-day work week since August 2004 (MOE, 2004c). However, there is no evidence yet that this has resulted in more teachers aspiring to leadership positions.

Heavier family commitments faced by female Singaporean teachers, especially married ones, are similarly faced by UK teachers. This undoubtedly is one reason why women are under-represented in school leadership in the UK (Coleman, 2005). Similarly in Israeli schools, female educators also struggled to manage their professional life and at the same time manage the home (Fuchs, 1992). In Australia, Lacey (2003a) noted that “research showed that males and females had different attitudes to leadership, with more females than males wanting to remain in the classroom” (p.1).

For a few participants (e.g. V4, V5, V6) joining teaching provided a stable income to help with the family’s expenses. However, none of the participants thought that the KP’s higher salary was an enticing influence. According to Normore (2004),

*Traditionally, if teachers wanted to earn more money, achieve higher status, or earn greater respect, they would leave the classroom and move toward a principalship or some other administrative role. Today, fewer teachers are likely to see administration as a way to improve their salaries, prestige, or respect among other colleagues.*

Agreeing, Lacey (2003a) attributed this phenomenon to the impact of greater work responsibilities on the family. She said:

*Teachers generally identified the effect of the principal's role on the family as a strong disincentive to seeking promotion. Females identified this negative effect more strongly than males. Family responsibilities clearly impacted on the development and timing of women's leadership aspirations (p.4).*

High family commitments divert the time, energy and focus of teachers away from aspiring to leadership positions. Some face challenges simply to teach well and do not have the capacity or desire to want to go beyond teaching. Some of these commitments (either voluntary or otherwise) have a higher priority for some participants, than their career aspirations, resulting in teachers remaining as teachers, whether they are happy or not.

#### **6.1.1.3 Not sure what they want beyond teaching**

In the early years, the participants generally know what teaching entails. They acquired such knowledge from significant others. In particular, K1 (whose mother and aunts were teachers), K5 (whose sisters are teachers) and V5 (many in her extended family are teachers) fully understand and look forward to teaching. Other than V3 (whose father was a principal), none of the others had significant others who understood what leadership appointments in school entail. Many of the participants had uneducated parents who nonetheless highly regarded teaching as a career for their children. Consequently, most of the participants were only guided and encouraged to be teachers, not KPs. At the early stage of their careers, the participants were not sure what is beyond teaching or whether they wanted that. T4 had this query: "What are the leadership roles available?" T5 has a limited understanding of what leadership entails:

*I think they have more responsibilities, they make more decisions, and they can affect things more. So if you want to achieve something or really make a difference in something, I think the leadership track can make a lot of impact compared to the teaching track.*

Later, when participants were more settled as teachers, some continued to only teach as they were not offered any leadership opportunities. As T2 sighed; “when I joined this school, such posts were already filled. My training subject and my HOD’s training subject are the same so there is nothing I can do. I am stuck”.

Others continue to teach initially but later became unsure if that was the best decision to take. As T6 shared:

*My principal asked me this question last year. I told him I don’t know; I am still enjoying my job. But now I start thinking, you know why? While I was telling him I enjoy my job, my peers who have joined 8 years ago, seem to have moved upwards. So it is time I started thinking.*

For some, like T1 and K2, they are ambivalent about moving to KPship. T1 replied when asked whether he was scheduled for a promotion interview: “I don’t know, not fixed yet. Maybe at the end of this year. If my principal thinks I am suitable, he will send me. Otherwise I am happy being a teacher.”

Even K5 was only appointed after 15 years as a teacher. Also, K1 was happy as a teacher for 13 years before considering a leadership position. It appears that years of service is not a determining issue with regards to leadership aspiration as an older teacher could have acquired leadership experiences during schooling days or in their first career but yet still happily remain a teacher and not want to aspire to official leadership positions.

Many researchers believe it is “painful and tedious” for teachers to only learn about leadership through experience (Handy, 1993). Consequently, there should also be formal leadership development (Bush, 2004) besides the informal development. This is particularly pertinent when teachers are less than keen to be leaders. Singapore teachers are offered competing career tracks (MOE, 2006b) and this further diverts their attention from leadership positions. The availability of viable career opportunities for teachers outside the MOE (Lim, 2004) exacerbates the shortage of teachers aspiring to leadership positions. To alleviate the situation, a succession plan at the organisational level would be necessary and Lacey (2003b) thought that such could include strategies to recruit, develop, and retain teachers at different levels of leadership.

Some participants do not know enough about leadership or they are simply unsure of what they want to do, even when they are more settled and experienced as teachers. Consequently, the safe way is to remain as teachers. This is compounded for some participants who also do not know if they have what it takes to be a leader. Yet there are some who may be interested in official leadership positions, but do not know, or are not guided, how to get there. This results in fewer teachers aspiring to leadership positions than would have been the case if there was greater clarity on what leadership entails.

#### **6.1.1.4 Risk averse; concern over failure; no career planning; at mercy of school leaders’ grooming; rather let others decide about their leadership potential**

Some of the participants are conservative, even modest, and prefer to wait for their supervisors to recommend them for higher appointments (the MOE career tracks and system of career advancement are explained in section 1.1.6) than volunteer for them. As K2 shared, “I did not deliberately aim for KPship because I just thought of teaching, but eventually there was an opening.” According to V2 “there are some areas we cannot see about ourselves; it would be good if the top management would chart our careers”.

Some participants are risk averse and do not wish to venture forward if they are unsure of the outcome. When asked why she was reluctant to be a KP, V4 confided:

*The principal talked to me; but I said, "No, I don't think I can do it well". And the fact that I might not do a good enough job, tells me I should not even try it. There is no such thing as trying, for me it must be good enough...at the bottom of that, I didn't think I had the confidence.*

This is supported by Schmidt (2000) who found that department heads exhaust themselves trying to achieve quality and experience anxiety when they are not achieving their goals (p.833).

From the evidence, it seems teachers prefer to know they can handle the KP's role before they seek after it. This knowledge can come from within (perhaps based on pre-service leadership experience), in that they know they can manage the KPship and hence work towards it (e.g. T1, P1), or it can come from supervisors in the form of career affirmation and encouragement to work towards the KP interview (e.g. K3, V4). Teachers with latent ability may not fall into either group and hence, may not get the chance to try out leadership tasks just to see if they have the ability or to use it to develop the skills needed for KPship. This is unfortunate; P1 recognised that as "you get into the work, in a way you are also learning to exercise leadership. As you go along, you find you can take on the role". This is perhaps unavoidable as school leaders would prefer to give important tasks to teachers who have either a proven track-record or who have given them evidence of their ability. Also, there are often limited leadership opportunities, which are fewer than available teachers.

Some supervisors do not discuss their intentions when they task their teachers to do extra non-teaching work. The teacher involved may think it is just additional

work and may not conscientiously link this to their suitability or training for leadership tasks. As K1 revealed:

*I do not know whether I was being groomed or not. If my boss never told me and just gave me work, I would just take it that I am just doing work for him. He should tell me when I am given work. He should say "I am giving you this work because I feel you can do it...because I think you have the ability." Then there is an extra motivation involved.*

Such disconnect has resulted in several KP-level participants (K1, K5 and K6) having to remain as teachers for more than 13 years before they were noticed and offered the chance to lead in an official capacity. In all three cases, it was a new school leader who offered them a chance at official leadership positions. In fairness, this is not always the case as some of the participants were noticed and offered leadership opportunities only after a few years in service (K3, K4, V4 and P2).

The importance of the school leader in identifying and grooming suitable teachers is critical. If a teacher is keen to be a leader but does not have the support of the supervisor and school leader, that teacher can still apply to another school as a KP. If however the teacher is ambivalent, or is not noticed/groomed, then that teacher remains a teacher. Byham, Smith, and Paese (2002) believe that "the selection process must accurately pinpoint individuals who have the right combination of skills, ability, and motivation" (p.4). This is supported by Grant et al's (2000) study on gifted females: "career guidance may have facilitated the career decision-making efforts of these gifted females, and deficits in career development may be a major barrier to career attainment for gifted females" (p.259). As Herr and Cramer (1996) advocated, educators need to embrace the idea that effective career decision-making can be fostered intentionally through career development interventions. Agreeing, Lacey (2003b) felt that selection processes need to be structured so that they

encourage and support the organisation in its attempt to locate and appoint highly qualified and appropriate applicants to leadership positions.

There is also another aspect of the school leaders' ability to "recognising unique strengths and matching them to needed functions" (York-Barr, 2004, p.290). If a teacher's strengths are inaccurately assessed, it means that the teachers will not be groomed in the areas most likely to further their interest and aspirations towards leadership positions. Barker (1997) agreed and emphasized the importance of coaching, mentoring and talent-spotting, within the framework of a more systematic approach to succession planning.

Many participants felt they are being 'Asian' in not asking for higher/leadership appointments. They believe that if they are ready and deserve the promotion, their supervisors and school leaders would have noticed them and appointed them. It does not matter whether this philosophy towards leadership progression is because the participants are risk averse or are simply being careful, or that there is no proper career management in that school, the end results are similar – fewer teachers are offered the chance to try out leadership tasks and fewer teachers are officially appointed as KPs.

#### **6.1.1.5 Greater Accountability; and Poor work-life balance**

Some participants only want to teach because they do not like what leadership entails in terms of poor work-life balance. A clear example is T3. Hers is a new school, only 5 years old. It does not have a full enrolment of students and thus does not have the full staffing of 60-plus teachers typical of secondary schools. With the need to still offer a minimum number of co-curricular activities for the students, and still offer the same number of subjects for external examinations, the teachers have to wear multiple hats. T3 did not relish that sort of life-style, which has poor work-life balance. She lamented:

*I am almost working 24/7. I find it very hard to have work-life balance when there is so much marking to be done, and never-ending work. Actually I am still young and I feel I can maintain this sort of lifestyle but it is not healthy in the long run. It is just that I feel I need my own life.*

T6 is unhappy with the perceived system of automatic progression for MOE scholars (sponsored for their undergraduate studies and looked after career-wise by the MOE subsequently). He strongly believed in meritocratic progression of teachers and harbours some resentment over the scholar system. He has doubts over the quality of leaders as some of them have arrived through this 'non-meritocratic' route. However, he noticed that his peers have moved ahead in appointment and thought that he should also consider KPship. Coupled with his lack of clarity over the KP's job, as he "doesn't have a good idea what a HOD or SH is", it resulted in him being unsure whether he wanted to aspire to leadership positions.

Some did not aspire to leadership appointments because of the more onerous job-scope. None of the teacher-participants admitted that the greater accountability required of a leader was a stumbling block, but that greater accountability required a heavier commitment, which was the stumbling block. P2 aptly pointed out: "Ask yourself, based on the extra responsibility you have to take on [as a leader], is it worth getting the extra \$500-\$1000?" He continued with this emphatic response:

*Not worth it! So to the teachers, if the main consideration is pay, even if the consideration is not pay, they will ask, "why do I want to suffer and pick up more of the burden? I have enough of it as a teacher". I see the strain. I know it is going to get worse as I move up.*

Researchers are generally agreed that leadership positions in schools are increasingly more complex, changing, challenging and accountable. Hage &

Powers (1992) opined that 21<sup>st</sup> century work emphasizes complexity rather than routinisation. Agreeing, Crow (2001) acknowledged that “the changing demographics of schools, the explosion of technology, and the rapid growth and change in knowledge require individuals who can live with ambiguity, work flexibly, encourage creativity, and handle complexity” (p.2). Consequently, it is necessary but not sufficient for teachers with just teacher competencies to want to be leaders. This is supported by Fuchs (1992) who concluded that “being a good teacher does not mean having the right skills for becoming a good principal” (p.11).

Lacey’s (2003a) research in several Australian schools found that principals were highly dissatisfied with the “effect of job on personal life” (p.4). This was corroborated by D’Arbon’s (2001) study which identified that the highest-ranking disincentive to applying for promotion was the impact that the job would have on the person's family and personal life. Furthermore, McNamara (2009) found that of negative factors the most frequently cited was “workload/work-life balance” (p.46). Agreeing, McNamara (2009) found that perhaps unsurprisingly, a common factor for all teachers, workload was seen to provide the greatest barrier to leadership aspirations overall (p.52).

In their study on 26 New South Wales HODs on why they aspired to that position and what they liked least about the role (amongst others), Collier et al (2002) found that 14 of them cited ‘lack of time’ and 9 felt that ‘constant workload and pressure’ were the two worst aspects of the HOD’s role.

The wide job scope of the middle-level leaders was well documented by Busher and Harris (1999) and comprises of translating and implementing senior management policies, development of department culture and group identity, improving staff and student performance [subject leadership], and liaising with extra-department entities (p.307-308). These four dimensions create both

complementary and potentially competing demands (p.308). Such are significantly more difficult than teacher's primary role of teaching.

Even if their family commitment is manageable, for some participants, greater accountability and poor work-life balance do not sit well with them. Rather, such people want to continue with teaching which they enjoy rather than aspire to leadership, which they may not enjoy. The consequence of such attitudes among teachers means that fewer of them want to aspire to be leaders.

## **6.1.2 Influences that encourage teachers to aspire to leadership positions**

### **6.1.2.1 Prior leadership experience**

Initially some participants may not be keen on leadership, as pointed out above. Others however (who have experienced leadership positions prior to joining MOE) are more open to taking on leadership roles. Participants who had held leadership positions in their co-curricular activities typically had less concern about their ability to hold leadership appointments. For instance, T1 was the band leader in both his secondary school and junior college and was very comfortable leading his peers. V5, V6 and P1 were prefects in school and this contributed to their willingness to lead their peers. K2 served as a cadet lieutenant in the National Cadet Corps during his secondary school days extending even to his Junior College days. He enjoyed the leadership opportunities. Some like T1, V2 and P1 were officers during their conscript service in the armed forces and were also comfortable leading others. Similarly, both T6 and K2 served as instructors during their conscript days.

On the other hand, T4 who was a prefect in her primary school days did not enjoy the experience and shied away from leadership in secondary school and junior college. She simply "did not feel comfortable leading a team" and this feeling remained with her as a teacher.

There are some who had held no prior leadership position, such as T5, who admitted: “As a student, I was in the school Red Cross committee, so that is about all the leadership experience I’ve had, like in charge of the room, the sick bay or something. Other than that, not much leadership experience”.

Researchers generally concur that prior leadership experience is important. Even if people have leadership proclivity, they need to be groomed to be able to do well in leadership appointments. McNamara’s (2009) study of black and minority ethnic teachers’ career trajectories, identified that the two overriding enablers were qualifications and experience, and self-confidence (p.54). Recognising this, Bush and Glover (2004) advocated that “formal leadership learning should be augmented by informal development [so that] all staff have the opportunity to develop leadership skills and behaviours” (p.20).

The participants are aware that some competencies required of leaders are not what teachers usually have or practice in the course of teaching. Those with prior leadership experience, whether during schooling days, or in the armed forces (as conscripts) or in the first career before becoming a teacher, are more comfortable about leadership tasks and more confident that they have the skills to lead their peers and also other people. As a consequence, such teachers are more likely to aspire to leadership positions.

#### **6.1.2.2 Importance of affirmation**

Younger teachers typically need affirmation to know that they are doing the right things and also doing things the right way. Such work affirmation could be given during the regular work review sessions conducted by their reporting officers. Without such affirmation, they would likely just continue teaching thinking that they need to work harder at being good teachers or that they have not done well enough to warrant consideration for higher appointments. As T5 confided,

“When my performance review is not up to mark, it stresses me. Actually the performance review will stress me more than anything! Like when people say I am not good, it stresses me.” However, having received affirmation does not mean that the teacher would always aspire towards leadership, as in the case of T3. She was sent on several leadership courses, given opportunity such as leading the school’s student council and yet she is not keen to be a leader.

With affirmation, some teachers thrive and in turn become more interested in leadership roles. K1 was a teacher for many years when the new principal noticed that he was able to manage his sports CCA very well and winning many awards for the school. K1 was encouraged and later rewarded with leadership training and ultimately the appointment as KP.

The need for affirmation is not restricted to the younger teachers. The more experienced teachers (i.e. KPs and VPs) also thrive on affirmation. They know they are doing well (after all, they have been promoted to KP or VP positions) yet they need affirmation to reassure themselves that others also think/know they are still performing well. When such affirmation is not forthcoming, they may feel disconcerted. V1 rationalised:

*I thrive in affirmation. So when bosses say “Good job” that is when we thrive. So for my HOD years...it really helped that my principal was appreciate and encouraging. Somehow these days I don’t find as much affirmation. When I do something quite well, my principal or the superintendent does not say anything. Maybe at this level you are not expected to have that kind of affirmation anymore.*

V1 recognised he needed affirmation although this need had diminished over the years. This affirmation can be just a pat on the back when things go well.

Brock and Grady (1998) recognised that affirmation was important to beginning teachers who sought it from their principals so that they could know that they were doing things well. They also noticed the opposite was true - that it is when the principal's support and affirmation are absent that beginners feel abandoned. According to Fenwick (2001), teacher professional growth plans in New Brunswick (Canada) also foster affirmation which is necessary to accommodate diverse teachers and contexts. Fenwick (2001) also noted that "a major source of affirmation for many was the written evidence of accomplishment".

Most participants need affirmation to know they are doing well, or are on the right track. Others need affirmation to sustain their motivation. Consequently, all the participants need affirmation as positive feedback of how well they have done. Whatever the extent of affirmation needed by the participants, any that are forthcoming from the supervisors serve to encourage them to achieve a higher level of work, to work harder, and for some, to even aspire to leadership positions.

### **6.1.2.3 Bored or dissatisfied with remaining a teacher; desire to go beyond teaching; desire to do things differently; competition; finding meaning in KPship; KPship offers challenges**

While some teachers are happy just teaching, others need affirmation to apply for leader positions. Others, like K1, find that teaching may not sustain their interest till retirement. He said:

*I am 40, I will be a teacher for another 20 years. It is starting to become a chore, to go into the classroom everyday. But I find that I have half a career left, and if I am going to do the same thing over and over again, there we have the problem that...in 10 years' time, I am going to be such a jaded teacher, that I will not be of service to the Service.*

This may be because as teachers mature, and become more adept at teaching, they have the time and capacity to consider the possibilities beyond teaching. Such teachers may want to go beyond the teacher's daily routines. K1 said:

*As I look at my job, my career, it is time to move and find new challenges. Either within the job or outside. Fortunately for me, I am finding new challenges within this job because of the leadership opportunities that have opened up. At some point, I imagine I am a teacher and find that there are no more challenges for me, it would be such a sad day. It would be better that I find another career. But I think this leadership track has opened up new challenges and quite substantial ones as well.*

Such teachers are game to experience new roles, undertake unfamiliar and challenging tasks, and even enjoy competition. They are prepared to consider KPship as they still have the opportunity for classroom teaching, which is what they joined teaching for. Some of them recognise that KPship offers them the opportunity to influence the school and the students in a much larger way than what a teacher can achieve. This appeals to teachers such as K3 who said "I like doing a bit of administration so that you can impact on the school, like planning the timetable, drafting invigilation timetable and examination."

Of significant importance to some participants in deciding to aspire to a leadership position, is that they need to find meaning in the higher job. A higher salary is enticing, but insufficient to win teachers over to want to lead. As K5 confided, "I feel I can do a lot more as a leader." Also, T6 noted that, "I do see that KPs make a key impact on a lot of things". Teachers typically join teaching to make a difference. Hence they need to find meaning in KPship if they are to aspire to it. McNamara's (2009) study on black and minority ethnic (BME) teachers showed that of the 6 positive factors in their decision to apply for headship (which do not appear to be BME-specific), the most common positive factor mentioned by respondents was the *ability to make a difference* (p.45).

McNamara (2009) also discovered several challenges teachers faced: *professional ambition* (42 per cent); *seeking a fresh challenge* (41 per cent); and *leadership ambition* (31 per cent) (p.40).

Finding meaning also involves having alignment between the school/principal's vision and the KP's own vision. Otherwise it becomes untenable for the HOD (Schmidt, 2000, p.832). The above evidence (McNamara, 2009) also supported the influences identified from this research that some teachers may be dissatisfied with just teaching and want to go beyond that. Lacey's study (2003a) found evidence that:

*Seeking a job that provided personal challenge was a motivating factor for some people, [although this may have] resulted in high levels of stress. There was also evidence to suggest that some individuals may not wish to remain in this sort of challenging role for lengthy periods of time. Younger teachers also indicated that although motivated by challenge, they were eager for this challenge to be provided early in their careers.*

This study's data are supported by Collier et al's (2002) study on 26 NSW HODs, which surfaced many similar reasons why they wanted to be HODs, namely; a natural career progression (10 respondents), wanting to make a difference (8 respondents), attracted by the challenge of the role (8 respondents).

The participants accept that leadership tasks and positions are more challenging compared to teaching. Those that have taught well, or have taught for some time, may, after a while, want to do things beyond just teaching. The participants appreciate that leadership positions allow them more leeway to do things differently, compared with being a teacher. Furthermore, they feel they can contribute more to the school as KPs rather than just teachers. These characteristics distinguish KPship from teaching.

#### 6.1.2.4 Needs change with age

Initially when joining the teaching profession, all participants felt that they joined to teach, not to lead. Consequently when they were young teachers, they preferred to focus on shoring up their content knowledge and pedagogy. K6 aptly summarised this: "I always believe if the time is not right, don't force it. Because when I am ready, I am ready, and when I am not ready, I am not ready". However, for some, after the passage of time, idealism gave way to realism. T6 reconsidered his earlier disinterest to be a KP. He shared:

*My principal asked me this question last year. I told him I don't know, I am still enjoying my job. But now I start thinking, you know why? While I was telling him I enjoy my job, my peers who have joined 8 years ago, seem to have moved upwards. So it is time I started thinking.*

For some teachers, as they gain more experience they reach the stage where they are ready for more challenges. K5 confessed:

*In retrospect, I think I made a mistake by saying 'no' then. But at that time, I was thinking that there is so much work a KP has to do and I just want to be a teacher. I didn't want to be a KP. I was thinking about the KP's workload. That deterred me. Maybe I wasn't ready then.*

This study noted that teachers who have settled down into teaching roles may later find they want to look beyond teaching towards leadership. However, Lacey (2003a) noted that in the Australian schools that she researched, 50% of younger teachers who had aspired to the principal position at the beginning of their careers no longer did so (p.4). This seems to imply that Singaporean teachers started as teachers not wanting to be leaders, but many Australian teachers started as teachers keen on leadership, but later lost that interest.

The participants acknowledged that although they may have wanted to concentrate on just teaching earlier on in their career, when they are older, their needs may change, such as looking for a greater challenge. Having gained greater teacher competency, the participants often welcomed different challenges. For some, a leadership appointment gave the participants a greater sense of achievement and satisfaction through having a greater impact on the school. More mature/established teachers might be prepared to reconsider leadership opportunities/positions they could have eschewed earlier on.

## **6.2 How socialisation influences impact teachers' decision-making processes and career aspirations**

### **6.2.1 Influences that encourage teachers to remain as teachers**

#### **6.2.1.1 Contented older teachers - leadership interest may decline with age**

Unlike the influence above (in 6.1.2.4) where some participants decided to aspire to leadership later on in their careers, some teachers settle down so comfortably that they do not want to aspire to leadership positions. T4 noted that:

*The older ones, once they hit a certain age, they are contented to just remain as teachers...about 40 [years old]. After that if they are still teachers, from what I see, they would be happy being what and who they are, and what they are doing.*

Also supporting this view is V6 who felt that “if there is too long a wait, the potential leaders will look elsewhere or are distracted with other things like starting a family”.

Researchers also concur with this view; Barth (2001) reasoned that some teachers may not want promotion to leadership positions because this would

mean them leaving their circle of colleagues/friends and they prefer not to do that. Therefore the longer they have to wait for leadership positions, the closer their circle of colleagues/friends becomes and the weaker their aspiration towards those leadership positions. Such sentiments are the result of what Brott and Kajs (2001) identified as one's professional identity which strengthens over time. The pursuit and enactment of [professional] self-identity by people is a central aspect of their development of agency (Giddens, 1991). Supporting this concept of professional identity, Dimmock (2006) argued that:

*People learn to adopt expected roles through their socialisation experiences at work and elsewhere; their perceptions of how they perform these roles allow them to form a sense of professional identity ... in terms of the positions and roles to which they aspire or otherwise, and whether or not they stay in or leave the profession; and if they stay, whether or not they seek promotion. (p.5)*

Research in Australian schools has also yielded similar findings. Lacey (2003a) found that:

*The length of teaching experience appeared to affect career aspirations, as teachers with less than 5 years experience were more likely to aspire to the principal class, while those with more than 10 years experience more likely to aspire to remain in the classroom. (p.2)*

Similarly, other younger teachers also indicated that although motivated by challenge, they were eager for this challenge to be provided early in their careers (Lacey, 2003b).

K5, however, thought older teachers were not always content to remain as teachers but were simply not given the opportunity. She offered an alternative perspective:

*I get this impression that opportunities are given to younger teachers. So older teachers are in the way; they may not be directly told that, [but] school leaders always pick the younger teachers to be KPs, and in some situations and some schools, older teachers are asked to step down, from being HODs to become senior teachers, to give way to the younger teachers to be KPs...definitely when you are an older teacher, when you see that, then your aspiration to be a leader will be curtailed. We know MOE wants the younger teachers to hold the appointments. Once you are older, after a certain expiry date, not much you can do.*

This influence may seem at odds with the earlier influence (needs change with age), but actually does not. The participants felt that while more experienced/established teachers may be ready to consider leadership, those who have not been offered promotion within a certain age range, may not want to aspire to be a leader. Often, it is because they are very comfortable as teachers, have many good friends at that level and hence do not wish to move up to leadership positions.

#### **6.2.1.2 Need to manage, confront, discipline and supervise ex-peers; reluctant to have less student contact**

Busher (2005) noted “negotiating and interacting with colleagues lay at the core of middle leaders’ work with staff” (p.144). Most of the participants are comfortable with having to manage, supervise and especially lead their ex-peers who would be their subordinates if/when they become KPs. However, a few, like T4, would prefer not to. She explained it is because it entails:

*Having to manage my team members should there be conflicts, probably because I’m not firm enough to handle them. Some are not as motivated as you want them to be, and I find it very challenging to find ways to motivate them and to get the job done.*

This is supported by Lacey (2003a) who noted that one of the four strongest sources of dissatisfaction for principals was “supervision of work” (p,4). She opined that the interpersonal relations, particularly with teachers and parents, provide enormous challenges and frustrations (Lacey, 2003b). Schmidt’s (2000) study discovered that “department heads were also troubled when they were expected to face their old associates in unaccustomed roles which would result in feelings of stress, anxiety and discomfort” (p.838).

Having to manage ex-peers is further complicated by the “complex switching of roles and lines of accountability between different aspects of their work” (Busher and Harris, 1999, p.307). For instance, a KP can head his subject area but be answerable to another KP – Singapore teachers are trained and required to teach two subjects.

Also, the respondents realized that KPship does require them to have less student contact. Some, like T3, felt that they would not want to have less direct links with students. When it was suggested to her that KPship allows her to still interact with students but with some off-loading so that she can perform other administrative roles, she vehemently declared “I want my co-curricular activities!” Such sentiments are supported by Murdock and Schiller (2002) who quoted Lyall (1993) and McPake (1998) that many [appointed leaders] regret having to leave the classroom behind. This is indirectly in line with Lacey’s (2003b) observation:

*This research confirmed that incentives to promote tend to be factors related to the outcomes of the work, whereas the disincentives tend to be related to the nature of the work.*

In their earlier days many participants did not have the occasion to manage their fellow-teachers and this proved to be a stumbling block for some regarding their aspiration to leadership positions. They see their supervisors having to discipline

their peers and some do not cherish the thought of having to do the same as KPs. In addition, some participants were not prepared to have less student contact, which they enjoy tremendously. That KPship still permits significant student contact as there is 1/3 off-loading still does not satisfy all the participants and is a further reason for some to eschew KPship.

## **6.2.2 Influences that encourage teachers to aspire to leadership positions**

### **6.2.2.1 Peer collaboration, competition and influence**

The importance of peer pressure and influence cannot be over-estimated. Colleagues/peers who work together to undertake innovative projects challenge each other to be able to go beyond what teachers typically do. As a teacher, P1 was able to work with his peers to organize a large scale teachers' conference. However, colleagues can also spread negative energy if they create a suspicious relationship among the teaching staff. This may occur if they consider one another as competitors rather than collaborators. K1 advised:

*People are not stupid. They can sense competition. I think the school is one of the places you cannot allow this thing to happen. I think if you look at the heads, I don't think I have competitors, I think I have friends who are pulling together for the benefit of the school, who by and large see the same vision of the school, sing the same tune, following the strategic thrusts. Everybody helps everybody. If you can't, this can be a miserable place.*

Peer collaboration, if present, serves to encourage teachers to want to do more. D'Arbon et al's (2001) study found that the second-highest ranked concern was an unsupportive external environment. They contend that the job of being a principal [or by extension a leader] in today's society has grown beyond what one person can do. Therefore, greater emphasis is put on the need for collaboration

among peers and the presence of healthy competition where teachers challenge each other to excel.

The presence of like-minded peers can challenge each other to do well as teachers and also to want to do more than teaching. Not all participants enjoyed such friendly competition but for those who did, it served to bring out their latent leadership abilities resulting in those participants wanting to be leaders.

#### **6.2.2.2 Open door policy of reporting officer: mentoring; teachers need good leaders in order to grow – impact of good, nurturing and understanding supervisors**

As teachers, the participants felt it would have eased their professional growth if they had seniors to guide them. These people could either be their supervisors, or be someone else, such as mentors. In any case, both should be approachable and adopt an open door policy. Such mentors could provide guidance, point out potential problems ahead of time, help teachers prioritise, and provide encouragement. The existence of such a mentor (either appointed or self-appointed) matters greatly. K1 offered a balanced view:

*You need a mentor, somebody who can share his experiences, who can take you to the next level. But the funny thing is that the mentor-mentee process is a double-edged sword. If you have somebody that you like as a mentor, then it is great. If the mentor is just given to you and you can't click with that person, then it doesn't help in any way.*

The importance of mentoring was noted by Osler (1997) who opined that whether formal or informal, mentoring was felt to be desirable. Schmidt's (2000) study included teachers who attributed their gaining department headship to the mentoring provided by their principals (p.836).

The process of mentoring begins early, even from the early stage of identifying potential leaders. Normore (2004) advocated that principals need to regularly identify potential leadership among their staff and to work with them in their development plans. He added:

*In order to attract potential administrators, there needs to be a process in place for identifying future leaders. Principals and superintendents need to recognize leadership qualities among their teachers and to encourage them to pursue and prepare for administrative roles. This can be done by engaging in discussions about career goals with potential leaders and recognizing potential leadership skills (i.e., school growth teams, action teams, other committees such as discipline, finance, professional development, and curriculum). (p.13)*

Besides mentoring, being a good role model to the teachers is helpful. A leader's accessibility (Sebring, 2000), ability to engender trust (Hopkins, 2001); and setting an example (Andrews, 1991) would help create a positive impression on teachers regarding leadership. This is also because as according to Bolam and van Wieringen (1999) "heads of department learned their knowledge and skills from earlier role models and their own experience rather than from management training" (p.8). Collier et al's (2002) study on NSW HODs found that 9 of the 26 respondents felt that mentors provided the necessary modeling and influenced them to seek HODship. Ten respondents attributed their principal or senior school staff in encouraging them to aspire to KPship. Such silent witness by leaders serves as a form of role-modeling and encourages teachers to aspire to leadership positions. Otherwise, if teachers see their leaders not able to cope, or worse, not enjoying leadership, it is less likely teachers would want to move to or along the leadership track.

A supervisor who practices an open-door policy creates a more conducive, open and trusting working relationship with the teachers. This also enables the

teachers to have ready access to good career advice and guidance. However, not all participants were fortunate to have a mentor or a supervisor who practised an open-door policy. With proper career guidance, the chances are the participants have a better appreciation of what leadership entails and this helps the participants decide whether they want to be leaders.

## **6.3 How environmental influences impact teachers' decision-making processes and career aspirations**

### **6.3.1 Influences that encourage teachers to remain as teachers**

#### **6.3.1.1 Highly dependent on reporting officer's spotting; declining may not lead to a second chance; few opportunities**

In Singapore schools, the principal is the key decision-maker, including matters of deciding who to nominate for higher appointments, and who to try out in leadership tasks/roles. Teachers who are not noticed or who are not groomed would likely remain as teachers. Teachers in a typical school form more than three quarters of its staff and there are insufficient leadership opportunities for all of them. T6 rues that:

*You know last time...you deliver and your boss says ok, this guy is ok, he goes up. Now the situation is everybody is showing the boss. After a while the one on top would say, who? So many to pick from. So naturally the one who keeps quiet won't be noticed at all.*

It also means that those who are offered leadership opportunities and decline may not be offered a second time. This unfortunately reduces the chances for late bloomers or those who for whatever reason did not accept the first offer. K5 was fortunate to be noticed a second time, albeit at a different school. But she

was only offered a chance when she had spent 7 years at that second school. She said:

*Actually, Mrs B encouraged me and talked with me about it. But then there were no openings. It was a situation where my HOD is a Social Studies and History person and I am a History person. So there were no openings and that's when SCM discussed and finally made me a Subject Head for History.*

In response to this school situation, Lacey (2003a) advocated that:

*Development opportunities need to be provided to allow potential leaders to develop their leadership capabilities and for current leaders to enhance their skills and knowledge. Young teachers need to be provided with early leadership experiences and opportunities should be expanded for staff at all levels to act in leadership roles (p.4).*

Recognising also the unduly high dependence on the reporting officer's spotting and grooming, and to alleviate the situation of there being insufficient teachers aspiring towards Australian school leadership positions, Lacey (2003a) advised that selection processes need to be structured to encourage and support both the application and selection of highly qualified applicants. She felt that:

*Career development of current and potential leaders is an essential element of succession planning. From the organisation's perspective, career development ensures a match between the career plans, interests and capabilities of individual employees and specific organisational needs (p.4).*

The participants' leadership interest and ability were necessary but not sufficient in their aspiration to leadership positions. Their supervisors' spotting and

grooming were equally necessary before they were offered leadership opportunities. It also meant that the lack of such grooming would result in many unfulfilled aspirations. The perceived paucity of leadership positions meant that not all teachers were given the opportunity and those who had rejected an offer once, were not often offered a second chance. It is recognised that an element of luck is involved – the teacher’s career progression unavoidably depends on their school leaders. Even if a teacher is good, there is no guarantee that the teacher would be recognised in a timely manner. Some may never be endorsed for higher appointment.

### **6.3.1.2 Need for independent thinking and initiative; higher expectations of KPs; lots of administrative work**

According to Begley (2000), the key dimensions of a principal are as manager, program leader and learning facilitator, school-community facilitator, visionary, and problem-solver. Consequently, senior leadership positions also have much more administrative work than teachers and these tasks have to be shared/distributed with the middle-level leaders.

Hallinger and Heck (1996) highlighted that school leadership is more than the “what” of leadership (structures, functions, routines and roles) – it also includes the “how” – the daily performance of leadership routines, functions and structures. According to Spillane (2005) school leadership is not the effort of the superhuman leader but involves “multiple leaders, some with and some without formal leadership positions” (p.145). Such people work in a coordinated manner at times and in parallel at other times (Heller, 1995). The participants recognised that leadership requires much more from them than teaching. They have to think independently and exercise initiative. Such may prove a stumbling block to teachers’ aspiration to KPship. Some of the respondents are uncomfortable with this. As T4 confessed “I just don’t like making major decisions that have serious consequences if they do not work out”. She further added:

*For a teacher, I think being competent in teaching is critical. On the other hand, apart from subject mastery, a leader must have foresight and have the ability to envision for the team which I am not very confident of. That is not my strength and if I push myself to be a leader, then my teammates would also suffer as I cannot lead the department well.*

However, those who have gone through KPship, such as P2, felt that the perceived higher expectations was perhaps not as severe as thought. He said:

*Less so with KPs. Definitely so with the VP and P. Because the KPs can always defer, as the main decision makers are the P and VP. They determine the direction of the school, not the heads. The heads are managers.*

Researchers agree that the school leadership positions are very challenging. Normore (2004) acknowledged that “the complexities, changing demands and expectations within administrative roles have caused a shortage in applicant pools” (p.1).

KPs in Singapore schools are expected to undertake significant aspects of school leadership, including administrative work, and these add to their curriculum workload. They also need to think more independently, like the principal. Teachers are typically not aware that the KPship requires such high level of leadership competency and those who are aware actually do not aspire to leadership because they feel they are not up to the mark. Some others do not aspire because they overestimate leadership’s competency requirements. This has inevitably resulted in fewer teachers aspiring to leadership positions.

## 6.3.2 Influences that encourage teachers to aspire to leadership positions

### 6.3.2.1 Safe and forgiving school culture; Presence of friends and colleagues

Some participants believe that as they mature, they increase their capacity to do even more. P2 said that: “You get into the work, in a way you are also learning to exercise leadership. And as you go along, you find that you can take on other roles”. However there is a difference between being able to and willing to do this. The presence of friends challenged some of the participants to excel and subsequently become willing to take on leadership roles. As P1 reminisced:

*We found that we naturally have the leadership in us. Because we always seem to think we can do things better. We can improve. If you ask me, I think it is good to have these types of colleagues around you, because it spurs you to do things better, to do more things, to do things differently, but yet you get all these people who are there, who are like-minded.*

P2 defined friends as follows:

*Friendship is based more on people of the same level, because they joined teaching at the same time. They have the same needs initially, or same concerns when they come to the school. It is more work-driven rather than interest-driven. The social circle tends to be batches by batches.*

Since friends as defined can have common goals, if they can work together, they can spur each other on.

Complementing the presence of friends, is the importance of a forgiving school culture which encourages teachers to try new and harder tasks. As K5 explained “school is a relatively sheltered place. Out there is not so sheltered. So while

the pay may be better outside, you get other problems as well". Such senior management support was thought vital to ensure that professional learning experiences within school were present (Osler, 1997). Agreeing, D'Arbon et al (2001) found that the second-highest ranked factor causing teachers not to aspire to leadership positions was an unsupportive external environment.

A supportive environment could include a safe-to-fail environment. As Sullivan (2007) noted "overachievers love taking risks and often reach for unrealistic goals...they hate to fail. Any setback can make them feel inferior" (p.5). She proposed helping employees accept failure, not punish people for it. Teachers who see this forgiving culture in the school would be more willing to take the risk of aspiring towards leadership positions. Such school culture could also be the presence of like-minded friends/colleagues who serve to encourage each other to excel. Sullivan (2007) also proposed "pairing coworkers who complement each other" (p.6).

Further support came from Ziegler (2010) who said "it takes time to get good at something. Innovation requires a long-term perspective and involves experimentation, failure, and time" (p.19). He also held that "safety is a basic human need and people with a sense of security and belonging are stabilised for learning, creating, innovating" (p.19).

A forgiving school culture is largely dependent on the principal who sets the school tone. A school tone which allows teachers to take risks, try new initiatives and graciously accepts that not all ventures no matter how well-intentioned will succeed, gives teachers (especially those who are risk averse) confidence that they would not be penalized if things do not succeed well. The presence of like-minded friends/colleagues would embolden teachers to even be prepared to take on leadership tasks, which could lead to them aspiring for leadership positions.

### 6.3.2.2 KPship interviews/appointments at Cluster level

KPship interviews are conducted at Cluster level (the Cluster system having been explained in section 3.5.2) and the interview panel comprises of the cluster superintendent and two other principals from within that cluster. The interviewees are often known to the panel and are strongly recommended by their respective principals, who also sit in at the interview, as resource persons. Also, the Cluster superintendent visits each of the schools' annual ranking deliberations and hence is aware of the more promising teachers. This level of awareness and at times even familiarity makes the cluster interview panel less threatening than a panel which does not know the interviewees. The familiarity and also the less threatening mood at the cluster KP interview often allow the teachers to be able to perform well and pass the KP interview. Another advantage is that the candidate's name can be resubmitted by the sponsoring principal. With the interview process more forgiving, this perceived lower level of difficulty can serve to encourage the applicants. As V1 neatly summarized:

*For the KPs' interview, it is different. The interviews are done at cluster level, the principals would be interviewers, and you can get a second go at it. Another chance and that kind of thing. So it is more controlled, more predictable.*

Such KP interviews in Singapore are often different from that conducted overseas. D'Arbon et al's (2001) study revealed that the selection process is perceived to be too complex and intrusive. This is also supported by Lacey (2003b) who found that teachers of both genders describe the selection process as difficult, time consuming, demanding and traumatic.

It is a good thing that KPship interviews are conducted at Cluster level, especially by a panel chaired by the Cluster's superintendent. It could have been readily conducted by the superintendent of an adjacent cluster and the panel members

would likely have been less familiar, and the mood less forgiving. Consequently, this works to the advantage of the teachers going for the KPship interview and knowledge of this process would help allay the concern of teachers regarding the difficulty of the interview and could encourage them to aspire to leadership positions.

### **6.3.2.3 KPship offers good mix of management and teaching; KP still has domain ownership; Off-loading**

The participants joined MOE to teach, and at the earlier part of their career, did not want to take on any appointment that deprives them of student contact. They derive much pleasure from interacting with their students and would not want to give that up. Many participants recognised that KPship offers a nice combination, allowing them to do something different, such as planning, leading the team and yet have a 2/3 load of classroom teaching. As K3 explained:

*I don't mind middle management roles...because I like doing a bit of admin which you can use to impact on the school, like planning the timetable, drafting invigilation timetable and exam. At the same time, I would like to impact on students in the classroom. I feel satisfaction is greater when you have direct contact with the students.*

This dual role is not always embraced by teachers. Siskin (1995) noticed that these two roles “underlie many of the difficulties in understanding and practicing the hermaphroditic role of the [department head] (p.5). However, Murdock and Schiller (2002) also recognised the tension of the dual role arose from the conflicting demands on time. Schmidt (2000) noted that “department heads seemed to prefer their teaching role while subsuming leadership duties within that role” (p,834).

Many teachers want to be recognised for their subject expertise. Agreeing, Collier et al (2002) noted that 7 of the 26 NSW respondents cited the desire to be a leader in the subject area, as one of the reasons why they wanted to be HODs.

KPs have 1/3 class off-loading so that they have time to take on the additional workload – this is a significant point in favour of KPship. Teachers who generally do not wish to give up student contact will be more willing to take up KPship because of this aspect of the job. But there would also be some teachers who recognise the tension faced by KPs resulting from the conflicting roles and this may deter some teachers from aspiring to KPship.

## **6.4 Summary**

In summary, Lacey (2003b) thought that to create a climate that encourages leadership aspirations and increases actual application rates, it is important that both incentives and disincentives are addressed. Consequently, Singapore schools and the MOE need to ensure that they implement strategies to both develop and support leadership aspirants and also implement strategies to alleviate the influence of factors that discourage leadership aspirations.

Based on the data and analysis, the conclusions, the proposed Model of Selective Appeal, implications and recommendations of this research's findings will be discussed in chapter 7.

## **Chapter 7**

# **THE MODEL OF SELECTIVE APPEAL, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **7.1 Overview of the Model of Selective Appeal**

From pre-teachers to teachers (the first transition), teachers typically join the MOE to teach, not to lead. In the early years of teaching, many teachers do not know what KPs do. For those who do, some consider the possibility of becoming KPs (second transition). None however looked beyond KPship towards the VPship or principalship; if they aspire to leadership positions, they do so one rung at a time.

In the early career stages (first 3 years of service), beginning teachers (like T3 and T5) tend to be affected by personal influences (often innate) which encourage them to remain teachers or discourage them from becoming KPs. Such teachers are typically inward-looking and just want to shore up their teaching competency. The influences are shown in the pink Box 1, Table 7.1 (details in Table 4.5).

Categories	Time of onset	Categories			
		Teaching influences	Leadership influences	Teaching influences	Leadership influences
		Sub-categories			
		Enticing to remain as a teacher	Eschewing to move over to KP	Enticing to move on to KP	Enticing to move over to KP
		Column A	Column B	Column C	Column D
Personal influences	Innate	<u>Box 1.</u> Influences impacting teachers early in their career (first 3 years of service).		<u>Box 2.</u> Influences impacting teachers when they are more mature (3-5 years in service).	
Socialisation influences	Pre and in-service	<u>Box 3.</u> Influences impacting teachers when they are more mature (3-5 years in service).		<u>Box 4.</u> Influences impacting teachers when they are quite senior (beyond 5 years in service).	
Environmental influences	In-service	<u>Box 5.</u> Influences impacting teachers when they are quite senior (beyond 5 years in service).		<u>Box 6.</u> Influences impacting teachers when they are quite senior (beyond 5 years in service).	

**Table 7.1: Influences on Teachers' Leadership Aspirations (to KP) impact at different stages of their careers**

With more experience (3-5 years of service), teachers begin to be aware of the enticement of the personal influences which encourage them to be KPs (yellow Box 2), and also the socialisation influences (some are pre-service, while others are in-service) which encourage them to remain as teachers or discourage them from being KPs (yellow Box 3). The occasional few may be attracted to KPship and given some leadership opportunities. However, they would be too junior to be given serious consideration for official leadership positions unless they are mid-careerists (like K2), or if the school has difficulty filling up critical appointments.

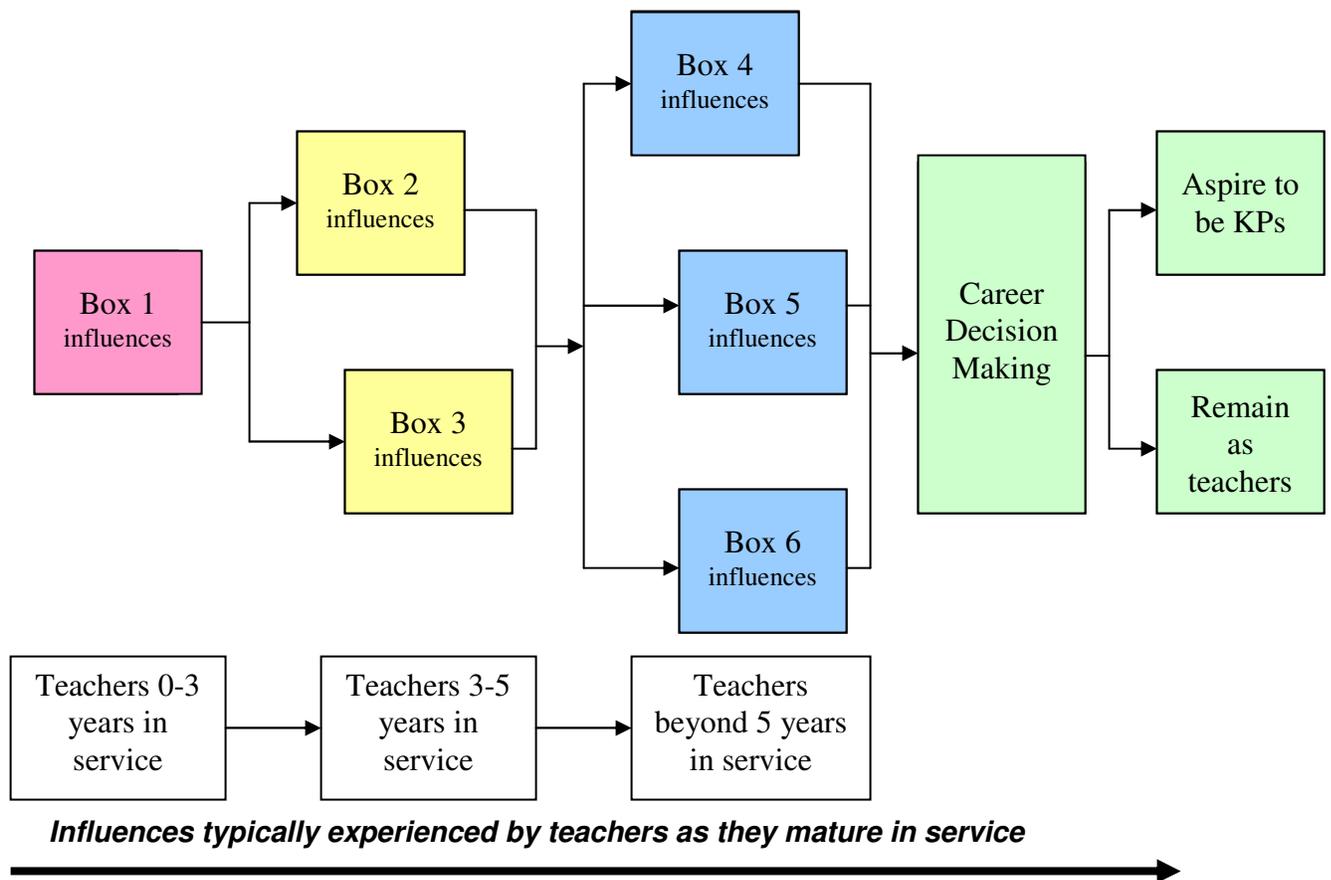
When teachers are settled down (beyond 5 years in service), they are open to the socialisation influences that encourage them to be KPs (blue Box 4) and the environmental influences in blue Boxes 5 and 6. The influences that matter in these 3 main categories (personal, socialisation, and environmental categories) *interact, and their combined effects* cause teachers to aspire (or not aspire) to leadership positions in the school.

Depending on their personal attributes, teachers are affected by personal influences, resulting from the innate characteristics of the teachers (for example, leadership dispositions) and pre-service experiences (such as leadership experiences in co-curricular activities). Socialisation interactions and experiences with friends, family and significant others give rise to socialisation influences (for example, if there is a family member holding school leadership position). The nature of the home and school environments (environmental influences) also matter (for example, having peers who are like-minded in wanting to go beyond teaching).

In addition to, and within each of the 3 categories, there are two further but qualitatively different categories of - teaching influences (teaching characteristics) and leadership influences (characteristics of leadership positions). Some teaching influences generally encourage teachers to remain as teachers (for example, teachers' social identity), or encourage them to aspire to KPship (for example, bored with remaining a teacher). There are also some leadership influences that generally discourage teachers from aspiring to KPship (for instance, the need to manage/discipline ex-peers), while others encourage them to do so (for instance, finding meaning in KPship).

Table 7.1 suggests that teachers at different stages of their career are more susceptible or open to the different types of influences, as included in the 6 boxes (in Table 4.5). However, teachers actually progress through these stages, implying that they actually encounter all the influences described. As the

teachers experience the different influences, they realize that these influences affect them differently (for instance, to some teachers having less student contact is unacceptable, while others are ambivalent about that), and even to different extents for the same teacher at different stages of their career (for example, higher remuneration has a different attraction for different teachers). The decision-making process that research question 2 focuses on can be depicted in Figure 7.1.



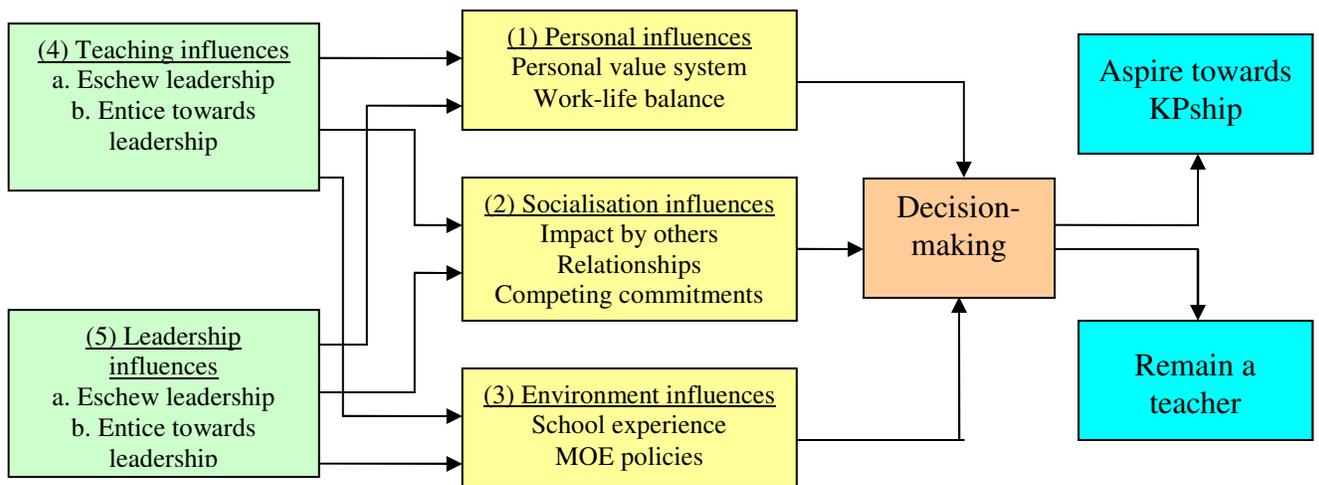
**Figure 7.1: The Decision-Making Process for Leadership Aspiration**

In accordance with Blumer's (1969) perspective of symbolic interactionism, and its claim that people make sense of their experiences through interaction with others - the teachers tend to make sense of the full range of professional experiences and conditions and to balance those against other responsibilities in their lives. They form perceptions of the merits/demerits of the influences with regards to their own career trajectory, and in particular, their leadership

aspirations. This decision-making with regards to their leadership aspirations lies at the heart of the Model of Selective Appeal.

There is no single influence that tilts the balance regarding a teacher’s decision-making on whether to aspire or not aspire to leadership positions, but rather the cumulative effects of all relevant influences matter. For instance, while teachers may welcome the higher remuneration, they may be more concerned about having work-life balance and spending sufficient time with their families. Sometimes, finding meaning in KPship may be critical to the decision to be a KP. This also depends on the level of experience of the teachers, or the stage of their teaching careers. For example, beginning teachers are more concerned with the ability to cope with the current appointment and have no capacity to manage the additional tasks of the KP. Within each stage, some influences matter more than others. For instance, younger teachers may view an increase in remuneration as a strong motivation, while older ones with more savings may not be as readily enticed. Agreeing, Draper and McMichael (1998) found that the decision to apply for leadership positions was the “result of reflection...on the balance of lifestyle, personal qualities and professional aspiration, as well as the job itself” (p.35).

All the above can be summarized in the Model of Selective Appeal, Figure 7.2.



**Figure 7.2: The Model of Selective Appeal**

## **7.2 Implications of the findings for teachers, school leaders, and MOE**

The implications, derived from findings that answer the two research questions as well as the Model of Selective Appeal, focus on addressing the aim of the study and research problem namely, that in Singapore (as elsewhere) there are insufficient teachers aspiring towards middle-level leadership (KPship). The influences identified and their combined impact on leadership aspiration are derived from 20 participants and may or may not be transferable to other teachers in Singapore, or teachers elsewhere. The suggested implications consider what teachers, KP/VP/P and the MOE can do to ease the shortfall of teachers aspiring towards KPship. The implications are elaborated upon, after the matrix in Table 7.2.

IMPLICATION	ACTIONS REQUIRED OF:		
	Teachers	KP/VP/P	MOE
Focus on teacher level to increase flow into leadership pipeline		Yes	Yes
Focus on teachers while they are young, before they are set in their ways		Yes	Yes
Focus on mentoring and career planning		Yes	Yes
Focus on both strategies of identifying potential leaders		Yes	Yes
Focus on the individual teacher		Yes	
Focus on teachers when they are ready		Yes	
Teachers' needs change with age		Yes	
Teachers with significant family commitments		Yes	
Focus on stage-appropriate influences	Yes	Yes	
Facilitate teachers' understanding of enticing/eschewing influences	Yes	Yes	
It gets 'easier' beyond KPship	Yes	Yes	

**Table 7.2: Matrix of Implications and Action Agencies**

After data coding on influences at all three transitions (teacher to KP, KP to VP and VP to P) it was clear to the present researcher that the highest number of eschewing leadership influences occurred at the teacher to KPship transition. An explanation could be that fewer participants had transitioned from KPship to VPship and even fewer from VPship to principalship. In addition, the later transitions may have fewer eschewing influences because KPs and VPs have already experienced leadership (they fear it less, and know they can cope) and many of the influences that stunt teachers' aspirations no longer affect them. At

least in this study, it seems that teachers face more eschewing influences regarding leadership aspirations for the middle-level rung, compared to KPs and VPs for more senior roles. It also means that if principals/MOE wish to increase the pipeline of teachers prepared to consider leadership, they should at least initially focus at the teacher level, which is also the focus of this study.

From the small sample of data collected in this study, younger teachers appear more receptive to influences. Once they have taught for many years, they are often contented with their lot, or less enthusiastic about moving from their comfort zone as teachers. And the longer time goes by without nomination for promotion by their seniors, the more likely it is that their ambitions are tempered by 'realism'. Teachers may likely not want to consider KPship when they are too comfortable in their teaching role, having made good friends among colleagues in school (social identity), and feeling respected as teachers. Especially in Singapore, where they have good teaching resources, they are able to juggle their teaching and extra-curricular work, and may have established a routine that they may be unwilling to change. Consequently, if this potential pool of leaders is to be tapped, then MOE should plan to entice them regarding leadership roles, while they are not yet set in their ways. Data suggests that once teachers reach about 40 years old, they tend to prefer remaining as teachers as their leadership interest may have waned.

Without good mentoring, career planning or exposure to leadership opportunities, teachers may remain uninformed about leadership and unaware of their potential leadership talent. Mentoring is important as some teachers (especially in hierarchical Singapore schools) may prefer to let their KPs/VPs/Ps decide about their leadership potential rather than push themselves forward. They would rather not ask for leadership roles without affirmation (and not take risk on a role they may not have aptitude for). Reporting officers (the teachers' immediate superiors) need to be trained in mentoring and also recognize that in such cases, they need to take the initiative to develop their teachers' leadership ability and

aspirations. MOE could consider establishing a systematic mentoring programme, and not only for the MOE scholars.

Reporting officers who mentor can help teachers shorten their learning curve, guide their professional growth, and motivate them to go beyond teaching. If reporting officers are not conscientious, they risk not spotting the latent leadership potential of their teachers thus reducing the chances of the teachers considering KPship. Recognising this, teachers could also actively ask for (either formal or informal) mentors.

The study discovered two strategies for teachers to earn the chance to be appointed to leadership appointments. The first is to work hard and hope that their performance is noticed by their school leaders and thereby rewarded with opportunities to gain leadership experience. The other is to volunteer for leadership roles and prove their leadership ability. Depending on their leadership grooming philosophy, some school leaders prefer one strategy over the other. Some adopt both strategies. Teachers in a school need to know which strategy their school leader prefers. It would be better if school leaders can adopt both strategies as this lessens the chance of potential leaders being missed.

Reporting officers need to understand what motivates each teacher. Those who need or thrive on work affirmation need more effort to mentor them to a higher level of contribution. If left alone, such teachers may not be able to rise beyond teaching. Some teachers need help to find their own meaning in KPship. Capable teachers may want to stretch their ability and reporting officers can provide some leadership opportunities and entice them with more challenging work. For teachers who cannot do without pupil contact, reporting officers can demonstrate that KPship offers a good mix of management and teaching which still allows the KP domain ownership.

The data shows that younger teachers (trying to strengthen their teaching competency) tend to focus more on the eschewing influences than the enticing influences, of leadership. They (e.g. T3 and T5) tend to focus on personal influences that enticed them to remain as teachers and personal influences that discouraged them from moving over to KPship. They clearly remembered why they joined MOE – to teach and not to lead. In the early part of their teaching careers, such teachers may not know what they want beyond teaching. It is best to leave such teachers to focus on being good teachers and not confuse them with leadership tasks and roles.

To younger teachers, the lure of KPship could be the higher remuneration. More senior teachers who are financially secure may better appreciate the opportunity to have greater impact on the school and the pupils. Reporting officers who understand their teachers' needs would be able to maximize the latter's leadership potential and interest. Recognising this, teachers may heighten their awareness of their career needs and aspirations.

Teachers, especially female teachers, may face family challenges that put any leadership aspirations on hold. Such challenges might include ill-health, injury or death in a family, or simply shifting of home, or a new marital status. This may require the teachers to re-prioritise their existing work and home focus. Such challenges could be temporary and a refusal to take up a leadership appointment may not remain a “no” in future. Consequently, reporting officers should maintain a watching brief and offer leadership opportunities when teachers are ready.

Prioritised focus could be on influences that matter more to teachers (aspiring towards KPship) at different career stages. Younger teachers struggling to enhance teaching competency may not have the spare capacity to take on leadership tasks. Teachers recognise the KP's greater accountability - an overworked/overloaded KP who does not have work-life balance may put teachers off any leadership aspirations. Loading could be gradual, unique to

teacher, ability and interest, and mutually agreed upon. Recognising that the effects of different influences on them may change over time, teachers may realise that what appears as significant obstacles may be alleviated over time.

Some teachers may become bored with teaching, or be dissatisfied with remaining a teacher. Their reporting officers could help make teachers more aware of what leadership positions entail. Sometimes it is not that the school/MOE's policies/processes are not good; it could be that teachers are unaware of the details. For instance, the fact that KPship offers a good mix of management and teaching could be better highlighted to teachers rather than left to them to figure out for themselves. That KPship interviews are not as fearful as teachers imagine, could be a reassuring influence. The familiarity of the chairman and members of the interview panel could make the experience an enjoyable, rather than traumatic one.

As teachers, none of the participants harboured any thoughts about appointments beyond KPship. Some of them knew what KPship entailed. Some of these aspired towards KPship while others were either neutral or preferred to remain teachers. They were unaware that VP/Principals generally have more resources and more freedom to set their own goals and objectives, and that in some ways, KPship may be the most challenging of all leadership positions. Some, like V1, let slip the relief he felt that he had completed the KPship tour of duty.

### **7.3 Limitations of the Study**

It is recognized that some principals may have appointed teachers to unofficially stand-in for the un-staffed KP positions in their schools. Such teachers, who function in an acting capacity, may or may not be preparing for actual leadership positions. Such data is internal to the 170-odd secondary schools in Singapore, and not easily available. There is of course no data on how well prepared these

teachers are as stand-ins, and also how keen they were in the first place to handle the additional tasks. There is also no data on whether putting them in an acting capacity entices them towards or puts them off leadership positions. Evidently some principals put teachers in an acting capacity but do not send them for interview for official appointment, thereby inadvertently reducing the number of people moving on to officially hold these appointments. This seems to be dependent on the philosophy of the principal. This study does not deliberately include or exclude such teachers, but where respondents are in an acting capacity, their sentiments would be specially noted.

The possible combinations of respondents comprise of **teachers**, **KP** and **VP**, who are **keen**, **not keen**, or **unsure** of wanting to progress to the next stage of leadership. Due to the time and manpower constraints of the EdD degree, only two teachers in each of the nine combinations together with two principals could be feasibly interviewed. Other than the six teachers, the other participants were asked to provide retrospective perspectives. The total number of interviewees was twenty, which is a manageable number for this doctoral degree. However, two respondents in each category are insufficient to allow sufficient data to generalise for that category. The data and model generated thus apply only to the participants of the study.

As this was not a Singapore government sponsored study, no access was granted by the MOE to classified policy documents. Fortunately, such classified policy documents and their rationale are not as critical to the research questions as teachers' perceptions of these policies and their impact.

This study's retrospective aspect saw incidences of selective recall of past events, especially as they relate to perceptions/feelings which may not have been recorded and are subject to the teachers/KPs/VPs/principals' memories. The tempered inputs are from people who 'have arrived' and who may provide

politically-correct answers. Consequently, the technique of triangulation is important to help overcome such threats to confirmability.

Sometimes the school environment strongly influences the teachers' further leadership aspirations and it would be useful if any six respondents (comprising those who are keen, not keen or unsure) were to have come from the same school. This may then capture any school-specific influences. However, it was not possible to secure the assistance of six such people from the same school. Although the principals expressed support for this study, none of them were prepared to provide more than three teachers to be interviewed. Each school on average provided about two respondents and as such, the school-specific influences (if any) could not be isolated.

## **7.4 Recommendations**

### **7.4.1 Contribution to body of knowledge**

This study claims to contribute to the body of theory on teachers' career choice as it focuses on teachers' decision-making in regard to whether they stay as teachers or apply for leadership positions in the Singapore secondary school context. It throws light on the present shortage of teachers opting for leadership in Singapore schools.

This study also documents the influences that impact on Singapore secondary school teachers' leadership aspirations. In addition, it shows how the influences impact on teachers, and which categories of influences are more likely to impact on teachers at which part of their teaching career (captured in Table 7.1 and Figure 7.1). The data shows that different influences impact different teachers differently, or even the same teacher, at different times and to different extents. It shows that at certain stages of their careers, teachers may be more receptive to certain influences. More importantly, it shows that teachers' leadership

aspirations are not the result of a single influence but that of a myriad of influences. It is a balance between the pull and push factors of the current job as teacher and the potential future job as KP, and this is unique to the individual teacher.

#### **7.4.2 Future research**

This study is based on just 20 participants. Larger surveys to test the Model of Selective Appeal would be helpful. Future research could consider how the impact of gender on the influences which have been identified to have an impact on teachers' leadership aspiration. Likewise, it would be useful to know whether educational qualifications and which of their experiences relate to the key influences identified in this study. Furthermore, Singapore society and its workforce are multi-ethnic. It would be useful to know whether there are influences that affect some races or cultures more or less than others so that policies designed can be flexible to accommodate them. It would be useful to understand similar data from other Asian school systems. Lastly, in view of the fact that Singapore MOE will have more and more non-citizens among the teaching staff, further research could illumine the impact of having more KPs who are non-citizens.

In conclusion, this study has explicitly addressed the two research questions posed in chapter 1 and is able to identify the implications on teachers, school leaders and the MOE. The Model of Selective Appeal shows how the influences that affect teachers come together to affect teachers' decision-making on whether to aspire, or not aspire, to KPship.

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