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The Distribution of Leadership between Vice-principals and Principals in Singapore

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The Distribution of Leadership between Vice-principals and Principals in Singapore

Abstract

This article examines the distribution of leadership between vice-principals and principals in Singapore. Vice-principals are an important leadership source in schools because they contribute to various key functions in school, including staff development, student learning and management. This research is on vice-principals' contributions which are underrepresented in the literature. The study consisted of interviews of 28 vice-principals and 10 principals from 37 schools in Singapore. A mixed case-oriented and theme-oriented strategy was adopted, with member checking conducted through a case write up for each vice-principal. The findings illustrate how vice-principals worked with principals to co-set directions, motivate staff, lead instruction, and promote a desired culture. The study suggests the possibility of viewing the vice-principal and the principal as a leadership couple, with each performing complementary or overlapping practices, through a combination of collaborated and collective distribution. The study also illustrates vice-principals' leadership and agency vis-à-vis principals', which otherwise have been neglected.

Key words: distributed leadership, vice-principals, assistant principals, deputy principals, setting directions, motivating, leading instruction, culture building

Introduction

Effective leadership has long been established as a critical factor in the literature on school effectiveness and improvement (Al-Harathi & Al-Mahdy, 2017; Muijs & Harris, 2003). However, with widespread education reforms and increased accountability demands, it has become untenable for principals to lead schools on their own (T. Bush,

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3 2019; Modeste, Hornskov, Bjerg, & Kelley, 2020). Increasingly, there has been
4
5 advocacy to distribute leadership beyond the principal (Gumus, Bellibas, Esen, &
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7 Gumus, 2018).
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11 Our proposition is that besides the principal, the vice-principal is a potential
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13 leadership source. This is certainly the case in Singapore where in 2019, there were 324
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15 primary and secondary level (corresponding to grades 1-6 and grades 7-10) principals
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17 and 558 vice-principals (Ministry of Education, 2019), with about 90 schools having
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19 one vice-principal and the remainder having two to three vice-principals. Many
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21 education systems have similar positions, including the assistant principal in the United
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23 States, the deputy principal/head in Australia and England, and the vice-principal in
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25 Hong Kong and Canada. The term ‘vice-principal’ will be used henceforth to represent
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27 this position.
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33 In Singapore, both principals and vice-principals are rotated by the Ministry of
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35 Education (MOE) to different schools after a period, about five to seven years, though
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37 vice-principals tend to remain in the same school for a longer period than principals.
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39 The rotation of school leaders is perceived as an integral part of the leadership
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41 development process and to allow for renewal of ideas (J.-M. Ho & Koh, 2017).
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45 In Singapore, vice-principals are referred to by MOE and in official documents
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47 as ‘school leaders’, together with the principals (Jeanne Ho, Hairon, & Chua, 2019).
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49 Vice-principals are supposed to play an important role, and this is operationalized in
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51 vice-principals’ involvement in Director of School and Cluster board meetings, together
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53 with the principals. A biennial national school climate survey does not distinguish
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55 between the principal and vice-principal; they are referred to as school leaders, which
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57 means that teachers provide feedback on the joint leadership of the principal and vice-
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59 principal as a leadership couple (Gronn, 1999).
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3 Gronn (1999) observed that the leadership couple is a common but neglected
4 substitute for the solo leader. In Singapore, there was a similar gap in understanding
5 how the vice-principal's roles differed from the principal, and how vice-principals
6 contributed to this leadership partnership. Thus, our research questions were as follow:
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8 a) What leadership practice do our vice-principals enact? and
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10 b) How is leadership distributed between vice-principals and principals in Singapore
11 schools?
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19 Although the focus of our study is on vice-principals and their perspectives, the study
20 included the perspectives of principals who have worked with several vice-principals.
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25 Literature Review

26
27 This article adapts the definition of leadership by Pounder and colleagues (1995), with
28 leadership defined as deliberately exerting some form of influence on people in an
29 attempt to impact their beliefs, values, and actions, so as to achieve desired outcomes
30 (Pounder, Ogawa, & Adams, 1995). Spillane and Coldren (2015), who are proponents
31 of distributed leadership, similarly defined leadership as located in relationships of
32 social influence. We first review the literature on distributed leadership, which provides
33 the overarching theoretical lens for the study, followed by literature on the vice-
34 principal position. The latter provides some insights into leadership functions performed
35 by vice-principals, which informed our analysis of how leadership was distributed
36 between the vice-principals and principals.
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53 *Literature on Distributed Leadership*

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55 We view leadership as distributed in two senses, the leader-plus and the leadership
56 practice aspect (Spillane, 2006; Spillane, Camburn, & Pustejovsky, 2008). From the
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3 leader-plus perspective, which recognises that leading schools involve multiple
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5 individuals, we propose that the vice-principal is a key actor worth studying because of
6
7 their access to the principal, with the possibility of a close working relationship, akin to
8
9 that of a leadership couple (Gronn, 1999). Gronn and Hamilton (2004) suggested that
10
11 one key form of distributed leadership, or what they refer to as concertive action, is
12
13 manifested in leadership couples. Leadership practice foregrounds the practice of
14
15 leading and managing, which is perceived as generated from the interactions of leaders,
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17 followers and aspects of their situation, in which the situation, or context, is not just a
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19 backdrop for the leadership practice, it is a defining element of the leadership practice
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21 (Spillane, 2006).
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27 To understand leadership, we need to understand the practice of each actor who
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29 enacts leadership, but also to understand how leaders work together or separately to
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31 execute leadership functions (Spillane, Diamond, & Jita, 2003). This translates in our
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33 study into understanding the practice of vice-principals, and how the vice-principal's
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35 practice interrelates with the principal's practice. Three possible social arrangements for
36
37 leadership distribution were identified in Spillane, Camburn and Pareja (2007, p. 114):
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41 a) Collaborated distribution: leadership practice that is stretched over the work
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43 of leaders who work together in time and place to co-perform the same
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45 leadership routine
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48 b) Collective distribution: leadership practice stretched over the work of leaders
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50 who co-perform a leadership routine by working separately but
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52 interdependently, and
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55 c) Coordinated distribution: situations where a leadership routine is performed
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57 in a specific sequence.
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The bulk of the literature on distributed leadership examined the distribution of

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3 leadership between the principal and teacher leaders/teacher teams (Liljenberg, 2015;
4 Scribner & Bradley-Levine, 2010; Sentoènik & Rupar, 2009). There have been some
5 studies on the distribution of leadership in school leadership teams. A Slovenian study
6 on school leadership teams (Sentoènik & Rupar, 2009) did not include any vice-
7 principal, affirming that the situation in which leadership is enacted defines who the
8 leaders are and their leadership practice (Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2001).
9
10 Gronn's and Hamilton's study (2004) of a leadership couple as distributed leadership
11 practice involved co-principals, whose working relationship differs from that between a
12 principal and the vice-principal since the former couple possess equivalent power.
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25 Two UK-based studies (T. Bush & Glover, 2012; Wallace, 2002) of senior
26 management teams included vice-principals, but the focus was on how the team worked
27 with the principals. A Swedish study on distributing leadership mentioned the vice-
28 principal but there was no indication of his/her roles within the management team
29 (Liljenberg, 2015). Similarly, while Spillane, Diamond and Jita (2003) acknowledged
30 the leadership exercised by vice-principals in leading instruction, the focus of the study
31 was on the principal's and vice-principal's collective leading with teachers.
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41 How vice-principals' leadership practice interrelate with the practice of the
42 principal remains under-researched (Oleszewski, Shoho, & Barnett, 2012) as much of
43 the literature focused on the vice-principals as a standalone role (Barnett, Shoho, &
44 Oleszewski, 2012; Cranston, Tromans, & Reugebrink, 2004; Gaston, 2005). The
45 principal is mentioned mainly with respect to his/her role in delegating leadership (or
46 otherwise) to the vice-principals (Hernandez, Murakami, Mendez-Morse, Byrne-
47 Jiménez, & McPhetres, 2016; Militello, Fusaerlli, Mattingly, & Warren, 2015), with
48 few studies on the distribution of leadership between the two roles (Rutherford, 2003;
49 Wong, 2009).
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3 Wong (2009) provided a matrix to delineate possible working relationships
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5 between the principal and vice-principal, in which the vice-principal may be the
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7 principal's chief assistant, partner or mentee. However, the framework does not provide
8
9 details on the leadership practice enacted, though these are classified into technical,
10
11 structural, human, educational, political, and cultural aspects. Rutherford (2003)
12
13 provided insights on situational characteristics required for a successful relationship
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15 between the head and the vice-principal, including shared values and vision, close
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17 personal and professional relationships based on trust and respect, and clarity about
18
19 boundaries for the two roles. However, the focus of Rutherford's (2003) paper was on
20
21 these characteristics rather than on how leadership is shared between the principal and
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23 vice-principal. Similarly, Hughes (1999) focused on the influences on the configuration
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25 of the vice-principal's roles, rather than on the roles of the vice-principal in relation to
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27 the principal's roles.
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34 A few studies examined the distribution of leadership between the principal and
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36 vice-principal. One study conducted a survey in which school leaders in American
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38 elementary schools self-reported the priority and the amount of time they committed to
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40 specified leadership activities during a school year (Camburn, Rowan, & Taylor, 2003).
41
42 The survey found that vice-principals were involved in providing instructional
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44 leadership, defined as setting instructional goals, developing instructional capacity,
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46 coordinating curriculum, and monitoring improvement, although less so than their
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48 principals. However, at the other extreme, a paper based on two case studies in Mexico
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50 found that principals and vice-principals do not work together and they focus on
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52 different activities (Navarro-Corona & Slater, 2017). Spillane's and Camburn's study
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54 (2006) of how leadership was distributed in schools included the vice-principal as one
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56 stakeholder that the principal reported s/he co-performed leadership with. However, the
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3 classroom teacher was perceived by the principal to be more frequently involved in
4 leading curriculum and instruction (26.2% of the time) than the vice- principal (13.3%).
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8 There were three recent studies on the distribution of leadership in Singapore.
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10 One study examined three dimensions of distributed leadership in Singapore, including
11 empowerment, interaction for shared decision and development for leadership; it did not
12 discuss details of the distributed leadership practice (Hairon & Goh, 2015). Although
13 another study indicated that vice principals provided leadership for the integration of
14 ICT in Singapore schools, it did not differentiate between the vice-principal's role and
15 that of the principal's or how the two leadership roles interacted (Tan & Ong, 2011). In
16 their finding on the practice of distributed leadership in Singapore schools, Goh and
17 colleagues (2015) observed that teachers and key personnel had a threshold on how
18 much empowerment they wanted to be given, but were silent on the level of
19 empowerment that vice-principals would appreciate.
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35 ***Literature on Leadership by Vice-Principals***

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37 The limited literature on the vice-principal's leadership practice shows overlaps with
38 those performed by the principal - supervising and evaluating teachers, encouraging
39 innovation, providing instructional leadership, professional development, and visionary
40 leadership - suggesting that vice principals already share leadership with the principal,
41 although the literature does not indicate how the vice-principal's practice interacts with
42 the principal's (J. B. Bush, 1997; Frazier, 2002; Gaston, 2005; Hernandez et al., 2016;
43 LeMieux, 2000; Mercer, 2016).
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Vice-principals as Instructional Leaders.

In brief, there are two concepts of instructional leadership – one is narrow while the other is broad (Sheppard, 1996). The narrow concept defines instructional leadership as actions that are *directly* related to teaching and learning, such as conducting classroom observations and providing feedback (Hallinger, 2003). The broad view of instructional leadership includes all leadership activities that *indirectly* affect student learning, including school culture and timetabling procedures, by impacting the quality of curriculum and instruction (Southworth, 2002), generally referred to as leadership for learning (Hallinger, Gümüş, & Bellibaş, 2020).

The literature suggests there is a shift from the principal being the sole instructional leader to the vice principal being involved in this critical role, with vice principals themselves expressing a desire to engage more in instructional leadership practice (Arar, 2014; Militello et al., 2015; Muñoz & Barber, 2011; Oleszewski et al., 2012; Wang, Gurr, & Drysdale, 2016). While the vice-principal was mentioned in a Singapore study on instructional leadership, it was only to mention that s/he assisted the principal in providing instructional leadership, with no details of what this assistance looks like (Nguyen, Ng, & Yap, 2017). This lack of attention to the critical instructional leadership role of vice principals continued to be highlighted in 2016 (Searby, Browne-Ferrigno, & Chih-Hsuan, 2016).

Vice-principals as Transformational Leaders

With respect to transformational leadership, the other key leadership function performed by principals (Gumus et al., 2018), this leadership function is rarely explicitly referred to in the literature on vice-principals. However, it is mentioned that vice principals are involved in setting visions (Barnett et al., 2012; Cranston et al., 2004; Oleszewski et al.,

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3 2012), inspiring or motivating others (Calabrese, 1991; Cranston et al., 2004; Hughes,
4
5 1999), and providing intellectual stimulation (Militello et al., 2015), leadership tasks
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7 generally associated with transformational leadership, which involves setting direction,
8
9 developing people, providing individualized support, and re-designing the
10
11 organization's culture and structures (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006).
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14 In the Singapore context, in a dissertation on distributed leadership, the vice-principal
15
16 was found to have performed transformational leadership jointly with the principal
17
18 (Jeanne Ho, 2009). In this study, there was some element of reciprocal interdependency
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20 (Spillane, 2006), seen in how the vice-principal played the role of moving projects
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22 forward while the principal stepped in to smooth ruffled feathers when staff perceived
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24 the vice-principal as being too demanding, with both viewing this 'good guy' and 'bad
25
26 guy' pairing as an important component of their complementary leadership.
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30 31 32 **Methodology** 33

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35 This qualitative study involved interviews of 28 vice-principals and 10 principals in
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37 Singapore to understand the leadership practice enacted by vice-principals and how the
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39 vice-principal's practice interacts with the principal's leadership practice. A qualitative
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41 approach was selected mainly to represent the voices of vice-principals, who have
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43 largely been forgotten in the literature (Cranston et al., 2004; Rintoul & Kennelly,
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45 2014), and to uncover the contextual richness (Yin, 2015) in their experiences as vice-
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47 principals. As Creswell (2005) explained, a central perspective of the naturalistic
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49 inquiry approach is the importance of the participants' views, the influence of their
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51 setting and the meaning people hold of the issue being investigated. Thus, the study
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53 sought to hear the views of both vice-principals and principals, with varied years of
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55 experiences, from both primary and secondary school levels, and who had worked with
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57 various principals/vice-principals respectively, to understand participants' experiences
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of the distribution of leadership between vice-principals and principals.

Context of Study

In distributed leadership, the situation or context is fundamental in determining how leadership is distributed. In Singapore, rhetoric from the Ministry of Education (MOE) suggests that vice-principalship is an important position, with MOE conducting a rigorous process in selecting vice-principals. This includes reviews of performance over a period, input from cluster superintendents and principals, and interviews by senior MOE management.

Most of Singapore vice-principals were previously department heads or held leadership positions in MOE, which means that the transition to vice-principalship was not as huge as for vice-principals in situations where teachers were directly promoted to be vice-principals (Armstrong, 2012; Oleszewski et al., 2012). It also means that Singapore vice-principals had prior experience exercising leadership, particularly leadership for instruction.

Singapore vice-principals as a norm do not have teaching duties. This means that one main constraint of vice-principals having insufficient time to exercise leadership due to teaching duties (Leaf & Odhiambo, 2017; Rutherford, 2003) is removed. Additionally, Singapore schools are equipped with a large middle management layer, comprising on average 10-12 department heads. This includes Year Heads who oversee student welfare, including attendance, and often another head who oversees student discipline, again relieving our vice-principals of what are perceived as supervisory functions (Celikten, 2001; Hunt, 2011).

Furthermore, each school is equipped with an Operations Manager who assists with building supervision and student discipline, an Administrative Manager who oversees finance and human resource administration, and two to three support officers.

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3 These infrastructures are consistent with suggestions that one way to enable vice-
4 principals to provide instructional leadership is for them to share administrative duties
5 with other staff (Celikten, 2001; O'Connor, 2010).
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11 Given the context and the extensive administrative support that Singapore vice-
12 principals have access to, the expectation is that our vice-principals exercise leadership.
13 The question is what leadership actions our vice-principals enact and what the
14 distribution of leadership between the vice-principal and principal looks like when the
15 situation appears to support that distribution.
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23 ***Data Collection***

24 This study employed purposive sampling (Miles & Huberman, 1994). It consisted of
25 interviews of 28 vice-principals in Singapore, providing data triangulation across
26 multiple sources (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The 28 vice-principals provided an
27 “opportunity to learn” (Stake, 2003, p. 152) about leadership distribution between the
28 vice-principal and principal, with variations in age, school level, years of experience as
29 a vice-principal, number of schools and number of principals served (Table 1). On
30 average, each vice-principal worked with 3 principals and served in 2 schools, which
31 means that the vice-principal’s experiences were based on their working relationships
32 with different principals and school contexts.
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48 Insert Table 1

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51 Ten principals were interviewed to enable us to compare the vice-principals’
52 perspectives with the principals’ perspectives on the distribution of leadership (Table 2).
53 This comparison is important because Singapore principals are rotated to serve in
54 schools every 5-7 years (J.-M. Ho & Koh, 2017). This rotation can change the dynamics
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3 of their relationships with vice-principals. On average, we chose principals who had
4 served 3 years in schools and worked with 6 vice-principals. A deliberate decision was
5 made to avoid recruiting principals from the same current schools as the vice-principals,
6 so that the latter could speak openly about how they worked with their principals.
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8 There was one overlap because the principal joined the school after we had interviewed
9 the vice-principal.
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Insert Table 2

We employed semi-structured interviews to elicit information about leadership activities, interactions and dynamics of the relationship between vice-principals and principals. Sample questions included the following:

- (1) Please describe in detail one or two key leadership activities that you have undertaken as a vice-principal. How did you work with your principal to enact these activities?
- (2) What was your role in your vice-principal's performance of the leadership tasks?
(asked of the principal)

43 Each participant participated in a 1.5-hour interview. Coding of the transcripts using
44 Nvivo 12 software was done independently by two researchers, using a mix of codes
45 generated from the literature and directly from the interviews. Codes from the literature
46 were leadership actions from established constructs, such as inspiring staff to innovate,
47 role modeling, and developing staff. Examples of codes generated from the data
48 include co-setting directions and building relationships with staff.
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Data Analysis and Validation Process

To minimize the danger of analyzing the multiple interview cases at too high a level of inference, which may result in the loss of context specific details, Huberman and Miles (1994) suggested a mixed case and variable-oriented strategy. We adapted this as a mixed case and theme-oriented strategy, in which individual case narratives were written, followed by a cross-case narrative based on common themes, then reverting to the individual narratives to check how the common themes were exemplified in the individual cases. An individual case narrative was written for each vice-principal participant and sent for member checking (Carspecken, 1996). There were 18 responses, with 9 agreeing with the analysis and 9 suggesting minor changes. The findings from each narrative were summarized in separate cells in an excel spreadsheet, enabling comparison across the cases for confirming or disconfirming evidence (Creswell, 1998). Findings were discussed during monthly meetings, which involved two other researchers, supporting investigator triangulation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

After analyzing the first 20 vice-principals' interviews, preliminary findings were shared with the remaining 8 vice-principals, in addition to the set interview questions, to assess the transferability of these findings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). All eight agreed that the list of leadership actions generated was comprehensive and performed by them, though to varying degrees depending on their contexts.

Limitations

Although 28 vice-principal participants are a relatively large number for a qualitative study, this number represents less than one percent of the total number of vice-principals in Singapore. However, the profiles of the 28 vice-principals were varied, with 16 having served as a vice-principal in at least 2 schools. Of the remaining 12 vice-principals, 8 of them had worked with at least 2 principals. In addition, although

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3 there were variations in the leadership actions enacted and how the leadership was
4 distributed between the principal and vice-principal, the main leadership actions were
5 consistent across the vice-principals. Principal participants also generally affirmed how
6 vice-principals worked with their principals.
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13 **Findings**

14 Participants are represented as vice-principals (VP) and principals (P), with the last
15 letter, P or S, indicating primary or secondary school. For participants who are quoted
16 more extensively, fictitious names are used. The findings suggest that the vice-
17 principals and principals worked together to execute the following leadership actions,
18 with leadership ‘stretched over’ their practices (Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2004).
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- 26 (1) Co-setting school directions, motivating and working with staff to move in
27 the desired direction
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- 29 (2) Co-setting directions for teaching and learning and translating policies
30 related to instruction and student well-being; developing teachers
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- 32 (3) Promoting a desired culture
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41 ***(Co-) Setting Directions, Motivating and Working with Staff***

42 Vice-principals reported working with their principals to co-set the school’s direction
43 and develop strategic plans, with the principals leading the envisioning process and
44 providing the broad direction (VP02S, VP04S, VP09P, VP10S, VP15P, VP18S, VP25S,
45 VP27P). This leadership practice was most prominent when the situation required it,
46 such as when a new principal was posted by MOE to the school where the vice-
47 principal had been in position for some time, or when the school had just completed an
48 external validation.
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3 The role of the principal in providing the ‘broader direction’ (VP10S) was
4 accentuated when it was absent, with vice-principals sharing their difficulty in leading
5 when they could not ‘decipher’ (VP21P) or had to ‘figure out’ (VP28S) the principal’s
6 direction. In one context, the vice-principals were the ones who led the effort to craft
7 the schools’ vision, mission and values, in reverse of the more common situation of the
8 principal leading and the vice-principal following. The vice-principal, Tay Huat Chye
9 (VP06S), speculated this could be because it was a newly merged school (of two
10 existing schools) and the principal ‘wanted to be fair. He didn’t [want to] favor one
11 school or the other’. While Huat Chye tried to justify his principal’s action, or lack of it,
12 he observed that ‘ideally, staff would benefit if the principal shares more of his
13 thinking, by articulating, verbalizing and affirming the VMV [vision, mission and
14 values] journey in his own words’.

15
16 Although many vice-principals (VP01P, VP17P, VP24P, VP28S) agreed that
17 decision-making on direction and key strategies is a ‘negotiated process’ (VP23S),
18 which can involve the vice-principals voicing their disagreements with their principals
19 (VP01P, VP05S, VP08P, VP12S, VP17P, VP18S, VP24P), Singapore vice-principals
20 generally expected their principals to take the lead in setting direction at the school
21 level. Timothy Lee (VP05S) shared that he ‘personally still believe that the philosophy,
22 the vision, and everything comes from the principal’ while Lee Siew Lian (VP21P)
23 observed that she needed to know whether what she was pushing for ‘is also in the
24 direction of what the P wants’.

25
26 The principals interviewed agreed that principals have the responsibility to lead in
27 setting and communicating the direction of the school (P01P, P03S, P04S), although the
28 vice-principals should be involved in the ‘collective decision making’ (P02P). As
29 Monica Yeo, P08P, explained, her role as a principal is to
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5 give my key personnel, and therefore my teachers as well, all the big hangers to
6 work with. Yeah, in a way they are the strategic focuses. And I think that is the
7 important part that I play yeah, as a curriculum leader.
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14 However, since a school does not change its school vision or goals on a yearly basis, the
15 vice-principal's main role is to ensure alignment of programs to the school's existing
16 strategic direction (VP13S), or to do envisioning at a 'local' level for a specific area.
17 Nurashikin binte Munir, VP02S, shared that she 'can set the direction for ECG
18 [education and career guidance], for the areas under my care' but ultimately 'it's in
19 support of where the principal is taking the school'. Nurashikin compared the vice-
20 principal's 'charting the directions for the various units' with the principal's 'charting
21 the direction for the school'. Although Nurashikin viewed this 'local' visioning as
22 restricting her scope of leadership, other vice-principals shared enthusiastically their
23 driving of personal visions for their schools. For example, Jennifer Yeo, VP08P, leads
24 in her 'end dream' of opening classrooms, ensuring her principal endorses her vision
25 with the middle managers. Similarly, Ho Mui Cheng, VP20S, shared her personal effort
26 in using her 'own external resources and connections' to 'pilot a project that we target at
27 the "naughtiest kids in secondary 3" to help teachers see that there are possibilities...in
28 these kids'. Lim Seng Chee, VP12S, previously an English Head of Department,
29 convinced his principal and his English Head to implement a school-wide reading
30 programme and a debating society. While some vice-principals see 'local' visioning as
31 essentially a follower's role since this visioning needs to be aligned to the principal's
32 vision, other vice-principals view this as an opportunity for them to exert their
33 leadership, and even to co-opt the principal in a supporting role.
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3 Beyond co-setting the school's direction, vice-principals shared that they
4 supported their principals in translating the school's policies into actionable plans. They
5 were clear that the vice-principal is primarily responsible for overseeing the
6 operationalization of such plans (VP06S, VP09P, VP18S, VP23S, VP28S). The vice-
7 principals perceived their 'key job' (VP17P) is to help 'unpack' the school's/the
8 principal's vision and work with staff to 'make this vision into reality' (VP09P) through
9 'enactment' and 'monitoring' (VP18S, VP09P, P02P). Mark Ong (P05P) agreed that a
10 key role of the vice-principal is to 'operate from alignment to vision, mission, values
11 and broad directions' while Lim Li Mei (P01P) expected her vice-principals to 'look
12 into the strategic planning of the respective committees or departments, and on projects
13 that they are in charge of'.
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28 Translating and operationalizing school plans is seen as more than operational in
29 nature since it requires vice-principals to communicate and 'contextualize' (VP27P) the
30 school's direction to motivate staff to buy in and implement the desired changes. This
31 requires a process of engagement (P01P, P04S, VP01P, VP07S, VP19P, V22S, VP23S),
32 which includes building positive relationships and 'cheering staff on' (P04S). As
33 Nurashikin binte Sazali (VP19P) explained, the 'complexity' is that it is not simply
34 about implementing change; it involves knowing what to communicate, 'when's the
35 right time' to communicate, and how to work with various stakeholders to ensure
36 'fidelity of the implementation'.
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49 Vice-principals offer individualized support to their staff to build commitment, a
50 leadership function according to transformational leadership (Leithwood & Jantzi,
51 2006). Michelle Cheong (VP17P) explained the need to 'know every staff
52 personally...what they are interested in, what they are passionate in' so that she can 'tap
53 on those things positively...[and] bring the whole school forward'. Since vice-principals
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3 hold themselves responsible for overseeing the operationalization of school plans, they
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5 also perform the managerial role of monitoring ‘the implementation of the plan’
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7 (VP06S), based on their perception that the principals ‘don’t have much time to really
8
9 [dwell] into monitoring, really checking on the ground’ (VP09P).

12 The principals agreed that vice-principals are important as an ‘intermediate role’
13
14 (P02P) between them and the staff, to ‘hear the ground’, be the principal’s
15
16 ‘spokesperson’ and ‘help me to monitor and oversee certain departments’ (P10S), since
17
18 the vice-principals are ‘in touch with the people very much, more than I’ (P09P). The
19
20 vice-principal is mainly in the ‘front line’, working very closely with the middle
21
22 managers and teachers, with the principal coming in ‘at appropriate times’ to ‘share
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24 perspective and ...to set the context’ (VP23S) or when communication to staff requires
25
26 the ‘weight’ that is provided when the principal fronts the communication because ‘it is
27
28 not that much of a weight if it comes from the vice-principal’ (VP07S). The situation
29
30 appears to determine whether the principal or the vice-principal takes a leading role in
31
32 the front line, or a supporting role.

39 ***Leading Instruction***

41 Both principals and vice-principals perceived leading instruction to be their ‘core
42
43 business’ (P04S), their ‘bread and butter’ (VP17P). Vice-principals perceived
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45 themselves leading instruction in the following ways: 1) translating and operationalizing
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47 policies and guidelines related to teaching, learning and assessment, 2) guiding teachers
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49 and heads of department, and 3) promoting the holistic development of students. Vice-
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51 principals appeared to perform both the narrower definition of instructional leadership
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53 in performing actions directly related to teaching and learning and the broader definition
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55 which includes all leadership activities that indirectly affect student learning (Sheppard,
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57 1996).
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3 At the school level, Singapore vice-principals are assigned by the Education
4 Ministry to oversee the student development team, by crafting the roles of the team
5 members, and designing processes and structures for student referral and support. Vice-
6 principals view their role in leading this team as important in promoting the holistic
7 development of their students (VP13S). Even though this includes vice-principals
8 having oversight of student discipline and attendance, Singapore vice-principals
9 consider this as more than just a supervisory role. They view monitoring student
10 discipline and attendance as contributing to the students' holistic development and well-
11 being (VP09P, VP11P, VP16P, VP17P).
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24 Leaving the heads to run the subject departments, vice-principals assisted in
25 developing school-level visions, frameworks or policies to guide teaching, learning or
26 assessment (VP02S, VP16P, VP18S, VP23S, VP28S). For example, VP17P led in re-
27 designing the frequency and the nature of assessment across subjects and grade levels,
28 while VP23S led the subject departments to 'unpack' how to use formative assessment
29 to achieve the school's strategic vision of students as critical and independent learners.
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38 At the department level, viewing their department heads as important
39 'multipliers' (VP04S), through which vice-principals can impact teaching and learning,
40 vice-principals guide their department heads to review major instructional programs
41 (VP07S, VP19P) or assessment processes (VP08P, VP24P), and to deploy teachers
42 strategically (VP12S, VP18S). William Chan, VP28S, 'leads and facilitates' a
43 professional learning team for his department heads, facilitating their 'understanding of
44 ...why we need to explore certain pedagogies', using the team as 'my platform to
45 influence instruction'.
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56 Finally, at the teacher level, understanding that the ability of a school to realize
57 its vision and strategic goals depends on the capacity of its teachers, vice-principals
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3 guided teachers in instructional matters. Key practices included articulating
4 expectations of teachers (VP05S), observing lessons (VP02S, VP03P, VP05S, VP12S),
5 giving feedback on lessons or teachers' performance (VP01P, VP05S, VP14P, VP22S),
6 checking students' files (VP07S, VP12S, VP23S), and monitoring students' learning
7 progress (P04S, VP02S, VP04S, VP10S, VP14P, VP18S). Other practices included
8 working with teachers to integrate specific pedagogies at the whole school level
9 (VP08P, VP17P, VP21P), such as Harvard University's Making Thinking Visible.

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20 Although some principals were more actively involved in providing instructional
21 leadership in the narrower sense, this was usually in situations where there was only one
22 vice-principal and the principal supported by overseeing subjects that s/he had expertise
23 in (VP04S, P01P), or where the vice-principal was previously a department head in a
24 secondary school and was posted to be a vice-principal in a primary school, thus
25 requiring more handholding (VP01P). These examples illustrate how the distribution of
26 leadership between the principal and the vice-principal was shaped by the specific
27 situation that the two found themselves in, and their different expertise. Generally,
28 vice-principals are assigned by principals to oversee specific subject departments, and
29 thus they are more directly involved in leading instruction.
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45 ***Promoting the Desired Culture***

46 Culture building is required as a transformational leader in redesigning the organization
47 (Leithwood, Jantzi, & Steinbach, 2000) and as an instructional leader in building a
48 school culture which supports student learning (Sheppard, 1996). Vice-principals
49 observed that it is important to promote a culture that supports their school's vision,
50 mission, and values (VP05S, VP12S, VP22S, VP23S, VP24P, VP25S, VP26P).
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3 Vice-principals contribute to culture building by communicating or role-
4 modeling expectations and key messages, through their interactions with colleagues.
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6 They shared two distinct drivers: 1) desired organizational culture/values, and 2)
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8 personal values and/or beliefs.
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12 For Johannis bin Idris, VP09P, he appreciated that new ideas necessitated
13 change and that change needed time, so culture building was a personal endeavor for
14 him. He described being deliberately 'patient' if his heads 'are not meeting certain
15 standards', understanding that his perception of 'standards' may 'not be in sync' with
16 the heads' understanding. Johannis explained:
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24 I believe I am role modeling to my KPs [key personnel] how my KPs should
25 work with the teachers...we must create this atmosphere whereby it's a very
26 open kind of communication
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33 Johannis' example of culture building is driven by his personal values and within his
34 direct sphere of influence in his work with the middle managers. For Jennifer Yeo,
35 VP08P, she reported her school having a culture of care that she was careful to maintain
36 by not being 'top down' and listening to feedback from her teachers. For Michelle
37 Owens, VP17P, her school has a history of valuing and promoting inclusivity, and thus
38 this was a culture she strove to continue. These are examples of culture building driven
39 by organizational needs, with the desired culture usually set by the principal (P02P,
40 P09P). Lim Seng Chee, VP12S, observed the importance of the principal and vice-
41 principal working 'hand in hand' to 'build a culture...towards enhancing the school
42 tone' by communicating their common expectation for students to be 'more on task with
43 their learning'.
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Although vice-principals contribute to building the school's culture, this

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3 leadership practice is constrained when the culture and values which the vice-principal
4 desires to promote is different from the culture and values desired by the principal.
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7 Chua Pau Yi, VP15P, shared an analogy in which the ‘whole school is very cold’ and
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10 ‘in a cold weather, you must act in a very cold way – you can’t act as if you are so
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12 happy – you have to align with the tone in the school’. In addition, the extent to which
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14 a vice-principal can contribute to culture building depends on whether the principal is
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16 comfortable to allow the vice-principal to lead and ‘influence the kind of conversations’
17
18 that take place amongst the staff (VP26P). The culture set by the principal is
19
20 furthermore key in determining whether the vice-principal and the staff ‘dare to take
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22 risks’ (VP14P) and make their own decisions (VP24P), conditions which support the
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24 vice-principal’s exercise of leadership.
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30 **Discussion**

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32 With respect to the findings on leadership practices by vice-principals, the literature
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34 supports some of the leadership practices highlighted in the study, such as vice-
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36 principals (co)-developing the school’s vision, strategic direction and strategic plans
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38 (Kwan & Walker, 2008; LeMieux, 2000). In addition, Leaf and Odhiambo (2017)
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40 found that vice-principals in four high performing schools were engaged as instructional
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42 leaders in improving pedagogy.
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46 Many of the leadership actions Singapore vice-principals perceive themselves to
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48 be performing overlap with what the literature suggests are actions by principals,
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50 suggesting some degree of distributed leadership and complementary redundancy in
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52 leadership functions (Gronn, 2002; Ng & Ho, 2012). It is possible that vice-principals in
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54 Singapore have more opportunities and time to enact leadership because of the unique
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56 context in Singapore, where vice-principals have extensive administrative and
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58 leadership support from a broad base of middle managers, and no teaching duties. In
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3 addition, the fact that most vice-principals were previously heads of departments meant
4 they had prior experience in leading instruction.
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8 In examining the distribution of leadership between vice-principals and their
9 principals, Spillane's three leadership patterns (Spillane et al., 2007) served as a useful
10 frame. The distribution is not coordinated in that the leadership actions of the vice-
11 principal and principal generally do not need to be performed in a specific sequence.
12
13 However, there is evidence of a mix of collaborated and collective distributions. An
14 example of collaborated distribution, in which leaders work together in place and time
15 to co-perform the same leadership routine, is the principal and vice-principal co-setting
16 the school's direction. An example of collective distribution, in which leaders work
17 separately but interdependently, is in the leadership practice of culture building. While
18 the principal sets the tone for the school culture, vice-principals reinforce this culture
19 through their more frequent interactions with school staff. Based on the concept of
20 reciprocal interdependency (Spillane, 2006), in which individuals play off one another,
21 vice-principals support the visionary leadership of principals in helping to actualise this
22 vision (authors, 2020), while principals play a critical role in enabling, or disabling, the
23 leadership of vice-principals.
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42 Table 3 illustrates the distribution of leadership between the vice-principal and
43 principal based on the study. The table illustrates that vice-principals and principals
44 perform leadership functions which are related to both instructional and
45 transformational leadership, affirming integrated models of school leadership (Hallinger
46 et al., 2020). The table also illustrates the reciprocal interdependencies (Spillane et al.,
47 2003) of the two school leaders.
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In addition, table 3 suggests that, despite being acknowledged as ‘school leaders’, vice-principals are ultimately still subordinate to principals who determine or provide input on the performance appraisal of vice-principals. Furthermore, both principals and vice-principals agree that principals are ultimately responsible for what happens in their schools. In such a situation, although there is evidence of vice-principals partnering principals in providing leadership, vice-principals mainly play a supporting role, albeit as chief assistant (Wong, 2009). Thus, in setting direction, the principal is expected to lead as the vision setter although the vice-principal supports in amplifying, clarifying, and translating this vision. While vice-principals lead on the ground to engage and motivate staff, there are occasions when they require their principals to support them by leading communication which requires the weight of authority, with the principal perceived as the highest authority in a school setting.

In culture building, although vice-principals can set their own cultures at a more localized level, at the school level, they serve more as culture bearers to reinforce the culture set by their principals as culture founders (Southworth, 1998). Furthermore, if the principal’s desired culture and values differ from the vice-principal’s, or if the principal does not empower the vice-principal to contribute to culture building, the role of the vice-principal in culture building is very much constrained. Nevertheless, the role of vice-principals as culture-bearers is important in a context such as Singapore’s where the principals are rotated more frequently than the vice-principals. As indicated in Table 3, in such a situation, the vice-principal may play an important role in preserving the desired institutional culture.

While vice-principals generally play a supporting role to the principals, there are situations where they perform as leaders in their own right, particularly when they set

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3 direction for and drive school-level initiatives. This appears to be in contexts where
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5 they promote a cause they are passionate about, where they possess the relevant
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7 expertise, and where the principal supports the vice-principal's leadership.
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10 11 **Conclusion**

12 This study affirms that contextual factors shape the leadership which the vice-
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14 principal enacts and how leadership is distributed between the vice-principal and
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16 principal. These include personal factors such as the vice-principal's expertise and
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18 interest, the extent to which the principal is willing to empower the vice-principal and
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20 the alignment, or otherwise, of values between the vice-principal and principal (Arar,
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22 2014; Baker, Guerra, & Baray, 2018; Harris, Muijs, & Crawford, 2003). In Gronn's
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24 (1999) study of a leadership couple, he affirmed that commitment to shared values and
25
26 their realization are critical for a productive relationship for a leadership couple.
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30 This study focused on how leadership was distributed between the vice-principal
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32 and principal. However, as implied in the findings, there were other key actors whom
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34 the vice-principal worked with, particularly the middle managers, who were
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36 acknowledged by the vice-principals to be important multipliers of their leadership. It is
37
38 not the intent of this paper to simply **replace the single heroic leader with the heroic**
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40 **couple. The researchers agree with proponents of distributed leadership that multiple**
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42 **actors (leader plus) can enact leadership practice, which emerges from interactions**
43
44 **between leaders, followers, and a specific situation, in which followers may also exert**
45
46 **leadership depending on the context. Just as it is untenable for principals to lead schools**
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48 **on their own, it is untenable for the leadership couple of principal and vice-principal to**
49
50 **lead schools on their own, albeit as a couple. There is need for further research,** such as
51
52 an examination of how leadership is distributed within senior management teams,
53
54 including the principal, vice-principal, and middle managers (Wallace, 2002).
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Table I*Vice-principal (VP) Participant Profile*

ID	Age Bracket	Sex	Years as VP	Years in Current School	Schools Served As VP	Principals Worked With	School Level	No. of teachers in current school
VP01P*	45-54	M	3.5	3.5	1	1	Pri	80
VP02S#	45-54	F	6.5	4	2	4	Sec	120
VP03P	45-54	M	5.5	1.5	2	3	Pri	80
VP04S	55+	M	12	6	4	3	Sec	91
VP05S	45-54	M	9	9	1	3	Sec	80
VP06S	55+	M	9.5	4	3	5	Sec	100
VP07S	45-54	F	3.5	3.5	1	2	Sec	105
VP08P	45-54	F	4	4	1	2	Pri	105
VP09P	45-54	M	8	8	1	2	Pri	100
VP10S	45-54	F	8	3	2	2	Sec	100
VP11P	45-54	F	9.5	5.5	2	4	Pri	98
VP12S	55+	M	13	5	3	5	Sec	125
VP13S	35-44	M	6	3	2	3	Sec	103
VP14P	35-44	M	4	1	2	2	Pri	89
VP15P	55+	M	19	12	2	5	Pri	80
VP16P	45-54	F	9	7	2	4	Pri	75
VP17P	45-54	F	2	2	1	1	Pri	80
VP18S	45-54	F	4	4	1	1	Sec	90
VP19P	35-44	F	2	2	1	1	Pri	85
VP20S	45-54	F	9	5	3	4	Sec	102
VP21P	55+	F	9	9	1	2	Pri	80
VP22S	35-44	M	3	3	1	2	Sec	100
VP23S	35-44	M	7.5	1	3	3	Sec	100
VP24P	35-44	M	6	1	2	3	Pri	80
VP25S	45-54	F	5	5	1	2	Sec	110
VP26P	35-44	M	7	1	3	6	Pri	80
VP27P	35-44	F	7	1	3	5	Pri	120
VP28S	35-44	M	1.5	1.5	1	2	Sec	80

* P indicates Primary School (grades 1-6);

S indicates Secondary School (grades 7-10)

Table 2*Principal (P) Participant Profile*

ID	Age Bracket	Sex	Years as P	Years at Current School	Schools Served as a P	School Level	No. of VPs worked with as P
P01P	45-54	F	7	(just joined)	2	Pri	4
P02P	35-44	F	5	5	1	Pri	4
P03S	55+	M	15	3	3	Sec	8
P04S	55+	F	18	4	4	Sec	6
P05P	55+	M	18	4	3	Pri	7
P06P	35-44	F	5	5	1	Pri	2
P07S	45-54	M	12.5	1.5	3	Sec	7
P08P	45-54	F	11.5	6.5	2	Pri	3
P09P	55+	F	14	7	2	Pri	10
P10S	55+	F	17.5	3.5	4	Sec	12

Table 3. Distribution of Leadership between the Vice-principal and Principal.

Leadership Functions	Principals	Vice-principals	Implications for VP's development & roles
Setting direction & developing staff motivation & commitment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vision setter • Lead in setting school direction • Motivate staff to move in the desired direction • Front communication which requires the weight of authority 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vision amplifier & clarifier • Co-set school direction • Lead on the ground to engage staff to move in the desired direction • Lead in setting direction for school-level initiatives • Translate the school's direction, monitor implementation and alignment of department plans to school's direction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • VPs represent both senior management and the rest of the staff, connecting leader and teacher practice, linking direction with actualization of the direction. • VPs indicate their need to learn how to motivate staff
Leading instruction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set the general direction and policies for teaching and learning • Perform the broader definition of instructional leadership though some principals are involved in classroom observations and file checking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perform both the broader and the narrower definitions of instructional leadership • Guide subject department heads to translate and operationalize school-level policies • Oversee students' holistic development and welfare 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing potential VPs with opportunities to lead instruction helps prepare them to lead instruction as VPs • VPs lead instruction by negotiating and coordinating amongst department heads to ensure that different departments work towards common goals.
Building a positive culture for staff & students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set the culture as culture founder • Responsible for the extent to which there is an empowering culture for others, including the vice-principal, to lead 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reinforce the culture set by the principal as culture bearer • Set their own cultures at a more localized level, within spheres of influence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The VP plays an important role in preserving desired institutional culture, especially if deployed in a school for a longer time than the principal