

**UNDERSTANDING THE JOURNEY TO LEADERSHIP: THE  
EXPERIENCES OF PRINCIPALS IN THE FURTHER EDUCATION  
SECTOR**

**By**

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## **Abstract**

This study explores the lives and careers of twenty college Principals. There is no significant existing literature that focuses on the journey to leadership of college Principals that work in the further education sector. The research focuses on significant influences / experiences in the life and career journey of Principals. The career pathway model identified by Gronn (1999) acted as the guiding framework for the research with the focus being on the formation and accession phases.

In-depth semi-structured biographical interviews were the method used to gather data about the journey to leadership. Interviewees were asked about their life history, including their formative years, career trajectories, drivers, motivations, constraining factors and training.

This study also explores the role that self-belief and socialisation play in the journey to leadership, including the question of identity change.

The findings show that the process of leader formation for participants has been influenced by a number of important contextual factors. In the formative years, family and schooling experiences were significant. During the exploration of the career pathway themes emerged. Values, character and ambition were also found to have been enhanced by professional and social experiences during their later career journeys. These were the identification of influential / significant people, significant experiences, enabling and constraining factors and personal development and training. The research concludes that the development of the Principals' values, character and leadership ambition was anchored in their formative experiences.

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

AOC	Association of Colleges
BERA	British Education Research Association
CV	Curriculum Vitae
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
FE	Further Education
FEFC	Further Education Funding Councils
HE	Higher Education
HEFC	Higher Education and Funding Councils
HEI	Higher Education Institutes
LEA	Local Education Authority
LEP	Local Enterprise Partnerships
LSS	Learning and Skills Sector
LSIS	Learning and Skills Improvement Service
MBA	Master of Business Administration
NPQH	National Professional Qualification for Head Teachers
PQP	Principals Qualifying Programme
OFSTED	Office for Standards in Education, Children Services and Skills
SFA	Skills Funding Agency
UK	United Kingdom
USA	United States of America



# CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

## Introduction

The literature that surrounds leadership and in particular within education is vast. Educational leadership in particular is a hot topic with numerous studies and research being undertaken within this field. That being said, it is still a subject that is under-researched, and it has been identified as a field for further research to be undertaken.

It is a particular interest of the researcher who currently works within education and one day aspires to becoming a college Principal. The particular focus and interest being the journey to becoming a Principal. During the journey to leadership, as discovered by Day and Bakioglu (1996), Ribbins (2003) and Gronn (1999), leaders go through distinct career stages or phases and throughout these stages and phases experience a variety of emotions and challenges. Questions that have arisen from a review of the literature are as follows:

1. To what extent does the Gronn (1999) model help us to understand the journey to leadership of FE College Principals?
2. To what extent does “socialisation” influence the journey to leadership?
3. How is identity change mediated in the journey to leadership of FE Principals?
4. To what extent does “self-belief” influence the journey to leadership of FE College Principals?

In recent years extensive research has been conducted on the subject of leadership within education. Despite the plethora of leadership research that exists within the FE sector it is still limited, especially in relation to the journey to leadership and with a gap in the literature with regard to understanding and explanations of the life phases/stages that a Principal goes through on their journey to leadership. More specifically there is no real body of literature that exists exploring those life phases / stages as considered by Gronn (1999). There is literature that explores the question of leadership in FE research in general terms, some key authors include Lumby & Tomlinson (2000), Withers (1998), Withers (2000), Muijs et al (2006) and Gleeson and Knights (2007). Research that has focused on the role of the Principal includes Withers (1998) and (2000), Draper and McMichael (2000), Walker and Quong (2005) and Smith (2015). Withers, who delved into FE with early research (1998) focused on the impact of incorporation and later research (2000) focused on the evolving role of the Principal in the FE sector. The contribution of these early key works is discussed in more depth in the literature review chapter below.

There appears to be a significant void in research within the FE sector when it comes to the question of exploring distinct life stages and phases that a FE Principal experiences on their journey to leadership. This gap is especially important to address now given the latest round of significant policy, institutional and financial changes that has had a major impact on the FE sector, notably with the impact of the area reviews that will be discussed in the context section below.

Gleeson and James (2007) have argued that:

“Until recently further education has been described as the neglected ‘middle child’ of English education: a comparative low status due to its technical and vocational ethos has resulted in it being overshadowed by the policy priorities of schooling and higher education. However, in

the past decade FE has expanded to become a significant driver for modernising the UK's learning and skills sector (LSS)" (p.2)

Despite this, FE is still under-researched, and we as researchers know very little about FE practitioners as potential leaders. Gleeson and Knights (2008) have explored the concept of reluctant leaders; these particular authors looked at middle managers within FE and the reasons behind their reluctance to assume 'formal' leadership roles. It has also been suggested by Cranston (2007), who along with Gleeson and Knights (2008), suggests the potential of a leadership crisis. One of the middle managers interviewed by Gleeson and Knights (2008) stated that s/he wanted career FE progression but was reluctant to lead as this would mean a shift away from their subject area and teaching. Most notably this demonstrates that those seeking headship or Principal positions are torn between being competent and confident in their current roles to moving on into a more formal role that may be out of their comfort zone. Senior leadership roles mean focusing more on business aspects and funding in what is an ever-changing sector with new educational reforms and ongoing budget cuts. Elliott (2015) describes a sector still in the middle of a crisis which is continually impacting on FE leaders and their institutions. This seeming continual crisis within the FE sector is exacerbated by the generalised global crisis that exists within leadership. It has been reported by Henshaw (2016) 'that by 2022 one in four schools will be hit by this developing leadership 'crisis', Henshaw (2016) also states that there will be a shortage of '8,000' leaders by 2022 with the current figure being a shortfall of 3,000'. He goes on to state that the two main reasons for this shortfall are retirement and the move of some education leaders taking up roles as CEOs in academy trusts. Arguably area reviews will significantly impact upon middle leaders within FE and their decision to take the plunge and move towards Principalship. The researcher firmly believes that the challenging nature of the sector coupled with the increasing performance related

demands placed on FE leaders there will be a continued reluctance of middle managers to apply for Principal roles.

Lambert (2011) has described the leadership crisis in FE in the post incorporation era following 1993. Lambert suggests an ‘impending shortage of individuals wanting the role of Principal in Further Education Colleges, he also describes a lack of suitably skilled individuals to step into Principalship roles. This is also echoed by Colinson (2005) and Collinson (2003) who highlight that one of the many challenges is the lack of recruitment of such future leaders. Elliott (2015) outlines what he describes as the ‘prevailing and persistent crisis in post-compulsory education, he describes that it has created conditions that have impacted hugely upon the way in which institutions are managed and led. He goes on to say that ‘vocational education remains a poor relation, and college mergers stand at an all-time high and in one sense, nothing much seems to have changed since 1985’. These persistent changes, in what could be described, as an unstable and turbulent sector, that quite frankly many would argue that how can any leader effectively lead or manage.

Yet education, according to Freire (1998) is the key to ‘social transformation’. This bigger idea is at the heart of FE and is also echoed by Ruiz-Valenzuela et al (2017) who argues that:

“For various reasons, this sector has historically been under-considered by academics and policy makers alike. Yet, to have a fuller picture of the education system, studying vocational or technical colleges along with academic colleges is particularly important because the students the former colleges cater for have lower educational attainment, come from more disadvantaged backgrounds, and are most at risk of dropping out from the education system. Further education is therefore a key determinant of England’s educational level, social mobility, unemployment, and other labour market indicators” (p.1).

Elliott (2015) and Ruiz-Valenzuela et al (2017) both acknowledge a leadership research gap. Given this gap in the literature or the missing element in terms of what we actually know about

the journeys of these key leaders known as Principals in FE. There has been recent debate / discussion on the effectiveness of CEOs in the FE sector. This research aims to contribute to this by exploring the journeys of these key figure heads. This element is under researched and has been explored in HE, Schools and Academies. Using the Gronn (1999) model as a good grounding or basis in which to start, first by exploring if these leaders (Principals) go through distinct life stages / phases like those in a school / academy setting. This will contribute to filling the knowledge gap on what we know about the journey to leadership of FE College Principals.

As Ruiz-Valenzuela et al (2017) states, these Principals have responsibility for thousands of learners in FE and yet we know very little about their journeys. This could contribute to the recent debate / discussion about leadership effectiveness in FE, these authors also point out that using only quantitative data to measure effectiveness doesn't work.

Principals have a substantial impact on achievement, Ruiz-Valenzuela et al (2017) found no significant correlations between Principal characteristics, characteristics such as gender, age and salary, on educational outcomes. These authors state that these factors do not impact on outcomes.

Bohlmark et al (2016) agrees with the findings of Ruiz-Valenzuela et al (2017) and also points out that it is difficult to identify what makes a good Principal using observable characteristics only.

It is important to attract and retain high quality Principals in further education colleges, Principals have a low profile in the debates in education and yet they can make a difference. Ruiz-Valenzuela et al (2017) 'believes more attention should be devoted to them'.

This research hopes to contribute to the gaps in understanding by exploring Principals' journeys.

Shamir et al (2005) claims that life stories play an important role in leadership and the best way to learn about a leader's traits and behaviors is through life stories. This is also echoed by McLoughlin (2018) who says that it is 'vital to prepare the next generation of college Principals' due to the make or break nature for both leader and the college, he also argues that the sector should be succession planning, with forty-five percent of college Principals over the age of fifty-five with most probably retiring at the age of sixty.

As mentioned by Gronn (1999), leaders go through stages, during which they have self-belief and in many cases peers and colleagues encouraging them to move upwards and take on headships or Principal roles. Once potential leaders take on such formal roles, they become isolated and need to build self-belief and confidence in their ability to be successful in the role. This is something that Gronn (1999) suggests happens once these heads or Principals have been in post for some time.

This research project explores the lives and career journeys of Principals to understand why they have taken on the role.

Within the FE sector, those who wish to be Principals need to be able to adapt within an ever-changing position and environment. The role of a Principal within FE involves not only knowledge of the college, but the surrounding community and region, as well as keeping up to date with political changes. Some might see this as an impossible task. In various studies of Principals, senior and middle managers, it is believed that some of the reasons behind this reluctance to lead is due to the very nature of the job in terms of extra pressures, work-life balance and a lack of time and money (Collinson, 2009).

The FE sector as described by Collinson (2009) is often perceived to be low status educational institutions, often dealing with the most deprived or difficult students. The sector is often referred to as the 'Cinderella sector' of UK education.

Defining the concept of leadership is a difficult task as there are many theories surrounding what leadership is. Leadership is defined by Bass (1990) as:

“an interaction between two or more members of a group that often involves a structuring or restructuring of the situation and the perceptions and expectations of members...Leadership occurs when one group member modifies the motivation or competencies of others in the group. Any member of the group can exhibit some amount of leadership” (p.19-20).

Leadership within education is a topic of intriguing interest, questions often arise such as, are leaders born to lead or do leaders learn how to lead?

Greenfield and Ribbins (1993) suggest that leadership starts with the ‘character’ of a leader, in terms of their beliefs, values and self-awareness. Southworth (1993) argues that leaders tend to work hard as they are often seeking to accomplish their own vision or values. Hoyle and Wallace (2005) argue that leaders can follow “any vision you like, as long as it’s central governments” (p.139).

Hart (1993) suggests that a Principal’s succession affects all who work within and with the school. Hart (1993) also talks of a stage of apprehension and high expectations, both of the newly appointed Principal and those who work within the school / college. It is also believed by Hart (1993) and Crow (2007) that newly appointed Principals go through stages of socialisation, not only do Principals have to mix within a new social group, they also have to get used to a new role / profession. Organisational socialisation within education has had limited attention, however as Hart (1993) suggests research has been undertaken, socialisation will be explored in more detail in further chapters within this research project.

Bush (2010) believes that leaders within education are of vast importance and play a significant role within the organisation, coming only second to teaching practice. Bush (1998) also suggests that leadership and management need to be equal if the college wishes to be effective

and meet objectives. Bush (2010) also suggest that the process undertaken by a teacher to become a leader is an ‘incremental’ one.

The Gronn model was developed with school headteachers in mind and has only recently been adapted to encompass academy Principals and leaders within Higher Education. There is however a gap within the literature relating to the FE sector, which is believed by Weatherald and Moseley (2003) to be under researched, with no study ever being undertaken specifically focusing on Principals within colleges of FE. It is of significant interest to the researcher who is a Head of School within an FE college seeking to explore the career journeys undertaken by college Principals. In studies undertaken within other sectors, including both higher and compulsory education sectors, it was found that both heads and Principals went through various stages within their career. In some cases, it was found that both socialisation and self-belief were evident. Significant people, for example mentors, peers and family also played an important part in the lead up to headship or Principalship.

In order to explore these questions further key literature needed to be explored. In the first instance it is important to identify whether college Principals do go through these distinct career phases as set out by Gronn, Principals are notorious for ‘falling into education’ rather than planning to enter into it. Of the headteachers interviewed by Gronn (1999) and Ribbins (2003) most had not planned to enter into a career within education and in many cases definitely would not have considered headship if they had not been encouraged to do so. The researcher is keen to explore whether this will be the case for college Principals.



Many authors have also identified socialisation as a significant part of the journey to leadership.

This research will focus on early socialisation, Ribbins (2008) states that:

“this is made up of all the influences which shape the kinds of people prospective principals become, its believed that during this stage the future principal is socialised into the deep-rooted norms and values by the action and interaction of such key agencies as family (notably parents), school and teachers, peer groups and local community. These agencies especially those exerting their greatest influence in early childhood (Gardner, 1995), shape personality and in doing so generate conception of self” (p.65).

This is evident in the ‘accession’ phase in the Gronn (1999) model which was used to address research question two which explored “To what extent does Socialisation influence the journey to leadership”. It is here where the researcher details the early socialisation of those FE College Principals interviewed, this stage documents in detail those early childhood influences including parental influence, peers and educational influences etc. This research question is answered fully and in detail in chapter five Findings and Discussion.

Self-belief is evident in the key works of Gronn (1999), Ribbins (2003) and Day & Bakioglu (1996), notably also within the ‘accession’ phase. However, these authors hint at it within the ‘incumbency’ phase, which is where leaders identified themselves to be competent and confident within their role of headteacher or Principal. These are two key themes that have emerged and so it was interesting to see what role both self-belief and socialisation play within the career journey of a college Principal. Research question four addresses “To what extent does ‘self-belief’ influence the journey to leadership of FE College Principals” this research question is detailed in chapter five Findings and Discussion.

A further interest for the researcher, or rather question, is regarding identity change. The researcher was interested to explore “How is identity change mediated in the journey to

leadership of FE College Principals”. Research question three is discussed in detail in chapter five Findings and Discussion.

The audience for this research project will be aspiring Principals as well as those seeking to explore career journeys within education. The research to developing on the theories of Gronn (1999), Ribbins (2003) and Gunter et al (2003). This research has established career journeys experienced by college Principals, identifying similarities with those career paths of headteachers and academy Principals. Previous studies or research that have been undertaken within the education sector, in particular HE and compulsory education, has included research based around socialisation and self-belief and suggested that there is evidence to support socialisation throughout the stages of a leaders’ career. Notably in those studies by Gronn (1999) and Ribbins (2003) these authors documented in their findings that socialisation not only helps to form the character of the leaders in education but also styles them into the leader they often become. They also mention this notion of self-belief and how it is evident within the ‘accession’ stage (Gronn, 1999). There is also evidence to suggest that self-belief can be influenced by others. As suggested by Gronn (1999), peers, family, colleagues or those aspiring leaders’ current bosses can encourage leaders to take on the more formal leadership role and by this it is meant Principal or headteachers.

## **Structure of the Thesis**

The first chapter of this thesis, Chapter One, has provided an introduction to the research the journey to leadership. The remainder of this thesis is made up of chapters. Chapter Two provides an understanding of the further education sector and the leadership challenges, Chapter Three forms the theoretical basis for this and summarises the literature. Chapter Four

discusses the research approach and methods conducted and critically evaluates and justifies the methodology and methods used for this research. Chapter Five presents the findings of this research which leads to a discussion on the findings. This chapter includes a detailed analysis of emerging themes as proposed by Gronn (1999) including new findings. Chapter Six provides final conclusions and details a future research agenda for further study.

## **CHAPTER TWO: UNDERSTANDING THE FURTHER EDUCATION SECTOR; THE (LEADERSHIP) CHALLENGES**

### **Understanding the Further Education Sector**

#### ***Emergence of Further Education***

In 1914 the term ‘further education’ and ‘technical college’ came into effect following regulations for technical schools, in 1926 they became known as ‘Colleges of Further Education’ and are known today as ‘FE Colleges’ (Coles and McGrath, 2004). FE colleges in the present day offer a wide range of qualifications and training. For example, A-Levels, Apprenticeships, Traineeships, Vocational Qualifications, Higher Education and Entry level training. Since 2013 FE colleges have been able to enrol 14-16-year-olds for those who wish to study a vocational qualification alongside general qualifications including English and Mathematics. This demonstrates the diverse nature of FE colleges. In 1993 there were approximately 427 colleges in the UK including sixth form and specialist colleges. Today there are approximately 296 and this number will further decrease once the area review report is published in August 2017. Each year there has been a decrease in the number of colleges within the UK, this is a result of mergers and college closures due to the continuing financial pressures that are now imposed on colleges. This, along with continued funding cuts, has impacted on the FE sector as a whole. (AOC, 2017).

According to the AOC (2017) there are currently 189 general FE colleges within the UK, this thesis is specifically focusing on general FE colleges within the West Midlands region only, the reason behind this is this is where the researcher resides. Within the West Midlands there are currently 27 colleges.

### ***The Impact of Incorporation (1993)***

During the 1970s and 1980s technical colleges became FE colleges, they took on new dimensions as a consequence of a rise in unemployment levels. FE colleges offered courses that had emphasis on preparation for work in general rather than preparing people for specific jobs.

Over the last twenty-five years further education has undergone some significant changes. A key turning point for the sector was the Further and Higher Education Act 1992. This Act established the Further Education Funding Councils (FEFCs) removed further education and sixth form colleges from Local Education Authority (LEA) control, unified the funding of higher education under the Higher Education Funding Councils (HEFCs) and introduced competition for funding between institutions.

Funding was provided from central government through a series of organisations, first the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC), then the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and now the Skills Funding Agency (SFA). The funding has been moved to a system in which funding is based upon the number of learners and the type of course being studied.

According to Lucas and Crowther (2016) FE colleges entered the 1990s as institutions that appeared to cater for all, from 16-19-year-olds, both academic and pre-vocational, adult returners, vocational courses and links with employers, access students, Higher Education (HE) students, those with special educational needs, the socially excluded, basic skills provision and those not involved anywhere else. It is during this time that the FE sector was known as the ‘Cinderella service’, this reflected the divide between academic and vocational educational. FE enrolled students that other institutions did not want.

Colleges changed to a sector dominated by competition, with colleges and other providers competing for students.

The White Paper 'Education and Training for the twenty-first Century' (DES/ED, 1991), and 'Unfinished Business' (Audit Commission/OFSTED, 1993) highlighted poor financial management of FE colleges along with poor retention and success rates. Crowther and Lucas (2016) believe this led to incorporation.

The incorporation of colleges was part of a 'wider neo-liberalism logic' that began with the Conservative government of Margaret Thatcher driving public sector structural reforms; this was continued under successive conservative governments until New Labour were elected in 1997 (Masunga, 2014).

Colleges became focused on growth and increased efficiency. Therefore, colleges began to act like businesses focusing on spending time and resources on the demands of competition, and this meant in many colleges that courses were no longer demand-led but driven by the price tag provided by FEFC. Economists described such a state of affairs as a 'quasi-market (Lucas and Mace, 1999) resulting in colleges becoming finance driven. The title of 'Chief Executive Officer and Principal' largely replaced 'Principal' with a focus and emphasis on leadership rather than management, and students became 'customers'.

By 1997 the early phase of Incorporation, efficiency savings had caused financial problems in many colleges. Between 2001 and 2010 with New Labour, colleges changed their focus from unplanned growth driven to employer led strategic planning. The Learning and Skills Council (LSC) replaced the FEFC. The Coalition government-funded students in FE colleges based upon enrolment and qualifications passed from the previous year, thereby removing central planning in favour of demand-led and outcome-led funding (Crowther and Lucas, 2016). The Education Act 2011 allowed FE colleges to borrow money without permission from central government and to change the nature of their governance.

The coalition government ring fenced two million apprenticeships over five years, again causing the shift away from FE towards employers for funding for training, reinforcing demand-led funding.

In the current climate the FE sector is once again facing a period of great change, the post-16 education sector is seen as critical by the government to improve the UK's productivity. The government has already begun and completed a review of the sector with local area reviews taking place across the UK with the view to building 'fewer often larger, more resilient and efficient providers within the sector' (AOC, 2017).

As a result of these area reviews there were a number of mergers between colleges; 19 at the time of writing this thesis with more planned over the next 5 years. To date there have been 4 sixth forms that have converted to academies with a further 22 in the process of applying to become academies.

The focus of the reform by the current government is to increase the number of starts to apprenticeships up to 3 million by 2020.

### ***The Role of OFSTED***

The Office for Standards in Education, Children Services and Skills (OFSTED) was established in 1992 and further expanded in 2007 to incorporate children's services. Ofsted are independent, impartial and report to parliament. Their role is to carry out inspections of schools and further education skills providers. They produce inspection reports and ensure quality standards. OFSTED also report to policy makers on the effectiveness of these services.

Since the incorporation of colleges in 1993, inspection, along with other internal and external arrangements for quality assurance, has played a pivotal role in the FE sector. As Fletcher

(2015) describes, OFSTED has shifted its focus from supporting improvement to becoming focussed on accountability. Inspection takes place alongside the individual college's self-assessment mechanisms, including performance indicators. Its impacts have been strengthened by links to funding and most recently by the new role of the FE Commissioner. A poor inspection and poor financial performance can trigger an intervention from the FE Commissioner.

OFSTED's role has evolved considerably over the last 27 years; inspections are now carried out based on a 'risk based' approach focusing on those providers that are considered to be a cause for concern. As a consequence of this approach there has been a rise in the proportion of colleges with poor inspection results. In 2012 OFSTED changed the grading descriptor from 'satisfactory' to 'requires improvement' and introduced strict guidelines for re-inspection to those providers that are graded as such.

OFSTED have shifted their focus to put more emphasis on teaching and learning, and in the current environment are moving away from the traditional lesson observation grading for a more informal system where 'walk through' style observations are carried out and no grade is provided to the lecturer.

### ***The Changing Role of Governors***

Every college has a governing body that has an elected chair from the governing body's membership (Hill and James, 2015). Corporations were created after incorporation. For FE colleges to have corporation status, a governing body needed to be formed.

Hill and James (2015) state that:

“Every college corporation has a statutory Instrument and Articles of Government that sets out the responsibilities of the corporation and the principal and provides the framework within which the corporation must operate”. (p.3)



Hill (2013) describes two types of governors and states that FE governing bodies tended to be made up of businesspeople with the remaining governor seats made up of the Principal, teaching staff and a student representative. Hill (2013) along with Cornforth and Edwards (1999) believed that business governors were appointed to not only create some kudos amongst peers by having key businesspeople as governors but for these businesspeople to be able to support the college and create a corporate / business-like presence.

Following the Hodge Report (1999), which made recommendations for college governors to be more representative of the local communities surrounding colleges, governors were encouraged to move away from the business / corporate approach and focus on more educational matters (Davies, 2002).

The Education Act 2011 defines the instruments and articles for government for FE college corporations, a college's Instrument of Government sets out the number of governors a college must have in each category including staff and students. As stated by the AOC (2017), every college has to appoint a Chief Executive Officer (CEO) who is normally the Principal of the college. Every college must also appoint a Clerk. Although this is not a requirement by law, the financial memorandum states that the Principal must be the Accounting Officer.

The role of the governors has changed since incorporation; governors are more accountable and responsible for challenging and holding the college and CEO to account. Governors now drive college strategy to enable colleges to be more responsive to local communities and employers. Governors hold regular reviews in response to college performance, help set key performance indicators for the college, drive results, ensure the financial position is stable and reported upon, and review and help drive college mission and vision statements. (Department for Business Innovation and Skills, 2015). Governors have a key role to support colleges to ensure they can be successful. It is not the governors' responsibility to manage the college as this is what the Principal and senior management team within a college are responsible for.

Governors should support the implementation of strategies and support with the student experience to ensure success.

### ***The Impact of the Area Reviews***

In 2015 the government's policy statement set out an approach to restructuring the FE sector, this was undertaken in the form of 37 reviews starting with the Birmingham area review in September 2015. The aim of these reviews was to ensure that there are fewer, more resilient colleges that work together to produce skilled workers that local employers need. It is part of a wider plan as set out in the government's productivity plan, 'Fixing the Foundations – creating a more prosperous nation, improving productivity is a key national challenge'. It is believed by government that the post-16 sector (FE sector) is key to economic growth and critical to raising productivity. This major reform of the sector by government was also undertaken at a time of immense financial pressures facing FE colleges, In Birmingham alone two out of the four FE colleges were undergoing significant financial instability and significant levels of debt to the point where the SFA and FE Commissioner had to intervene. The first wave of reviews undertaken included a number of key stakeholders including the college and sixth-form Principals, local councils and Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEP). As a result of the Birmingham review, two of the four FE colleges opted to merge to ensure the financial stability, as well as securing the viability of one of the two colleges. One further college remained independent to work on a financial recovery plan, with the remaining college merging with an academy trust.

### ***Summary***

The aim of this chapter was to set the context for which this thesis is based, the chapter aimed to provide an insight and some background to the nature of the sector. The chapter also included the leadership challenges in terms of the nature of the sector they operate in as well as to include any key challenges. As can be seen the spotlight has been focused on leaders in the FE sector, notably the area reviews whereby colleges were reviewed in terms of their financial stability. This is one of the many challenges that Principals face.

The literature review chapter that follows will seek to explain key literature that exists and will be explored and discussed in detail. The literature will also provide a base of knowledge that the researcher will link back to when discussion the findings in Chapter Five.

## **CHAPTER THREE: LITERATURE REVIEW**

This review of literature provides a theoretical framework underpinning the following research questions:

1. To what extent does the Gronn (1999) model help us to understand the journey to leadership of FE College Principals?
2. To what extent does “socialisation” influence the journey to leadership?
3. How is identity change mediated in the journey to leadership of FE College Principals?
4. To what extent does “self-belief” influence the journey to leadership of FE College Principals?

In this literature review chapter, the researcher is reviewing the literature that relates to this core idea of leadership, focussing on the idea of understanding / revealing the ‘life journey’ to leadership. It also helps us to explain leader behaviours and actions, and debates the literature around it and so as to surface the key learning and insights from this literature. There are some scholars who may not wholly agree with this way of thinking about leadership, the researcher acknowledges that this is just one way of thinking about leadership which is informed by a broadly psychological understanding of leadership.

The first section of this chapter explores leadership in general terms and examines what leadership is. This chapter will then explore key terms and provide an overview of the literature. The subsequent sections will include the changing role of the Principal, career journeys in education, leadership development, socialisation, identity change and finally self-belief. The chapter will then provide a summary of the learning from the literature.

## **Introduction**

The literature that addresses the question of leadership in education is extensive. This section explores the key works on leadership within education and the matter of career journeys. This chapter will review the literature that exists within the field of life history leadership as well as that of leadership formation. The studies that will be discussed and outlined within this chapter inform the conceptual framing of the thesis, research approach and method, and research themes.

There is an under-representation of literature surrounding FE and so the researcher will draw upon those studies and literature that is geared to the sectors of HE and schools.

In order to undertake the research project an extensive and exhaustive literature search had to be undertaken, the use of journals, Internet databases as well as books and educational papers were explored. The University of Birmingham's education library was used for key texts as well as the universities online database. Athens was also used to find journals on leadership.

The key words and phrases searched were "career journeys", "self-belief", "Identity change" and "socialisation" all within the context of educational leadership and FE. Those studies exploring career stages were of particular interest to the researcher.

**Keywords: identity, self-belief, socialisation.**

## **The Review of Literature**

The initial context chapter which sits within the introduction section of this thesis as part one of chapter one provided an in depth look at the FE sector, firstly providing an explanation of how FE colleges were derived and secondly providing an in depth insight into the political acts or reforms that have shaped this particular sector. The section also determined what significant changes and challenges were currently happening or impacting on the sector and in particular colleges and their Principals.

In order to grasp the extent of research that has been conducted based around lives and career journeys of academic leaders / Principals, significant works including those of Day and Bakioglu (1996), Ribbins (1997), Gronn (1999) are reviewed.

Limited literature is available in relation to the journeys of FE College Principals. Therefore, literature surrounding both compulsory and higher education sectors is explored.

The core areas of research undertaken as part of the review of literature are leadership, and in particular, the nature of leadership for leaders within an FE college, life history including career journeys, self-belief, identity change and socialisation. Within the exploration of the key works or existing literature in the life history and career journeys section, the researcher looked in particular for the themes of influences / people / incidents, impacts of family, schooling and career including professional development and training.

## **What is Leadership?**

The topic of leadership has been of interest / fascination to scholars of human relations generally (Storey et al, 2017) for some significant time, indeed from the early period of the Greek philosophers Plato and Socrates (Carrol et al, 2019). In these changing, and often challenging times, it is argued that leadership – at least to some extent and however it is

conceived – could explain professional ‘success’ for both individuals and organisations (Carrol et al, 2019). However, leadership is a complex and widely debated phenomenon; and the many meanings of the word ‘leadership’ are open to a great deal of interpretation. As Bolden (2004) suggests, there is a lot of interest in the topic of ‘leadership’, not only in the education sector, but more globally across different sectors, regions and nations and yet there is no clear consensus as to its precise meaning (Grint, 2010).

Storey (2011) summarised the main theories of leadership, these are outlined in Table 1.

Trait theory; innate qualities; 'great man theories'	Carlyle (1841); Bernard (1926)
Behavioural theories: task related and relationship related; style theory (e.g. autocratic vs. democratic)	Ohio State University studies; University of Michigan, (Katz and Kahn 1951); Likert (1961); Blake and Moulton (1964); Lewin et al (1939)
Situational and contingency theory; repertoire of styles; expectancy theory	Fiedler (1967) Vroom and Yetton (1973) Yukl (2009); Hersey and Blanchard (1969); Thompson and Vecchio (2009)
Exchange and path-goal models (relationship between leader and led as a series of trades)	Graen and Uhl-Bien (1995); House (1971); House (1996)
'New Leadership'; charismatic and visionary leadership; transformational leadership	Burns (1978); Bryman (1992) Conger and Kanungo (1988); Bass (1985); Tichy and Devanna (1986); Kouzes and Posner (1997)
Leadership as performance	Peck et al (2009); Mangham (1986)
Constitutive, constructivist theory	Grint (1997, 2000, 2005)
Leadership within Learning Organizations: leadership as a creative and collective process; distributed leadership	Senge (1990)
Post-charismatic and post-transformational leadership theory; spiritual leadership; authentic leadership; leadership with compassion	Khurana (2002a,2002b); Maccoby (2000); Fullan (2001a,2001b); Boyatzis and McKee (2005); Tamkin et al (2010)

**Table One: Summary of the Main Theories of Leadership**

As can be seen in Table one, there is a plethora of theory and literature that exists surrounding leadership, there is a wide range of theories describing the meaning of leadership and the various different theoretical approaches. Storey (2011) summaries some of the main theories. Storey (2011) suggests that ‘the ‘new model’ of leadership is that leadership competencies are outlines of formative experiences. This supports Gronn’s (1999) theory who also believes a leaders’ character is formed during the formative years and this in turn shapes the leader that they often become.

Bennis and Thomas (2002) claim that ‘true leadership is an individual’s ability to find meaning in negative events and to learn from them’. As can be seen, there is a plethora of theories surrounding leadership. There are those authors that believe theories to include that of distributed and transformational leadership. This approach argues for a more systemic viewpoint, whereby leadership responsibility is detached from formal organisational roles, and that actions and influences of people at all levels are recognised as vital to the overall direction and functioning of the organisation.

This research is focusing on understanding leadership through the ‘idea’ of the journey to leadership, the research will explore the life and career journeys of twenty FE College Principals. The Principal position is the most senior position in an FE College, leadership over recent years has been in the spotlight in education and yet to date there is little to no research that exists around these leaders. McLoughlin (2018) states that there is a need to prepare the next generation of college Principals. He also believes that:

“Leadership is the key to the success of any organisation, as many colleges have learned, occasionally to their cost when things have gone wrong. While we have to always address the needs of today, tomorrow is never far away. In my experience, when there are changes at the top without effective succession planning, or individuals who can take over the reins seamlessly, there can be an unsettling effect on a college or training provider. Developing the leaders of the future will provide the stability, confidence and ambition needed for the sector”.



It is no secret that the Further Education (FE) sector in England is often referred to by education policy makers and practitioners as the ‘Cinderella sector’ when it comes to funding – or rather the lack of funding. There have been recent works published addressing the importance of FE college Principals and the role they can have / play in the success or detriment of an FE college and student outcomes. According to Ruiz-Valenzuela (2017), Principals ‘do matter for the educational performance of their students’, this is similar to the beliefs of McLoughlin (2018) who suggests:

“that developing leaders for the future will provide the stability, confidence and ambition needed for the sector. Investing in this cadre could not be more integral to the future of individual colleges”

The short section that follows aims to establish a broad ‘working’ definition and understanding of the term ‘leadership’; broad in the sense that a definition of leadership has been debated for hundreds of years and there is no one single definition.

So just what is leadership? Is it about the ‘person’ or ‘power’ or ‘title’? Or is it about ‘relationships between leaders and followers? Or is it simply a ‘social myth’?

“Scholars should remind us that leadership is not a moral concept. Leaders are like the rest of us: trustworthy and deceitful, cowardly and brave, greedy and generous. To assume that all leaders are good people is to be wilfully blind to the reality of the human condition, and it severely limits our scope for becoming more effective at leadership.” (Kellerman, 2004, p45)

There are clearly different opinions, definitions and descriptions of leadership and what the word itself, and its practice, actually means and involves (Storey, 2011; Carroll et al, 2019). When exploring the question of how leaders are formed (leadership formation), researchers have referenced different factors that influence leaders. There are authors who view leadership as “a consequence of a set of traits or characteristics possessed by leaders” whilst others regard it as “a process of social influence emerging from group relationships” (Bolden et al, 2011). This latter perspective is posited by others such as Bourdieu (1991), who believes we are

formed by our 'habitus', that is to say we are formed through our social experiences and by the places and spaces we inhabit. For Bourdieu, leaders are formed by their personal experiences and the contexts in which they work. This is the same idea that is echoed in the work on leadership by both Ribbins (2003) and Gronn (1999).

Northouse (2004) defines leadership as "a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal" (p.3). In a related vein, Grint (2017) argues that "leadership is essentially concerned with control; leadership is concerned with direction setting, with novelty and is essentially linked to change, movement and persuasion".

Western (2019) suggests that the propensity to leadership is explained to an extent by an individual's biographical journey; arguing that a common perception of 'leaders' is that they are charismatic and confident extroverts. Importantly, however, Western also proposes that often these great leaders mask insecurities and anxieties such as so-called 'imposter syndrome'.

As authors have suggested, there are a number of factors that can influence a leader. This is also true in the case of leaders in education, the findings from key works such as Gronn (1999) on headteachers and the latter works of Mackenzie-Batterbury (2012) on academy Principals depict this.

Leadership approaches are formed by emotions and experiences, and authors such as Western (2019), suggest that "leadership cannot escape these emotional and unconscious responses because leadership sits in the heart of human desire and fear". Similarly, Garcia (2018) also suggest that "Psychoanalytic insights refer to regressed childhood experiences being acted out on the stage of adult life". Hence, our feelings, as well as our perceived treatment from parents or authority figures from our past, have a part to play in leaders' character and potentially the way in which they choose to enact their leadership. In other words, our emotions shape

significantly how we theorise, perceive and enact leadership (and followership). This biographical ‘turn’ in the argument about what makes a ‘leader’ – and what makes leaders act the way that they do, leads Western (2019, p.31) to argue further that:

“Our parents, teachers, bosses, religious and political leaders, all signify forms of leadership that carry real hopes, dangers and emotional anxieties”

For Western, then, significant role models, influential people and experiences are what shape leaders and inform the type of leader that they become.

To take focus a little more at this point on the importance of the journey and the place of biography in shaping leaders and their approaches to leading, Danzig (1999) considers leadership as a tale of identity that is ‘illuminating’ and that begins with the biography and personal history of the ‘leader’. He also suggests that important events – also understood in their wider context – such as those experienced during a leaders’ childhood, help us to explain the motivations, values and approaches of the leader.

This suggests that revealing leadership stories allows for leadership practice to be understood and explained. From a personal development perspective, becoming a leader is partly about learning to analyse life journey experiences and how these may impact on future courses of action; in other words, reflexivity – the ability to reflect on one’s own life journey and how we are shaped by our social and professional experiences - is an important aspect of the journey to leadership (Denzig, 1999).

To summarise at this point, and drawing on Posner and Kouzes (1996: 3)

“Leadership is certainly not conveyed in a gene, and it’s most definitely not a secret code that can’t be understood by ordinary folks. Our research has shown us that leadership is an observable, learnable set of practices. Indeed, the belief that leadership can’t be learned is a far more powerful deterrent to development than is the nature of the leadership process itself” (Posner and Kouzes, 1996: 3)

The researcher recognises that this is not the only way of thinking about leadership, for example Grint's 4Ps framework of understanding leadership that encompasses the person, results, position and process could be used as this is another way of understanding leadership.

The following sections will discuss the question of leadership in education in more detail. Particularly, the discussion draws on the literature detailing the important themes of values and motivations, life and career journeys, leadership development, identity change, socialisation and finally self-belief.

## **The Study of Leadership**

There has been an ever-expanding amount of literature and studies produced surrounding leadership, and in particular within the field of education. The increased interest has been derived from the ever-changing education sector and the pressures now placed upon educational establishments to be outstanding. According to Harris et al (2003), educational leadership is always under scrutiny and consequently has attracted a great deal of interest and debate. Bush and Middlewood (2013) agree that there is still considerable interest in leadership development, they also argue that:

“the increasing range and complexity of leadership and management responsibilities in schools and colleges means that it is no longer possible, if it ever was, for the principal to be the sole leader” (p.10).

As Harris et al (2003) suggested; “leadership is currently in vogue” (p. 9), it draws attention from many researchers. There have been numerous studies relating to leadership and the journey of leadership by key authors such as Day and Bakiglu (1996), Gronn (1999), Pascal and Ribbins (1998), Gunter et al (2008) and the more recently Mackenzie-Batterbury (2012). A study undertaken by Rhodes (2013) exploring the transformation of educational leaders, specifically looking at the complex journey practitioners take to become educational leaders. Rhodes (2013) evidences the self-concept as well as identity change and transformation.

This is to name but a few, however there is an extensive list when sourcing research or data collected based around the field of educational research. Although it has been described as ‘in vogue’, it has also been well documented by authors such as Rhodes et al (2008) that there is a potential leadership ‘crisis’.

Educational reform has paralleled this trend with a renewed emphasis upon “improving leadership capacity and capability in the drive towards higher standards” (Harris, et al 2003, p. 9).

As Gleeson (2010) suggests the FE sector over the years has suffered funding and budget cuts and this has impacted significantly on leaders within FE colleges.

“The funding reality of ‘more for less’ soon became a major cause of concern for Principals and senior managers, many of whom had no experience of business or corporate management”. (p.182)

Gleeson (2010) also states that:

“Endless exhortations by government to greater flexibility and smarter working practices do not, however, cut much ice with Principals and senior managers, many of whom have experienced the demoralizing effects of funding cuts and industrial action. As early advocates and forerunners of incorporation have fallen victim to their own constructions of managerialism, more participative or inclusive leadership responses have since emerged. Though most ‘new guard’ Principals and senior managers in this study spoke of being heavily pressurized by funding, staffing and managerial constraints, they were not consumed or overtaken by such pressures”. (p.191)

Edgington (2016) agrees that the:

“FE sector seems to repeatedly suffer as a potential target for cost cutting measures whilst paradoxically forced into carrying the weight of responsiveness for the changing economic workforce” (p.26)

The ‘mystery’ of leadership has posed a number of difficulties for scholars over the years, mostly exploring the consequences of decisions made by leaders; this has led to sociological theories and approaches intertwined with behavioural research in an attempt to address the phenomenon of human leadership (Fenwick, 2006). Fenwick agrees with authors such as

Gronn and Ribbins who make clear that understanding the context in which leadership is exercised is of critical importance.

Gronn (1999) believes that “the field of leadership studies lacks a sound comparative point of reference against which to map leaders’ biographical experiences and activities. It is one thing to scrutinise leaders as individuals in isolation, but the field has remarkably few useful benchmarks or parameters for examining the circumstances of leaders’ lives in relation to one another, and also in respect of the cultures and societies from which they emerge”.

Brundrett and Terrell (2003) state that ‘it is widely accepted that educational leaders need specific preparation if they are to be successful in leading schools and colleges’. Aspiring headteachers based within schools can enrol on the National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH); it is a programme that prepares headteachers who are within 12-18 months of applying for their first post. Having undertaken research based around this field, it is evident that an Aspiring Principals Programme exists for those seeking Principalship within FE. This being said, after researching the programme the researcher found that firstly very little literature exists and secondly it appears to be training and webinars rather than a specific qualification or structured programme unlike the NPQH.

Those leaders who are seeking, or aspiring, to become Principals can often spend a few years as Vice / Deputy Principals, hence preparation is in the form of working closely with a Principal so they can get an experiential insight into the day to day duties of a Principal. Some Vice or Deputy Principals never move up, often retiring. Some leaders do not seek to move up, never wanting the responsibility of a Principal. As suggested by Gronn in his career model, some leaders suffer ill health and take the decision to retire before moving upwards. There are questions over why those in deputy and vice positions regarding the reasons why they do not aspire for promotion to that of Principal. One question being, did they ever have the intention

of doing so, have the vast changes within the sector coupled with the nature of both the challenging and changing role put them off?

The successful transition to leadership within education is becoming increasingly important to the sector. The reported leadership crisis, as well as negative perceptions of leaders in particular in education, makes these trying times for the sector. In particular, at present the FE sector is seeing significant funding cuts and this impacts on leaders. It has always been the case in schools that the head is fundamental in the success of the school (Browne, 2004).

Within the School sector, there are programmes to prepare potential heads to become headteachers. As discussed previously, there is no such programme within the FE sector. However, there is always the talk of ‘potential’, ‘rising stars’, but is this nurtured? Are potential leaders within the FE sector spotted as potential leaders and then developed into leaders, do these potential leaders feel like potential leaders?

Leaders come from a multitude of backgrounds, both socially and culturally. One size does not fit all and each will have their own way of leading, often this is based on socialisation and past experiences.

The journey to leadership can be a social and emotional journey, it has been suggested by Moller (2005) that leaders have multiple identities and that the sense of belonging, and as self-belief becomes more established, it has a role in precipitating challenges of identity transformation.

Leadership is emotional work and some leaders are more comfortable than others with their emotions, our emotions today may not necessarily be our emotions tomorrow.

Mullen et al (2014) states that “emotion lies at the heart of educational leadership – not on some periphery. It is not a distant cousin of thought and action. Emotion is who you are” (p.74).

Crawford (2009) urged educational leaders to “build a climate of genuine emotion where acceptance and trust are the building blocks of teamwork, and others not only want to follow them as leaders but feel able to become leaders themselves” (p.192-193).

A real reluctance exists, particularly in the FE sector, surrounding leadership positions. It is more specifically the reluctance to lead in FE colleges and to take on the important role of Principal. The Principal’s role is believed to be a difficult position to acquire and yet so many potential leaders seem less willing to take on the job (Walker & Qian, 2006). This is echoed by Fenwick and Pierce (2001), Rutherford (2005), Gleeson and Knights (2008), Page (2011) who all believe that there is a reluctance or unwillingness to move up to the Principal role. The shortage of potential Principals has sparked recent Whitehall concern about the reluctance on the part of middle ranking professionals to apply for leadership positions and has generated anxiety about where to recruit new leaders and why followers (middle managers) are less than enthusiastic to make the step up to leadership (Collins, 2006; House of Commons, 2006). Faced with such a formidable picture, it is not surprising that potential Principals are reluctant and thoughtful before choosing to become a FE college Principal or not. In the current climate, with the sector nationally described as the ‘Cinderella Service’ (Randle & Brady 1997), it is clear that the decision to become a FE college Principal is one that needs very careful consideration and also some clarity of the role is required in order for those reluctant potential Principals to make an informed decision.

It is believed that this reluctance to lead or take on this role stems from not just those senior managers, but from teachers/lecturers upwards, and in particular those deemed as first line managers, for example curriculum leader or programme leaders. Page (2011) argues that this reluctance is in actual fact ‘resistance’ and that it stems from the perception that the professional integrity, values, as well as work-life balance, is questionable and festers this resistance. This perception of leadership, and the risk to professional and lifestyle balance, is



deemed not worth the trade (Gleeson & Shain, 1999). Page (2011) also suggests that some of what he termed 'First Line Managers' see themselves primarily as teachers and prioritised students and teaching and learning over the managerial elements of their work.

Leadership within the education sector, in particular in FE, has become highly complex, if only because the context of their practice is uncertain and unstable. Not surprisingly, the 'shelf-life' of leaders can be relatively short. Gleeson and James (2007) state that one response is to adopt a strategy of 'growing your own' as a mechanism for grooming and fast-tracking those from the middle ground seen to possess leadership potential.

### ***Vision, Values and Education Leadership Motivation***

In studies exploring beginning Principals in Belgium and the USA, it was found that Principals were motivated by the 'opportunity to develop a career, having a chance to implement a personal vision and to create opportunities for school improvement' (Walker & Qian, 2006). When applying for a Principalship, aspirant Principals select establishments that they believe match their vision and values. It is evident that their life and career experiences will contribute to the shaping of their values as a Principal. It is also evident that Principals shape the vision and culture of a college. Principals have a set of values, beliefs, morals and ideas of how they want to lead, how they see themselves and more importantly how they want the college to look and feel. There is a lot of research that suggests that it is these very underpinning values that are first inspired or created from an early age and develop with the leader. These values may change dependent on circumstances including upbringing, family or significant people, career choices or paths and critical incidents or significant incidents throughout a person's life.

Jameson (2010) argues that trust and credibility is also key and is built on values. Jameson also suggests that honesty and integrity as well as high standards of moral conduct and emotional intelligence are key values.

Values can be critical in a leader and it is these values that shape the type of leader a person may become.

Values as described by Halstead (1996) as:

“...principals, fundamental convictions, ideals, standards or life stances which act as general guides to behaviour or as points of reference in decision-making or the evaluation of beliefs or action and which are closely connected to personal integrity and personal identity” (Halstead, 1996:5).

It is when aspirant Principals are considering taking on the role of Principal that considerations to the above are given. Given the nature of the FE sector and the challenging environment within which it is set, coupled with being in the middle of a ‘crisis’ (Elliott, 2015) that has impacted hugely upon the way FE colleges are now managed and led and with persistent trends, the question remains ‘whether and how a college can be effectively led, changed or improved within an unstable and many would argue ‘turbulent environment’ (Elliott, 2015).

These underpinning values, as viewed by Halstead, are critical to be able to ‘sustain vision’ (Halstead, 1996:148). Given the impact that the Principal will have on staff, students, local community and local employers, it is critical that the vision and values are shared in order for the Principal to be able to not only gain trust but to strive in this turbulent environment. This is echoed by Bush (2011) who comments that ‘moral leadership is consistent with organisational culture in that it is based on the values, beliefs, and attitudes of Principals and other educational leaders, he also goes onto state that these values and beliefs coalesce into shared norms and meanings that either shape or reinforce culture’. Withers (2000) states that it is about the Principal being able to provide leadership in which the staff can have confidence. This is believed to be key in order to instil into staff the capacity to deal with continuous

change, as well as being able to provide senior managers with the autonomy to drive change and be innovative and creative.

Walker and Qian (2006) also believe that it is the importance of the Principal clarifying and articulating their values in their role as Principal.

It is believed by Gleeson and Knights (2008) that it is values and identity that is behind the reluctance of middle managers to lead and take on the role of Principal. This is echoed by Briggs (2005) who found in a study of middle managers that it is the conflict of these professional values and trade-offs involved in balancing professional values and pedagogic judgments of these targeted future leaders.

A career has to be seen to be offering something, something that recognises hard work and rewards sacrifices made with respect to other aspects of life (e.g. family, leisure) and professional work (e.g. pedagogic beliefs, political values). The role of Principal in an FE college is highly demanding and can be a lonely role at times. For middle managers to consider this role for themselves they will want to know the risks and insecurities of investing in one's self in a future that lacks any recognised sense of career (Gleeson & Knights, 2008, p.59) and one that is deemed by Collinson (2003) that puts 'the soul of the professional at stake'. In light of what is known about the role and the impact of a Principal, it is important to explore motivation for taking on the role.

Stajokovic and Luthans (2003) would argue that "self-efficacy is the pervading psychological mechanism for positively motivating human resources" (p.126). They believe as Bandura (1986) suggested that motivators are the core belief that one has the power to produce the desired results. Bandura, among others, have advanced the concepts of 'self-efficacy'. Stajokovic and Luthans (2003) state that "this increasingly recognized psychological construct deals specifically with the control of human action through people's beliefs in their capabilities to affect the environment and produce desired outcomes by their actions" (p.127). Hence, they

believe that self-efficacy plays a pivotal role in the motivation for leadership. These two authors also advocate ‘verbal persuasion’ as a means to strengthening self-efficacy. They believe that this is sought from someone that they trust, and feel is competent.

Walker and Qian (2006) agreed, “although it is a personal or career related decision to become a principal, the actualisation of the job depends on recognition by others within the school community.

Research undertaken by Flintham (2010) found that core values held by leaders were people centred. Flintham found that leaders were energised by:

“...challenge and by the drive to make a difference to both their schools and their communities...a strong belief in the potential for success of such schools...and by the excitement and unpredictability of the leadership role” (Flintham, 2010:6).

Parker (2002) also identified that leaders were highly motivated to make a difference to people’s lives and eagerly sought challenges along their career journey. Vandenberghe (2003) also found this in his study exploring beginning Principals in Belgium. He found that the opportunity to develop a career, and a chance to implement a vision and to create opportunities for school improvement, were the main reasons for becoming a Principal. Crow (1995) who, in their study of becoming Principals, found that a number of participants were looking forward to inspiring people to make changes, facilitating programs and giving people the opportunities to be creative, echo this.

In the current economic climate of the FE sector, it is important for Principals to continue to want to make a difference and to be resilient. One thing that the FE sector needs is resilient and driven leaders in its colleges. Those that can facilitate change, be innovative and creative with curriculum design, but most of all work with local communities and local industry to ensure colleges are producing students who are prepared to progress and are employable. This means

Principals will need to operate within the constraints of government funding agencies like the SFA and ensure quality systems are in place, this is linked to OFSTED. The values of the Principal are key, as these have been discussed, the Principal will often need to adjust values and vision in order to meet sector needs as well as keep up with the ever-changing sector and government policies. During this research there is limited available literature that is specific to FE College Principals. Research is very much driven by schools or higher education establishments with a sizeable gap surrounding FE. The literature that does exist around FE seems to either explore leadership more broadly or focuses on the impact of incorporation and the changing role of the Principal. Further research is needed post-incorporation and that of more recent times. As Gunter (2005) suggests that, ‘there are reluctant field members who may be reluctant to question, still less challenge the status quo’.

Bennis and Thomas (2002) found in their study of leaders that at the heart of what makes a successful leader is often a pivotal or critical point or incident that shapes the leader. In their research “geeks and geezers” they reported findings that of the many leaders that were interviewed, most reported that their success as a leader stemmed from either being thrown into the cauldron and grew by learning or a critical incident or significant time in their lives. This was described as usually being during their childhood, a loss of a parent, social upbringing, political reform and even war. Of those leaders interviewed, there was a real sense that mentors too had played a role in the development of the leader.

Leadership and motivation have been linked by many to socialisation, there is socialisation in terms of schooling and upbringing which shape the person or leader they become and then there is socialisation for example to a new role. As Crow (1995) describes, this may occur at the exploration stage where the leader is exploring the idea of the new role as a possibility for one’s self or it can be a leader adjusting to the new role. Greenfield (1983) found that

socialisation to the Principalship typically emphasizes divestiture, that is, leaving teaching, which may discourage the individual from retaining particular norms of teaching, for example, a focus on classroom process and outcomes. This was also evident in a study undertaken by Browne-ferrigno (2003) who described that those becoming Principals experienced role identity transformation, some initially struggled with the concept of leaving the classroom or their previous role behind, others in the study appreciated that this needed to occur in order to adapt to the new role. Those who had some form of experience, whether through an internship or through taking on some of those duties of a Principal (some with support from current Principals), felt they were being prepared and felt better prepared and ready for the transition to Principalship. Those who had little or no experience of undertaking some of the duties of a Principal thought they needed more experience before they felt ready to transition to Principalship. Again, self-belief is evident, and it can be seen that those who have support from peers / mentors or opportunities for experience in the role before entering into it, felt more prepared than those who had no experience and no support.

### ***The Changing Role of the Principal in Recent Years***

Leadership in FE has changed over the last twenty years, from being local authority managed to one of institutional autonomy. This is a result of external pressures from the nationally imposed funding methodology and the increase in audit and inspection. Becoming a FE college Principal, according to Crow & Glascock (1995), is a transformative process with a predictable career pattern for many individuals within the field of education who seek to gain greater responsibility. Over the years, the role of FE college Principal has seen the shift from Principal to Chief Executive Officer (CEO), putting a much more corporate focus to the role. Whittaker (2014) states that colleges in particular are facing financial scrutiny in challenging times and

especially as the financial climate gets tougher. Hence, educational leaders will need to make some very difficult decisions in order to ensure that colleges are in good health financially. It is apparent that the role of college Principal has developed over recent years and there is now emphasis on finances, there appears to be more and more appointments of FE College Principals from either a corporate background or one of finance. Reports suggest that filling Principalship positions is becoming problematic because the pool of qualified candidates willing to assume positions as school leaders is growing smaller. Being a Principal nowadays means continually being confronted with different demands in a changing landscape that includes expectations of a very different nature linked to different aspects of the daily operation of a college and with conflicting demands. Faced with such a dilemma, it is not surprising that potential Principals are thinking carefully as to whether they want to take on such a daunting role (Gronn, 2003). Given the focus on Principals, it is important to ascertain how much has changed in the type of job they were doing now.

The journey to Principal has done little to prepare Principals for the balancing act they are asked to perform.

The role of Principal is one that is ever evolving and there does not seem to exist a clear definition of the role of a FE college Principal. The FE sector has undergone some radical changes over the years, the sector has seen and adapted to incorporation and more recently the sector was under review and has undergone Area Reviews in light of the latest report by the FE commissioner. For FE, incorporation led to new leadership and management models (Smith, 2015). Principals pre-incorporation were seen as just figureheads; suddenly incorporation meant Principals were now confronted with numerous and varied administrative processes (cited in Smith, 2015). In the same study by Smith (2015), Principals reported that they were not equipped to deal with the pressures of incorporation.

In the twenty-first century, Principals are now faced with the responsibility for restructuring, leverage accountability, revolutionary technology, liaise with external funding agencies and Local Enterprise groups and manage finances to ensure viability. At the very least, there is an expectation that Principals hold absolute knowledge and expertise even though the sector is currently reforming and changing the goal posts.

At the beginning of the journey, once a Principal is in post there seems to be this feeling of loneliness (Draper & McMichael, 2000) and abandonment, in some cases Principals have to deal with the history of the previous post holder (Withers, 1998 and Walker & Qian, 2006).

Principals are now held fully accountable, not only for college finances but to local communities and local industry. This is in addition to agencies such as the Skills Funding Agency (SFA) and OFSTED.

The role of a Principal in a FE college is described by the AOC, however this is not one that is set out by law but includes the following duties; that the Principal will be the colleges accounting officer and manage college finances, making proposals in relation to the college's educational character and mission, organising, directing and managing the college and dealing with staff matters within an overall framework set by the Board. Withers (2000) also echoed this in his follow up study of the evolution of the role of the Principal. He discovered that of all those Principals interviewed, only one could say that they had direct input into curriculum, the rest identified with the above with the focus or priority being finance driven. In the current climate and post area reviews, especially within the West Midlands (which is where this research is based), it is evident that the role of Principal has now very much become finance and environment driven, with the change in government and the continuous funding cuts to the sector. The Principals' role in the first few years is deemed one of survival with the view taken that the first year is the most crucial for beginning Principals. It is during this period that new Principals are establishing the culture or at least adapting to the culture already embedded



within the college. Beginning Principals at this stage of their journey are entering into the organisational socialisation aspect of the role and learning the ‘norms and values of the college’.

The first few years are about articulating their values and views as well as what is important to the Principal (Walker and Quong, 2005), in some cases changing a culture or developing a new vision can often be experienced.

## **Life History / Career Journeys in Education**

### ***Introduction***

Despite having undertaken extensive research on leadership within the FE sector, literature on the journey to leadership appears to be unavailable (Mercer et al, 2015). There have been studies on the journey to leadership within school settings, academies (Mackenzie-Batterbury, 2012) as well as limited research on HE leaders (Inman, 2007) and middle managers within FE. Whilst various studies have explored leadership in the FE sector (Briggs, 2001; 2007; Gleeson and Knights, 2008; Lumby, 1997) the journey to Principal still appears to be under researched.

Considering the leadership ‘crisis’ along with a reluctance to lead (Gleeson and Knights, 2008) and coupled with the ever evolving and challenging sector an understanding of the journey to FE College Principalship, is believed by the researcher to be of importance:

“Research into FE leadership development remains "relatively sparse and reflects a limited theoretical base"” (Muijs et al., 2006:93).

This section of the literature review will focus on the relevance of career journeys experienced by headteachers en-route to securing the headship post with the focus being in school settings. The review will aim to acknowledge significant or influential stages or phases of career

progression of school leaders as this is an area that is commonly researched and there is extensive existing literature.

The importance of exploring in depth a leaders' journey through life history according to Hatch and Wisniewski (1995) offers exciting alternatives for connecting the lives and stories of individuals to the understanding of human and social phenomena (p.113). Ouston (1997) argues that to fully understand the nature of leadership is to not only explore the current context, but to understand a leader's own history by also locating them in the past (p.169).

This is echoed by Tomlinson et al (1999):

“The quality of the head often makes the difference between the success or failure of a school” (p.xix).

### ***Career Journeys in Education Leadership***

The work of many authors, including that of Day and Bakioglu (1996), Ribbins (1997), (2003) and Gronn (1999), has resulted in a vast amount of theory that can be utilised to account for career journeys experienced by Principals, through the identification of stages or phases. Day and Bakioglu (1996) describe them an account of experiences both before, and during Principalship can be explored.

Day and Bakioglu (1996) conducted a study involving the interviewing of headteachers, focussing on their perceptions of development, each of the headteachers were asked to tell their 'story'. The research concluded that the headteachers experienced 'different developmental phases from taking up the post to their retirement' (Day and Bakioglu, 1996, p.207). The headteachers stories revealed that they went through four distinct phases known as 'initiation', 'development', 'autonomy' and 'disenchantment'.

The 'initiation' phase, according to Day and Bakioglu (1996), involves three sub phases known as 'idealism, uncertainty, and adjustment'. These authors reported that two types of beginnings

were experienced by the heads, those who were learning on the job and those who realised that they were having to work within an already existing framework and had to adapt their ideas and recognise changes could take time to have an impact or effect. Those heads who took up post within a school that had a good reputation and good community links had a better start or beginning than those who went into schools just before local managements were implemented, and reported a more difficult start to their headship, often encountering problems. It is in this phase that the heads are enthusiastic due to the 'euphoria' of getting a new job (Day and Bakioglu, 1996, p.212).

The second phase, known as the 'development' phase, included consolidation and extension. During this stage the research reported 'that heads still seemed enthusiastic, enjoyed working and wanted to continue', although it was also reported that depending on a head's individual self-esteem, some had lost a little of the enthusiasm (Day and Bakioglu, 1996). This phase was also perceived to be the most rewarding stage for the heads. Most of the headteachers agreed that they were able to establish their own 'flatter management structure' and begin to build their own team of senior managers. It is within this stage that heads reported that they were more confident, and it was at this phase that heads described as being a 'starting point for effectiveness' (Day and Bakioglu, 1996).

The third phase, known as 'autonomy', was described by Day and Bakioglu (1996) and reported that heads felt more competent due to experience and identified themselves as experts. However, during this phase Day and Bakioglu (1996) reported that the headteachers felt they had 'less energy, nostalgia for the past and increasing prudence and as a consequence, the beginnings of 'disenchantment' were identified'.

It is at this phase of 'disenchantment' that heads had reportedly lost motivation, or their health deteriorated as they neared retirement.

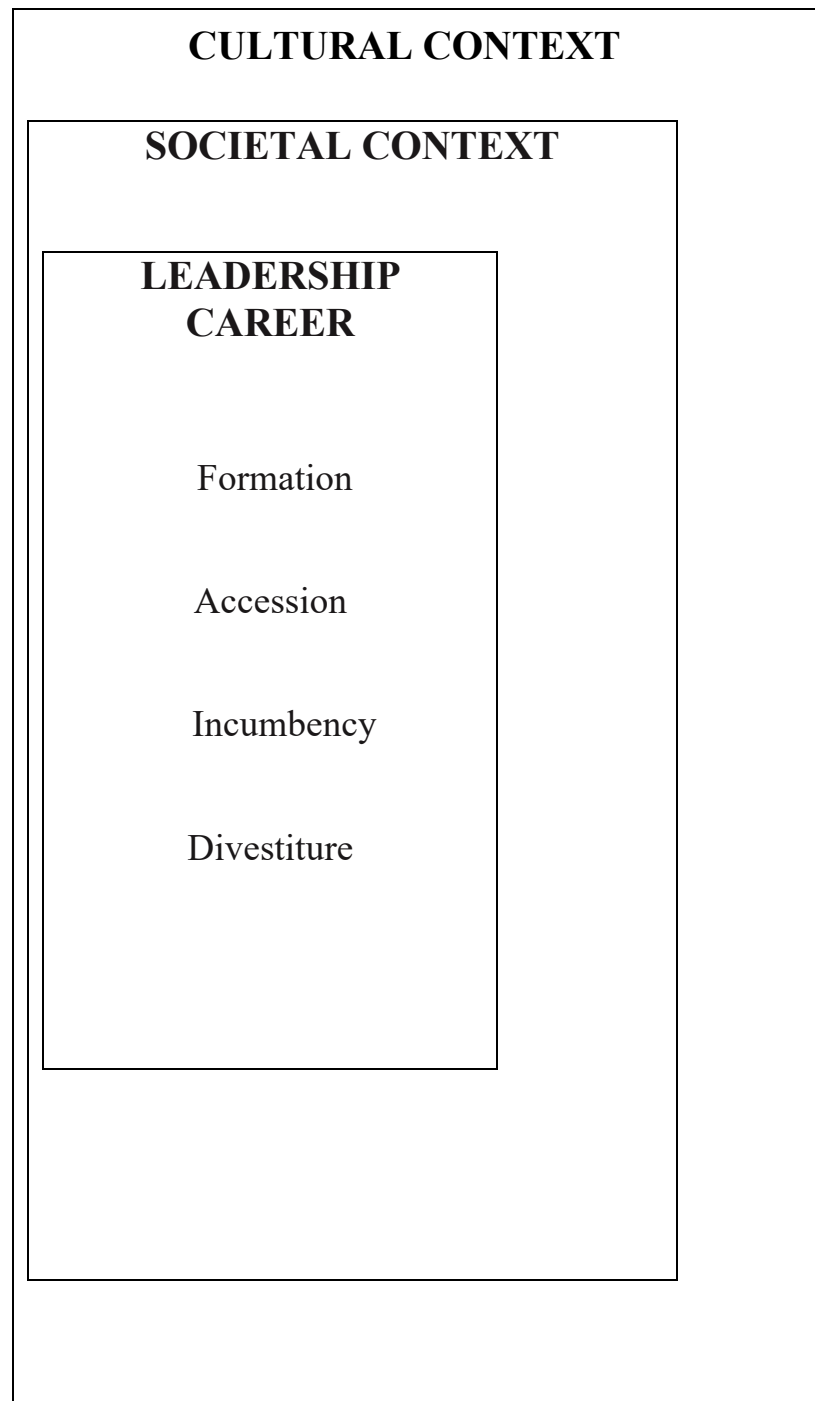
The influential work of Gronn (1999) who created ‘a career model of leadership’ includes a four-stage model of ‘Formation’, ‘Accession’, and ‘Incumbency’ and ‘Divestiture’ provides a foundation for this research. Gronn identified three ‘macro contexts ‘that affect a leaders’ career; these are historical, cultural and societal. These three contexts are not controlled by the individual and involve the time they are born, cultural experiences or values and the impact of society at the time they are growing up. As Gronn (1999) described:

“A leader born into a particular civil society, therefore, is the product of a specific era and is moulded according to the mix of cultural assumptions chosen by her or his primary carers”. (p.27)

Within the parameters of history, society and culture microcosmic details of each leader’s life can be explored (Gronn, 1999). Both Gronn (1999) and Gunter (2001) believe that the backgrounds of teachers and leaders should be explored and not written out of the story telling.

Gronn (1999) discovered that educational leaders followed a pre-determined career pathway. Figure one (p.52), taken from Gronn (1999:33), provides a diagram that represents Gronn’s career model of leadership:

## **HISTORICAL ERA. C.1850**

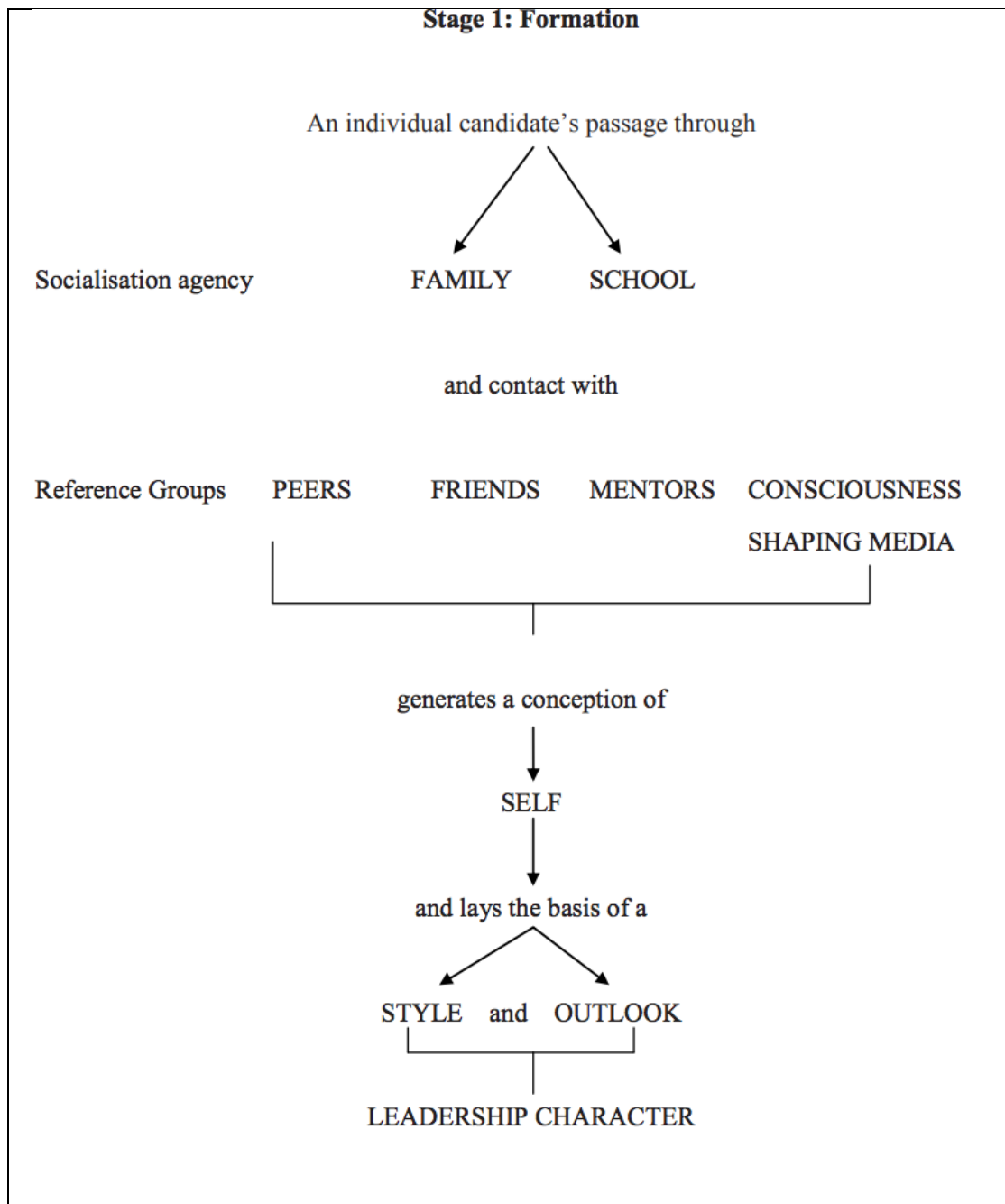


**Figure One: Gronn's career model of leadership (Gronn, 1999:33)**

Figure one clearly shows the three ‘macro contexts’ identified by Gronn by way of forming a leaders’ career in terms of historical, cultural and societal (Gronn, 1999). These contexts outline the era in which a leader is born, including the cultures that they experienced growing up as well as societal influences or impacts during that time. In order to fully understand a leaders’ experiences, decisions taken, and trajectories followed, these three macros need to be fully explored (Gronn, 1999).

The first of Gronn’s four stages is known as ‘formation’ and involves the period from ‘infancy to early adulthood’ (Gronn, 1999) and is shown in full in Figure Two (p.54) it is believed by Gronn (1999) that it is at this stage that the:

“Scaffolding of a character structure – ‘the essential {moral, social and psycho-physiological} properties of people who hold and want institutional responsibility’ (Kaplan, 1990a, p.419) – is erected”.



**Figure Two: Formation (Gronn, 1999:35).**

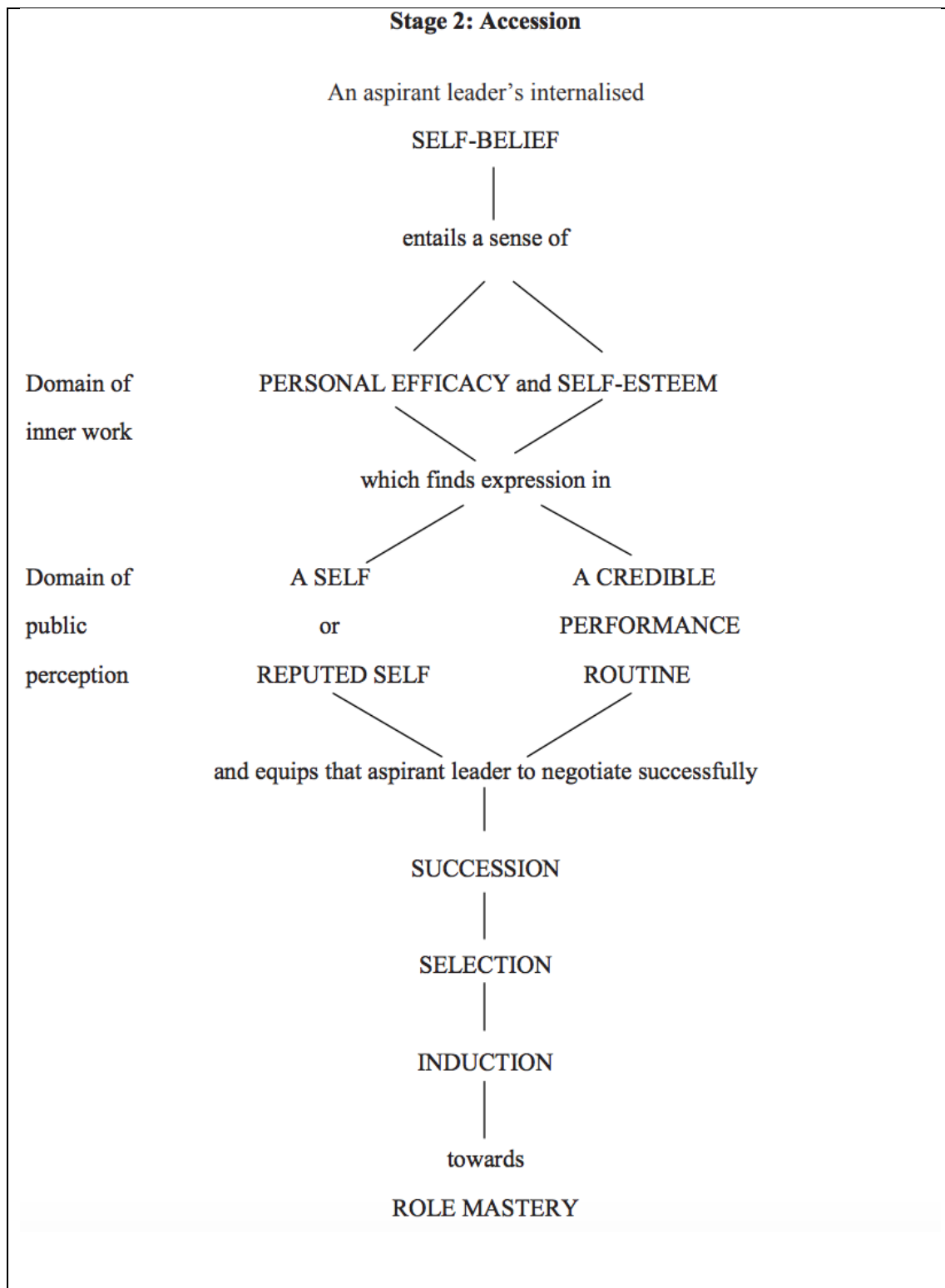
The second of the stages is the 'accession' stage described by Gronn (1999) as a stage of 'grooming'; this is where he believes that 'candidates rehearse or test their potential to lead' (p.34). It is during this time that Gronn (1999) believes that aspiring leaders seek the next step and that aspirant leaders have self-belief and display competency. This can be seen diagrammatically in Figure Three (p.53). This stage leads onto 'incumbency', the third stage

in the model. It is by this stage that leaders have honed their public personas (Gronn, 1999). This is the time that leaders are in post. The fourth and final stage is that of 'divestiture', the research conducted by Gronn (1999) revealed that this is the stage where leaders felt lack of fulfilment, suffered illness and experienced ageing.

It is at this stage that Pascale and Ribbins (1998) modified Gronn's fourth stage from 'divestiture' to 'moving on'. Ribbins (2003) explains that it is at this stage that leaders consider leaving headship; this can be moving into a new occupation, or to retire. He goes on to state that leaders make decisions based upon how they experienced the incumbency phase. It was at this point that some leaders opted for reinvention or rejuvenation, those heads that still felt motivated and 'enchanted' looked forward to moving on to different career paths. Those who became 'disenchanted' looked forward to retirement or faced divestiture.

This Thesis will focus on the Gronn (1999) model and will explore in detail the first two phases of 'Formation' and 'Accession'. Both phases will be discussed in the findings and discussion Chapter Five of this thesis.





**Figure Three: Accession (Gronn, 1999:37)**

Further studies undertaken by Mackenzie-Batterbury (2012) who explored the journey of 20 academy Principals, findings were similar to those recorded by Day and Bakioglu (1996) Gronn (1998) and Ribbins (2003) that leaders, Principals and headteachers all go through distinct life and career phases or stages. All recorded similar findings at each stage with schooling, and family upbringing playing a part in the shaping of their character and significant experiences and influential people being behind the drive and determination to succeed and run a successful academy.

A summary of these stages and phases of leadership can be found in Figure Four (p.58).

Stages	Phases	Gronn (1999)	Day and Bakioglu (1996)	Ribbins (2003)
1		Formation		Formation
2		Accession		Accession
3		Incumbency		Incumbency
	1		Initiation	Initiation
	2		Development	Development
	3		Autonomy	Autonomy
4	4	Divestiture	Disenchantment	Disenchantment / Enchantment

**Figure Four: A summary of the stages and phases of leadership.**

### ***Significant Influences on Career Journeys in Education Leadership***

When exploring career journeys, it is important to explore significant influences on the journey. This may encompass values, significant people or significant incidents that may have shaped the journey or the person or probably, more importantly, the particular choices along the journey to leadership. Crawford (2014) states that life history includes how personal experiences shape our own understanding of leadership and how to lead and as researchers we are seeking to understand the part these personal experiences play in an individual's' everyday lives.

## ***Family***

According to Gottfried et al (2011), home environments have an impact upon motivation, this starts from a young age where environments are stimulating and allow / encourage children to learn. As well as intellectually stimulating at home, it is believed that this encouragement and type of environments, where children are allowed to be curious and enabled to be intellectually stimulated, that it is likely to encourage motivation to lead 'because it is both conceptually and empirically linked to academic intrinsic motivation. Parker (2002) conducted research of five headteachers, in his study he explored the links between life histories and leadership styles, he summarised in the findings that there were key factors that each of the headteachers had in common. The first being, 'a secure early childhood', the second being 'parental desire for them to do well' and lastly 'the support, counsel and friendship of partners'.

This was also found in a similar study undertaken by Pascal and Ribbins (1998) who reported in their findings that almost all of the 10 participants (who were primary school headteachers) had come from "warm, hard-working and supportive families, characterized by a high regard for the importance of education" (p.15). It was also identified that having strong role models, as well as strong support structures in place, was a significant factor in the success of those headteachers (Pascal and Ribbins, 1998).

There were also similar findings in a study undertaken by West-Burnham (2009) who interviewed 18 headteachers. In the findings it was reported that role models had a significant influence, and these role models included family and friends with parents and siblings cited as having an influence by highly valuing education and providing advice.

Pace (1987) supports that leadership is not inherited, and is not genetic, but learned. He also proclaims that much of what potential leaders bring to the eventual leadership role is learnt from family exposure, this is echoed by Bass (1960) who also describes the significance of

childhood and adolescent experiences. Bass (1960) in his studies concluded that future leaders are likely to come from homes where they have been given the opportunity to problem solve:

“from homes where they have been stimulated and not left to their own devices; from homes where they have been treated as a function of their level of maturity rather than babied or pushed too rapidly; from organized harmonious homes emphasizing positive incentives” (p.198)

Bennis (1989) firmly believes that leadership is a skill that can be taught and / or learnt by anyone and everyone. He also infers that family environment in early childhood is the first phase of leadership development with adolescent experiences and schooling being the second phase. Bass (1960) ‘sees school experiences and school relationships as an increasing significance in the process of leadership development’.

Hartman (1999) also argue that women leaders have drivers that spring from childhood, they believe ‘it is these relationships within the immediate family that affect development at this stage of life, in terms of feelings of success, competence and confidence’.

Madsen (2008) implies that not all women leaders in this generation may have a supportive and enriching family environment and may have to master those leadership competencies in different ways.

### ***Schooling***

Bass (1981) champions that research studies show that it is not academic performance or IQ scores that are important in the development of future leaders, he implies that it is the leadership experiences at school in terms of being able to practice or rehearse leadership. This may be through extra-curricular activities such as leading a sports team or class rep etc. Gronn (1999) identifies schooling in the formation phase to be of significant importance. He states that it is significant influences within the school environment in terms of peers and friends that are important to the process, and in particular during the leader formation stage as this is about the

shaping of a leader. Gronn (1999) and Parker (2002) argue that both positive and negative experiences at school are important on the development of leaders. This echoes the findings of Bass (1981) in that it is the experiences as well as friends, peers and role models that are the important factor in the development of a leader. It is at this stage that modelling is taking place, role models such as teachers, parents and peers have an impact on young people's lives and experiences whilst in education can be of significance. Bennis (2003) advocates this and says it can be these experiences, or influential people, that motivate and inspire leaders. In his study of 'Geeks and Geezers', Bennis (2003) describes these defining moments as 'Crucibles' that he defines as the circumstances that cause an individual to be utterly transformed. In his study, these included pivotal moments like the loss of a parent at a young age, and others noted included fighting during the war. These are just a few documented in his study.

Bennis (2003) identified these crucibles as the event or relationship that 'forged a leader', one leader at the age of 8 founded the environmental group Tree Musketeers. Another declared that he designed and produced a magician show whilst at school and it was at this point he knew he was different, and this event set him apart. This leader went on to be a leading video game expert.

This is relatable to educational leadership where there has been similar emphasis placed on schooling and early childhood experiences. In studies undertaken by Inman (2007), a study of how leader academics lead within HE and Mackenzie-Batterbury (2012) who focused on academy Principals, both found that similar if not identical experiences were being identified as the same study undertaken by Bennis (2003). Respondents identified that formative experiences, both in education and in other aspects of life, noting mainly parental influence both positively and negatively having helped develop desire and motivation to be successful. Some identified these early experiences during the formative years as the key driver to wanting to become or been driven towards some form of leadership or management role, and it is this

that helped shape them as leaders. Inman (2007) identified that significant people who shaped them as leaders, or developed their desire to lead, were often teachers.

Based on literature it is evident that early childhood and educational experiences and environments play a key role in the development or shaping of educational leaders from a range of settings. This thesis hopes to include FE College Principals into the mix so that a good range across education sectors is covered, and then it can be gleaned that this is an accurate picture of educational leaders. This thesis also hopes to provide a sound basis that any future FE college Principal or educational leader can base their decisions on when deciding whether or not to take the plunge and become a leader in education. This will help with the ‘crisis’ within in educational leadership.

### *Career*

During the Accession Phase, Gronn (1999) identifies that educational leaders encounter significant people or experiences that impact on leadership development. This is also echoed by Inman (2007), Mackenzie-Batterbury (2012) and Francis (2015) who all reported instances of significant events, influences or significant people having an impact.

‘Critical turning points’ Gronn (1999) and ‘defining moments’ Parker (2002) are described as pivotal in motivating leaders during their careers. Parker (2002) concluded that for some educational leaders it was inspirational role models (school headteachers) that inspired or helped to drive their career forward, whether that was a positive experience or negative in that it inspired leaders to want to be better than the previous post holder (Sieber, 2011). It is during this time that ‘critical learning experiences’ (Parker, 2002) were often the defining moment or critical turning point in the leader's career.

Parker (2002) in his study of headteachers concluded that participants placed great value and emphasis on early opportunities to lead and or early promotions.

Significant people were described as parents, with one educational leader stating that it was her parents' desire for her to work and not go to university that evolved the desire to go to university and rebel against her parents. Another educational leader involved in the study undertaken by Francis (2015) stated that it was a teacher telling them that they were not university material that drove them to go to university. Most educational leaders interviewed across the three studies mentioned above spoke fondly about positive parental / teacher influences.

Walker and Qian (2006) discovered that those in a position at the start of their Principalship had taken the role firstly for a 'personal or career related decision' and secondly based on recognition by others within the school community. This relates to Gronn (1999) Formation phase in the model of leadership. During this phase, core aspects of a leader's character is identified, this includes peers and mentors that are supporting and helping in the development of self-identity and self-belief. It is the recognition from peers, mentors and often senior leaders that affirm one's identity as a leader as well as an identified style and outlook (Gronn, 1999). The ability to role rehearse or act out management duties also develops a leader's confidence in their own self-belief. This is recognised by Gronn (1999) in his Accession phase, Gronn (1999) identified that it is during this phase that leaders 'test their potential to lead by direct comparison with existing leaders and prospective rivals for advancement'. This forms part of invaluable recognition from peers and it is firmly believed that it is a leader's opportunity to demonstrate to talent spotters that one is worthy to be acknowledged and is ready, willing, and able to lead. These two phases secure an aspirant leader's self-belief that one is ready for the role. This once again demonstrates that significant people during an aspirant leader's career plays a pivotal role, these significant people include peers, colleagues, existing leaders as well



as critical friends. Browne-Ferrigno (2003) in their research reported that participants who had received opportunities to role rehearse and try their hand at leadership positions found it invaluable and were more confident in their journey to leadership after they had gained this prior experience and the opportunity to assume leadership positions.

### ***Mentors / Coaches***

There are many definitions and / or forms of mentoring, some are described as coaches. The importance of these key figure heads has already been proven in studies globally. It is important to this piece of research as the researcher believes they may play a key role in supporting Principals or those seeking Principalship. Both Inman (2007) and Mackenzie-Batterbury (2012) recognised mentors in their studies. Gronn (1999) also places mentors alongside peers and friends. The researcher is keen to find out if mentors such as teachers play any kind of role in the leadership journey like other studies have found.

Mentoring is an important element in the preparation of Principals in many countries including Singapore, The United States of America (USA) and the UK. In particular, in Singapore and the USA, because it forms a significant part of the preparation and training for aspiring Principals. In Singapore it is a compulsory part of the preparation to Principalship and plays a pivotal role to ensure Principals are best prepared for the role, in Singapore it is believed to have direct links to school effectiveness (Hallinger and Heck, 1999:179). In the UK it is a voluntary programme that takes place during the first year as Principal (Bush and Jackson, 2002).

The role of a mentor in the UK has been defined by Smith (1993) as:

“The role of mentor is to act as ‘wise counsellor’, guide, advisor to younger or newer colleagues – thus investing in their future effectiveness” (p.2)

This is echoed by Bush et al (1996) who also concur that mentoring includes peer support, counselling, socialisation and coaching. In a number of leadership studies, including the work of Thomson et al (2001), Sandler (2002) and Frearson (2002), all discovered mentoring and coaching to be evident as part of the process of leadership development. Frearson (2002) is of particular interest as this author focused on the post compulsory sector which encompasses the FE sector.

Browne-Ferrigno and Muth (2006) have suggested that mentoring helps aspirant Principals / headteachers to build confidence as well as aid socialisation. They believe that the importance of learning from other role models, learning from experienced headteachers and other senior leaders not only develops confidence but also builds professional identity.

This is echoed by Rhodes and Fletcher (2013) who also suggest that:

“At this stage provision of opportunities for mastery and for socialisation to enable a feeling of belonging via coaching and mentoring can potentially increase confidence and self-efficacy, coping and perseverance in the journey to leadership” (p.54).

These two authors believe that it is at this stage that senior leadership positions are being sought and therefore if exposed to experienced leaders or headteachers who can act as coaches or mentors can nurture the desire and talent to move into headship/Principalship. As if to almost role rehearse with the support or security of a safe environment which in turn develops self-belief (Browne-Ferrigno, 2003 and Gronn, 1999).

Rhodes and Fletcher (2013) argue that schools that use coaches and mentors, who they believe enhances self-efficacy, contribute to the transition to headship and could strengthen coping and perseverance once in the early stages of headship. Whilst coaches and mentors seem to form

an integral part of leadership development in schools, there is very little research exploring if this firstly happens in the development stages of FE College Principals and secondly, do FE College Principals have the same opportunities?

In research undertaken by Chow (2003) in Singapore and Daresh (2004) in the USA, both argued that mentoring formed an integral part in the development of aspiring Principals. The research findings also reported that the majority of those who had received some mentoring went onto become headteachers (Bush and Middlewood, 2013). The researcher believes that this is quite significant and believes that similar findings will be evident from those Principals interviewed. The lack of formal mentoring in the UK, especially in FE colleges, means that aspiring Principals may not get the development or encouragement they may need or seek. Bearing in mind that in studies globally it has been recognised as being integral to the development of Principals, coupled with the reluctance of managers to move into leadership positions could create problems for leadership in FE. As mentioned previously in chapter one, there is a global crisis in leadership and a continued reluctance of managers to step up that could worsen the said crisis. If mentoring could be the difference for aspiring Principals and it clearly is in other countries, could this mean that more managers would take the leap and assume Principalships in the UK and in particular in FE colleges? At present, and with the changing nature of FE including the ever-changing environment, this could be off putting for future or aspirant Principals. Husband and Lloyd (2019) found middle managers are often very reactive and not proactive, and often feel like ‘firefighters’. Many move into middle management positions and tend to carry on where the previous incumbent left off and this detracts from the ‘visionary’ or ‘creative leader’. They are often good teachers who have moved into leadership positions, often with little or no training. Husband and Lloyd (2019) also suggest that in ‘order for middle managers to be successful they need to be provided with opportunities to continue their education and development as leaders’. If FE colleges invested

in this and supported aspirant leaders with some form of mentoring, it is believed that this fear of moving up as described by the two authors, might diminish.

It is believed by the researcher that if support could be given to middle managers and they could be nurtured in terms of their leadership development and abilities, these leaders may be less reluctant to move into Principalship positions. There is clearly a need for some form of mentoring, not only at middle management level to support the move into Principalship (Chow (2003 and Daresh, 2004) but during early Principalship to allow the continual development of the leader.

Mentoring could support the self-belief of aspiring Principals. This is something that the researcher believes will be evident in the findings of this study and will be discussed in more detail in subsequent chapters.

Mentoring in the UK has been mainly school focused and in particular with a focus on those who are seeking headship in schools, mentoring forms part of the professional development programmes including NPHQ. In the more recent studies of Mackenzie-Batterbury (2012) who reported that mentors were evident in the journey to academy Principalship, the findings described that some of those academy Principals interviewed experienced a headteacher as their role model and mentor. Interviewees also recognised that those experienced headteachers provided them with valuable experience, often letting them undertake the duties of headteachers, which in turn developed their confidence and skills. It is this valuable experience that authors such as Gronn (1999), Bush and Middlewood, 2013) along with Rhodes and Fletcher (2013) believe develop or build self-efficacy and perseverance in the headship role. Could this be the answer, or at least part of a solution, for the well-documented leadership 'crisis' in education?

There are two forms of socialisation for educators learning a new role, the first has been defined by Crow (2001) as being 'professional, this includes preparing to take on an occupational role such as the role of principal' (p.187) and the second form as defined by Crow (2001) to be focusing on 'organisational which is the context of the role' (p.187), this includes adjustment to the school or college.

Mentoring and coaching can be used as an approach to facilitate socialisation and self-belief. MacBeath (2011) states that mentors and coaches are crucial aspects of support and challenge. MacBeath's research discovered that deputy heads found the exposure to others in similar positions helped to build their own confidence as well as allowing for opportunities to network and reflect on the complexities of leadership in a supportive environment. The research also concluded that mentoring and coaching was a powerful tool in professional development and provided a 'safe space' to discuss challenges. Macbeath (2011) goes on to state that school leaders benefit, and need professional programmes, and where they have this level of support, they are intellectually challenged and emotionally satisfied. MacBeath believes that the task of 'leading a school becomes less daunting to the incumbent and more appealing to the career deputy' (p.119).

Searby and Armstrong (2016) states that Assistant Principals or deputies as they are known in schools are often the 'neglected' managers who have relatively little attention or support. They are rarely mentioned in leadership preparation curricula, even though they are at what these authors declare as being at the epicentre of a school structure. According to Searby and Armstrong (2016) it is during this stage that these Deputy Heads / Assistant Principals are first socialised into administrative roles. It is believed that during this time that Deputy Heads / Assistant Principals develop behaviours, values and attitudes that shape their career success and future leadership practice. These authors also state that on the job training, rather than Principal / headteacher preparation programmes, are the reason for this level to gain a

promotion and that is based on the competency of the Deputy or Assistant Principal and their leadership ability.

Searby et al (2016) found that Assistant Principals tended to 'receive mentoring informally rather than through structured programmes, with the primary mentor coming from their senior Principals. Principals in this US study acknowledged their need for mentoring in this realm' (p.164). This was also echoed by Daresh (2004) who states that:

"Having a mentor is the single most powerful thing an assistant principal can do to enhance personal survival and effectiveness" (p.97).

Leadership mentoring is suggested by Browne-Ferrigno and Muth (2006) as best to enable aspirant Principals to build confidence and aid socialisation. Fletcher and Rhodes (2013) echo this but also suggest that it develops self-belief too.

Oleszewski et al (2012) also found that where Assistant Principals had been mentored, and in particular mentored by a Principal, they were better prepared for the role of Principal. Mentoring is considered to be an integral part of an aspirant Principal's journey to leadership as some of these authors have stated. Where Principals have received a mentor, whether it is through a structured programme or informally by a Principal, it is clear that it helps the progression to the next level of Principalship and is valued by those who have had the experience of a mentor.

The researcher is interested to find out if any of the Principals interviewed in this study have had any formal or informal training that includes any form of mentoring or coaching.

## ***Leadership Development***

Leadership development is seen as key in developing effectiveness within education. Within the school sector alone there is widely written research on leadership development and its effectiveness, this is not the case within the FE sector, both research and development are less widely developed (Mujis et al, 2006).

Leadership development as defined by Day (1999) as:

“expanding the collective capacity of organizational members to engage effectively in leadership roles and processes” (p.68).

There are many forms of leadership development for aspiring Principals, there are formal programmes such as the NPQH for those seeking headship in a school. For those seeking Principalship in an FE college, there are programmes such as the Aspiring Principals which has recently been rebranded to Senior Leadership & Management Development Programme. The latter includes building resilience and confidence to lead transformational change and empowering and engaging employees to name but a few of the key components of the rebranded programme. This is delivered through the AOC.

The previous programme Aspiring Principals, run by the Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS), focused on the theory and practice of leadership and was largely assignment based.

As Bush (2016) suggests, a Principal’s qualification and prior experience does not fully prepare professionals for the demanding role of Principal. His research suggests that many schools fail to provide any systematic training. In 2012 the coalition government dropped the NPQH.

Bush (2008) suggests that there is a need for ‘individualised learning’ approaches that include ‘facilitation’, ‘mentoring’ and ‘coaching’. There is a lot of literature that supports the notion of using mentoring and coaching as a strategy in leadership development and leadership learning

(Holmes, 2003; Simkins et al., 2006, Hanbury, 2009; Matthews et al., 2011; Crawford and Earley, 2011). The NPQH programme reported the successful elements of the programme were found to be ‘peer networks’, ‘placements’ and ‘coaching’ (Crawford and Earley, 2011, p.110).

Barber et al (2010) concur that preferential conditions for learning as being able to ‘learn from role models. Matthews (2011) argues that it is preferential to have ‘opportunities to lead’. This is also echoed by MacBeath (2007) who also claims that ‘opportunities to exercise leadership enhance learning’ (p.253).

Bush (2008) focuses on strategies for leadership learning such as coaching, Heck (2003) and Brundrett (2010) suggest socialisation theory is providing an increasingly convincing underpinning for leadership preparation (p.155).

MacBeath (2007) argues that everyone is a learner, including students, Principals and teachers etc. He believes that ‘the capacity for leadership arises out of powerful learning experiences’ (p.253). Bush (2008) argues that whilst leadership development is widely acknowledged, there is no real evidence to suggest that there is a clear route for aspiring leaders. There are existing optional programmes for leadership development, however none are compulsory.

Barber et al (2010) claims that there are a number of education systems that are ‘creating opportunities for school leaders to learn from one and other’ (p.16) and that these opportunities are ‘valued more highly’ (p.17).

Zhang and Brundrett (2010) advocate professional learning and leadership socialisation as important sources in grounding knowledge.



### ***Professional Development and Training***

There is a lot of interest in and a strong emphasis on leadership preparation and development within education leadership across the world. (Gunter, 2001 and Davis et al, 2013). Over the years there has been lots of research studies that have explored professional development and training of leaders within education. The focus has been predominantly in schools across the world. The research undertaken has illuminated some positive developments, as well as some concerns over such programmes. As Davis et al (2013) suggests, his findings have described these preparation programmes as failures, and this has brought into question the relevance of these programmes. These authors state that some critics of such preparation programmes state that they do not prepare Principals for the increasingly complex challenges and problems faced.

### **Socialisation**

The term ‘socialisation’ can carry different meanings; Leithwood et al (1992) after Merton (1963) defines the term ‘socialisation’ as follows:

“Socialisation incorporates processes by which an individual selectively acquires the knowledge, skills and dispositions needed to perform effectively the role of school-leader” (p.10)

This is echoed by Earley and Weindling (2004) who found Merton’s (1963) socialisation theory approach to understanding leadership and headship development. In this view of socialisation, they identify two phases. The first is professional socialisation, which refers to the period leading up to taking on the role of headteachers and involves personal experiences of schooling and teaching (Earley and Weindling, 2004). The second phase identified was organisational socialism, which involves learning ‘the knowledge, values and behaviours to perform a specific role after appointment’ (Earley and Weindling, 2004). Leithwood et al (1992) conducted studies involving both aspiring and practicing Principals in Canada.

Leithwood et al (1992) concluded from these studies that ‘most people thought they had experienced a moderately helpful socialisation, he also concluded that most of the participants recognised that they went through similar socialisation patterns’.

Similarly, Ribbins (2003) identified in the ‘formation’ stage that early socialisation influences such as family and school shape the personality of future heads. This was also true in the study undertaken by Mackenzie-Batterbury (2012) who concluded that:

“The formative experiences of family and schooling contribute significantly to the initial formation of values and personal qualities. Within the journey, the experiences and encounters occurring between the four strands contribute to the development and crystallisation of these values and personal qualities”. (p.56)

A similar study by Earley and Weindling (1999), Harris et al (2003) and Crow (2007) of new heads suggested ‘that socialisation is a staged process involving complex changes in the role conceptualization and identity’.

Other authors including Earley and Weindling (2004), Browne-Ferrigno (2003) and Simkins, et al, (2009) suggest that ‘full socialisation into the new role occurs after appointment. It is during this period that personal and professional values, abilities and interpersonal skills seem to be critically important’.

Gronn (1999) suggests that when researching about an individual leader’s life and career journey, regard must be given to historical details as well as society and culture.

Gronn (1999) in his career model of leadership identifies socialisation in the ‘formation’ phase

“Formation means those preparatory socialization processes and experiences which served to later position them in their previous incarnation as leadership aspirants in a state of social and psychological readiness to assume responsibility and authority” (p.32)

It is at this stage that Gronn (1999) believes that either by intention or by influence cohorts of leaders emerge. Armstrong (1973), who in his ascriptive model describes a form of ‘anticipatory socialization’ in which echoes this:

“The offspring of a socially exclusive stratum was selected and segregated at a young age for later elite roles” (p.20)

Gronn (1999) also describes how English public schools over the years have played a part in shaping and developing leaders, where leaders were prepared for these elite roles, firstly preparatory schooling, boarding school and then finally a degree from either Oxford or Cambridge. It is clear from researching the many studies based on career journeys that socialisation does play a part in shaping the leader and their career journeys. However, findings from these key studies of Gronn (1999), Day and Bakioglu (1996) amongst others is that in the cases of Headteachers and Principals, many were from a working-class background and would not have had such privileged upbringings.

That said, the literature that exists and surrounds leaders within education clearly identifies socialisation as a key part in the journey of educational leaders, regardless of social class, as Gronn (1999) states family, culture and schooling as well as peers, friends and mentor can all be influential.

Duke (1987) also believes that socialisation is important and states that:

“Becoming a school leader is an on-going process of socialisation” (p.261).

Parkay and Hall (1992) also hinted at the importance of socialisation in their studies of high school Principals in the USA. These authors recognised that socialisation plays a part in the Principals’ stages of development in the form of their ‘personal characteristics’.

In the later works of Ribbins (2003), who adapted the Day and Bakioglu (1996) phases and the career stage model by Gronn (1999), to form a model of pathways for school leaders, within this model the ‘formation’ stage remained and again is recognised for the early influences of socialisation from those agencies such as family and schooling, similarly to that of Gronn (1999).

Earley and Weindling (2007) describe in their career stages of headship that Stage 0, which is preparation prior to headship is the stage where “career people develop a conception of

headship during their professional socialisation” (p.74). In their study most headteachers agreed that off the job training and development learnt from own experiences as well as working with peers and good practitioners helped in the preparation to headship.

It is apparent that socialisation plays an integral part in not only the forming of the character of the educational leaders as suggested by Gronn (1999), it is a key part within the development of the leaders’ career journeys. Extensive studies have been undertaken within the fields of compulsory education in that of schools and journeys to headship, and also more recently within HE. It is apparent from the research that headteachers and Principals seem to follow a traditional route of becoming a leader and many of those included in studies go onto HE and gain degrees and then enter into a career of teaching before moving up and becoming a leader. There are some however, that follow a non-traditional route and rather than obtaining a degree, work outside of education and enter into the education sector at a later stage in their careers. The researcher hypothesises, based on working within this sector, as well as speaking with educational leaders, the researchers’ that this will be the case of most of the FE Principals participating within this research project. The researcher additionally believes that self-belief also forms an integral part within the journey to leadership as found in the studies by Gronn (1999), Ribbins (2003), and those more recent studies by Inman (2011) and Mackenzie – Batterbury (2012), and the recent work of Rhodes (2013) this will form the basis of the next section.

## **Identity Change**

The role of the FE college Principal has significantly changed since Incorporation. FE College Principals inevitably tended to concentrate more on finance, with few FE College Principals

managing to persuade their governors that education was still important (Withers, 1998).

Financial control was a dominant factor and preoccupation for the board of governors.

These Principals had new accountability and in turn felt there was an increase in isolation in their role. Withers (1998)

“All those in post before incorporation took the view that their job was not the same as the one to which they had been appointed. Most felt that the reality was that leadership had now been replaced by ‘firefighting’. Little training seemed to have been available for the new tasks and the only personal support came from their own peer group, formalized at regional and national levels”. (p.51)

According to Withers (1998) FE College Principals, during this time of incorporation, were either resilient or had succumbed to the new stresses and strains of the job and chose to leave their institutions. Those that stayed in post found themselves isolated from staff, often feeling the burden of not only their job being at stake should the college not run effectively but the feeling of personal responsibility for the colleges’ survival. Those with the resilience to continue in post often found themselves changing job titles to Principal & CEO.

Withers in (1998) conducted research that explored the experience of incorporation, specifically focusing on FE College Principals and their impressions. During this study he found that the attitude of each Principal owed much to his or her background, philosophy and temperament. Similarly, Bandura (1994) also believes that self-efficacy is

"The belief in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to manage prospective situations."

In other words, the Principal's self-efficacy / belief in his or her ability to succeed in a particular situation, which ultimately stems from their make-up, past experiences and / or their upbringing. Bandura described these beliefs as determinants of how people think, behave, and feel (1994).

Crow et al (2016) states that ‘Identity provides motivation for an individual to take on and enact a role’.

Wenger (1998) argues that ‘One can design roles, but one cannot design the identities that will be constructed through these roles’ (p. 229)

Scribner and Crow (2012) found in their research of school leaders that:

“The concept of professional identity provides a valuable antidote to the overreliance on technocratic orientations to school leaders’ work by help-ing us understand what influences a leader’s behaviors and what drives a leader’s willingness and ability to take on and enact creative and effective leadership in a high-stakes, dynamic knowledge society” (p.245)

Wenger (1998) suggests that we can define identity by defining who we are, by where we have been and where we are going. This is echoed by Scribner and Crow (2012) who state that a Principal uses his past experiences (e.g., family background) as well as his future hopes (educational reform) to construct and negotiate present identities. It is believed that these professional identities can influence the way in which individuals enact a role (Burke and Stets, 2012). Research presented by Scribner and Crow (2012) found several professional identities were employed by a school leader and that these changed throughout the course of his life and career.

The changing nature of the role of an FE college Principal over many years has seen such Principals developing their skills, and to some extent becoming removed from curriculum and curriculum issues and focusing on finances, mergers, government priorities. With some FE colleges, Principals involved in overseeing new builds or reductions to curriculum and even, in some cases, whole campuses, as a result of cuts to funding. Withers (2000) stated that Principals are just as likely to be spending a lot of time in meetings with architects and builders as with curriculum people. Similarly, Principals noted in this same study that their roles now include that of ‘estate agent’, ‘trouble-shooter’ and ‘front man’ for the college. The majority of Principals stated that finance was something that occupied a lot of their time.

Withers (2000) described in his research how one of the Principals stated that you have to ‘reinvent’ yourself. A further Principal stated that there is a real reluctance within senior

managers / staff to take the leap to promotion, especially when it comes to Principalship. The hours and the demands, coupled with isolation and the burden of ‘the buck stops with you’, are considered the main factors that are causing this reluctance. This is echoed across leadership in education as earlier stated when describing the leadership ‘crisis’.

The identity of FE College Principals has evolved resulting in identity change for those involved. There are clearly an array of changes to identity, whether this is through the job title and role itself, with the simplistic changes such as the move towards Principal & CEO title moving on to those more drastic changes such as becoming business and finance driven to ensure survival in the volatile sector that is FE.

There is no question that becoming an FE College Principal is a big step for those seeking this prestigious position. It is a daunting thought for some, there are people working within FE colleges that have considered or are considering making the move to Principal. There are those that feel ready, and these may be people that have significant leadership experience or have lots of years’ teaching experience. The journey to Principal generally involves gaining several promotions through the management structure before gaining the role. This can take a number of years for some and for others, those that are more confident and ambitious or those who are championed by others, tend to move up the ladder quicker. There have been studies undertaken within the school sector, with particular focus on the journey to become school headteachers. The researcher discovered that there are preparation programmes which exist for those seeking such positions and there has been for many years. Such programmes aim to prepare those people identified by peers, headteachers or school leaders. Young, Petersen and Short (2002) identify that the ‘pool of qualified candidates willing to assume positions as school leaders is growing smaller’. There seems to be this real reluctance of people within education to assume these positions. The preparation programmes are aiming to alleviate some of the fears

construed by many and seeks to provide support for those seeking headships. Within the FE sector, there is no real preparation courses or training as noted by Briggs (2007). Instead, those newly appointed Principals often seek mentors usually more established Principals who have tended to be successful.

Becoming a Principal is a transformative process; it can be a predictable career path for many within the field of education who seek greater responsibility (Ortiz, 1982). Effective preparation programmes are believed to be most effective when those in posts can apply newly acquired knowledge to professional practice whilst continuing to develop and being monitored. This tends to be by a mentor and in most cases, this is the current Principal. Browne-Ferrigno (2003) states that a critical step in the professional growth process was that of those Principals whose professional behaviours and mind set changed, professional growth happens when Principals understand the roles and responsibilities of being a Principal. Those who have been brave enough to step up to the role of Principal tend to do so when peers / colleagues look to you as a leader. A participant in the research undertaken by Browne-Ferrigno (2003) stated that

“When people see you as a leader or ask for your guidance, you start to feel like an administrator. I think the change in my perspective came as a result of the way other people saw me” (p.489).

The reluctance for not moving onto become a Principal is believed to be that teachers face the reality of complex pressures and observe how their Principals respond to the challenges. Not all Principals – even the effective ones – have the needed dispositions and skills to serve as role models for aspiring Principals (Crow and Matthews, 1998; Williamson and Hudson, 2001).

It is believed by authors that a leader’s identity changes with the differing roles undertaken, the researcher has pointed out that the FE College Principalship position is one that has evolved and changed over the years with Principals recalling the change from Principal to Principal & CEO as being significant. Research found that Principals had to adapt to changes. For example,



it was noted that colleges were becoming more business-like and therefore Principals had to evolve with these new roles. Research also found that Principals felt that they had become more isolated with some authors evidencing the lack of preparation for these new roles.

The researcher believes that findings in this research will echo those found in this literature review and that whilst these FE College Principals may follow a different career path, the researcher believes that identity change will most certainly be evident. What will be interesting to find out is to what extent is identity change is mediated in the journey to leadership.

## **Self-Belief**

Self-belief is believed to be firmly grounded under social cognitive theory as recognised by Bandura (1991) who suggests that “human behavior is extensively motivated and regulated by the ongoing exercise of self-influence” (p.248) and that this encompasses the self-efficacy mechanism. He also suggests that this plays a fundamental role as it includes thought, action, affect and motivation. Bandura (1991) also goes on to suggest that people form beliefs about their own capabilities, what they can do as well as anticipate consequences, set goals for themselves and plan courses of action that are likely to produce the desired outcomes.

Self-efficacy very much encompasses self-belief and as suggested by Bandura (1986), it is these beliefs that influence the perceived causes of successes and failures. Bandura (1991) states ‘that a person’s beliefs about their own capabilities to exercise control over their own level of functioning and over events that affect their lives’ is pivotal and persuasive (p. 257).

He also goes on to suggest that:

“people’s beliefs in their efficacy influence the choices they make, their aspirations, how much effort they mobilize in a given endeavor, how they persevere in the face of difficulties and setbacks, whether their thought patterns are self-hindering or self-aiding, the amount of stress they experience in coping with taxing environmental demands, and their vulnerability to depression” (Bandura, 1991, p.257).

According to Pajares and Schunk (2002) and Bandura (1986), 'social comparisons with peers are critical to the development of self-belief' and that highly efficacious people tend to have better results or outputs than those with low levels of self-efficacy. People who do not believe in one's own capabilities to exercise control over their own actions undermine their own efforts to cope with demanding situations. This is also echoed by Bandura and Locke (2003) who describes that it can affect whether individuals think in 'self-enhancing or self-debilitating ways'.

According to Bandura (2012), people are not always in control of some elements that can impact on the self-concept, and that environmental influences, emotional states, thought processes and performance levels need to be considered. Bandura firmly believes that there are four elements that make up a person's self-belief, the first being through 'mastery experiences' which encompass one's own perseverance and resilience. He believes that if a person only experiences success then they become easily discouraged by failures. Bandura believes that resilience is built by learning to manage failures so that a person can learn from those failures. He goes on to state that the second element that plays an important role to one's self-belief is through 'social modelling'. What is meant by this is that by surrounding one's self with similar people who succeed, one can build upon their own belief in one's own capabilities and that one's own confidence and aspirations will be developed and increase. The third element believed by Bandura to have an influence is 'social persuasion', it is believed that a person's resolve can increase the chance of success and it's believed to be derived from people being persuaded to believe in themselves. It is this element where individuals are encouraged to measure success by 'self-improvement' rather than triumphs over others'. The final element concerns choice processes. This is quite an influential factor, as not only does this impact the choices people make, this is actually fundamental to set the course of their life paths and what they become.

Now that it is clear that self-belief is evident as part of the self-efficacy process, it is important to make the link to leadership. In a study of educational leaders in schools undertaken by Petridou et al (2014) it was evident that self-efficacy was instrumental for leaders and leadership development. He concluded that developing a leader's' self-efficacy is an important element in improving the quality of leaders within schools. This was echoed by Dimmock and Hattie (1996) who state that self-efficacy is about having confidence that one can achieve goals and produce outcomes. They concluded that those Principals with high levels of self-efficacy are more likely to accommodate and cope with change. This is important for FE Principals as the sector is undergoing, and has always been partial to, significant levels of change and challenges, with the most recent of changes being the local area reviews as mentioned previously. Authors such as Wood and Bandura (1989) also state that people in leadership roles must have a robust sense of personal self-efficacy to be able to remain focused and persevere. Dimmock and Hattie (1996) agree that self-efficacy is built up of a Principal's own beliefs in their own capabilities, to exercise control over events that affect their own lives and others, and it is these beliefs that they label as self-efficacy.

Research suggests that self-belief is evident within the career journey of educational leaders, this is whether they are headteachers or Principals. Very little literature exists focusing on FE, which is of particular interest to the researcher. Literature that exists that included that of self-belief in the career journeys of educational leaders is geared around compulsory education and HE. With a number of studies undertaken based around schools, evidence suggests that self-belief is not apparent until, what Gronn (1999) suggests as, the 'accession' stage. This is the stage where aspiring heads or Principals are alert to leadership opportunities and vacancies. In a number of studies undertaken over recent years on the journey to leadership, including that of headteachers and Principals across sectors including HE and compulsory education, the

importance of self-belief has begun to emerge and be recognised by many authors to play an integral part in the successful journey to leadership, as Rhodes (2012) suggests:

“A small number of studies have begun to suggest that the management of self-belief may be an important but neglected factor in the journey to leadership” (p.2)

Gronn (1999), in his studies of headteachers, hinted that this is the ‘accession’ stage in a career model to leadership. Gronn (1999) noted that there were two types of self-belief, firstly a sense of efficacy, involving confidence and competency. The second notion being that of self-esteem, feeling worthy and valued. Day et al. (2006) noted that ‘self-belief influences personal efficacy in teaching, and this is also true of wanting to move on to headship’. There has to be a level of self-belief in order for those aspiring leaders to even contemplate applying for a headship or Principalship. Draper and McMichael (1998) who describe “people who have a strategic approach to their career with headship in their sights, feel that they are ready and are not put off by the demands of the job”. This is echoed by Brundrett and Terrell (2003) who, when describing the ‘accession’ stage of Gronn and Ribbins career models of leadership, hints at self-belief. He describes how candidates look for advancement, seeking experience into a leadership role, again the researcher believes this demonstrates an aspirational leader has some self-belief, as without self-belief leaders would probably not seek advancement. As suggested by Rhodes (2012), there has been some recent studies that suggest that increased self-confidence and self-esteem may be beneficial in the facilitation of a journey to leadership. Rhodes (2012) also intimates that although studies on self-belief exist, there is still much to be explored, in particular the management of self-belief, as part of the journey to leadership remains unexplored.

Cowie and Crawford (2009) conducted research exploring seven headteachers and their career paths. These authors reported in their findings that all of those interviewed had taken very different paths and at some point throughout their journey had self-belief, usually at a point in

their career where they were being encouraged to take on responsibilities. The heads also talked about being ‘talent spotted’.

“These development opportunities appear to have broadened their outlook and helped develop confidence and self-belief” (Cowie and Crawford, 2009, p.11)

It was also noted by Cowie and Crawford (2009) that those heads interviewed needed to feel and believe they could take on a headship before embarking onto such a position, with some of the heads stating that they would not have gone for promotions if they had not been encouraged to do so by peers or those in more senior positions. This became a theme and Cowie and Crawford (2009) noted that other heads had similar experiences with colleagues, family and headteachers all encouraging them to progress onto headship. This clearly shows that without self-belief having been instilled in the interviewees, they may not have progressed into headship positions. This demonstrates that self-belief plays an integral part within the journey to leadership. It is clear from these studies that talent recognition of these individuals was key, and if they had not been recognised as potential senior leaders some may not have made the move to headship. It is clear here that these colleagues, family members and headteachers, as described by Cowie and Crawford, played a key role in not only the development of the leader but supported to the point where the individual’s self-belief either improved or was cemented. It is also clear that without access to such people, this may impact on one’s self-belief and more crucially whether they actually move up or not. It is important here to state what talent recognition is and why it is important to this study. Firstly, is talent recognition different from talent identification? Research shows that they are one in the same and so can be described as or defined as:

“Talent is a complex of aptitudes or intelligences, learned skill and knowledge, and motivations attitudes-dispositions, that predispose an individual to successes in an occupation, vocation, profession, art or business” (Gardner, 1992).

Secondly, it is important that talent is recognised. There have been studies undertaken in schools but there seems to be a gap in literature when it comes to FE, with Rhodes (2007) reporting findings that ‘talent identification in schools is ill served’.

As McLoughlin (2018) suggests, the FE sector should be succession planning with 45% of Principals reaching retirement age sooner rather than later. Table Six demonstrates the proportion of Principals in this sample who are nearing retirement age. At the time of writing this thesis, there are twelve Principals in their fifties with six already in their sixties. With this in mind, as well as a reluctance to step up, talent identification is going to be important to the sector, especially to aid the succession planning. Previous studies have touched on talent recognition. Notably Inman (2007) recognised that it was important and linked to succession planning, however the findings supported by other authors described this as being left to chance.

The researcher is intrigued to see if this will be the same in FE. Notably leaders in FE tend to follow very different paths to those of school headteachers, is talent recognised in FE, and if it is, by who? The literature suggests that self-belief along with significant people are integral to leadership development. This will be discussed further in the discussion section of chapter five.

Gronn (1999) indicated that in order to progress into a position of headship, heads needed to have a sense of self-belief and self-efficacy. This was evident in Gronn’s (1999) ‘accession stage’. There is also evidence in the ‘induction’ and ‘establishment’ stages as suggested by Oplatka (2012) whereby Principals starts to feel confident and competent in their role. Oplatka (2012) also suggests it is worth noting that Principals do not always follow a linear path and some Principals included in research often move backwards and forwards through the various stages.

In the wide range of studies explored, and in particular that of Gronn (1999), they have uncovered compelling evidence to suggest that self-belief is evident although not necessarily before the position of headship or Principal occurs. However, it has been noted in some studies that self-belief occurs when the aspiring heads or Principals begin to look for opportunities to progress into these roles. Self-belief can be initiated by praise from peers, supportive family members as well as prior achievements and accomplishments. Some of the heads interviewed by Gronn (1999) mentioned supportive families or a colleague or boss that had pushed them to go for promotions, without which they would not have sought promotions.

The researcher could argue that self-belief and self-efficacy are inextricably linked. Bandura (2003) describes self-efficacy as 'beliefs in one's capabilities to organise and execute the courses of actions to produce given attainments'. The research focuses on the gestation of self-efficacy in future leaders, and this poses the question: what intrinsic qualities and extrinsic experiences contribute to achieving self-efficacy? As Goddard (2004) suggests, self-efficacy should not be confused with generalisations of self. Whereas other forms of self, such as self-esteem and self-worth, are indiscriminate, self-efficacy is specific to a particular task. This is not to say that self-efficacy, self-esteem and self-worth are disparate. Goddard argues that self-efficacy for a given task could be low, however self-esteem is not affected as little or no self-worth has been invested in doing the task to a certain level or standard. This is further compounded by self-evaluation of ability. For example, a person could be highly skilled at a task, and yet has a low level of self-efficacy for the task due to intrinsic high standards. Clearly the antithesis of this example can also be considered. This links to Cowie and Crawford (2009), who state that some leaders required no external motivation to progress into a leadership role, suggesting a high degree of self-efficacy for a leadership role already exists. Others required the input of family members including parents, partners and or managers. This raises another

interesting question. Can the talents of genuinely capable, potential leaders be lost due to low self-efficacy? Rhodes (2012) states:

“Persistent low self-efficacy may lead to avoidance or disengagement from a leadership journey and in some cases unreasonably derail those who could lead well but whose talent may be lost.” (p.444)

Therefore, another aspect of this research will focus on talent recognition and how extrinsic influences can affect self-efficacy in a potential future leader.

### ***Self-Belief and The Journey to Leadership***

Self-belief encompasses self-esteem, self-confidence and self-efficacy. The term self-esteem is often used to describe how an individual feels about themselves and has been defined by Rosenberg (1965, 30) ‘as an individual’s positive or negative attitude towards the self’.

For leaders to take up a leadership position, it is believed that self-confidence and self-belief need to be fostered throughout the journey. Self-belief can be influential in the journey to leadership; this may need to be instilled into some potential leaders by family, mentors, and existing leaders. Often leaders do not identify themselves as leaders and in some cases, others propose the idea to them. Those more confident, and with higher levels of self-esteem, may move through the journey to leadership more quickly than those whose confidence levels are lower. The type of leaders within the FE sector have often worked in industry before embarking upon a career within education, there are also those leaders who enter education as teachers/lecturers and then slowly progress up the ladder. Once middle management levels are reached, some are reluctant to take the next steps to Principalship. This can be through fear of failure under current climate pressures and the changing nature of the environment. College



Principals needs to be able to adapt to the changing environment as well as changes to political policies.

The journey to leadership can be a social and emotional journey, it has been suggested by Moller (2003) that leaders have multiple identities and that the sense of belonging and as self-belief becomes more established it has a role in precipitating challenges of identity transformation.

A person's professional identity is based on personal perceptions of self-efficacy in relation to their working context (Busher, 2005). The professional identity of those working in FE colleges is therefore within a complex and changing professional context. Professional identities encompass professional values (what I profess), professional location, (the profession to which I belong) and professional role (my role within the institution). Professional values and professional location include the perception of self-image. (Busher, 2005).

The FE sector is an ever-changing environment, one that faces ongoing challenges dating back to incorporation, which took place in 1992. Incorporation essentially was the decentralising of government control over to FE colleges. Since incorporation, FE colleges needed to apply business practices to the provision of education, which of course impacted on the role of FE College Principals as well as other management roles across FE colleges. It meant that FE colleges became more corporate in nature and more emphasis was put on income generation and college effectiveness and efficiency, a move that Randle and Brady (1997) suggest 'clashed with the value system of academic staff' whose professionalism focused on student learning and academic standards.

Gleeson & Shain (1999) suggest that this meant that FE College Principals' professional identities were 'increasingly under threat or at least in tension with the need to apply business practices to the provision of education'.

### *Summarising the Learning*

It would seem from the literature that education leaders go through distinct life stages and that significant people (family, colleagues, and managers) as well as self-belief play apart in the leadership journey. This is clear for academy Principals as well as within HE.

The literature suggests that there are identifiable stages that leaders go through and a number of influences within these ‘stages’ or ‘phases’ that appear to be crucial, these being significant people, self-belief as well as socialisation. The result of which has provided conceptual frameworks to underpin the basis on which leaders have learnt to lead.

Literature appears to conclude that the life history approach is a valid method when exploring how leaders learn to lead. The crucial aspect though which is evident within the literature reviewed is the notion of ‘self-belief’, without which the author believes the identified leadership crisis as discussed by authors Shaw (2006) and Rhodes et al (2008) could become considerably worse for the education sector. Authors also recognise the impacts of socialisation within a leaders’ journey, both Gronn (1999) and Ribbins (2003) provide evidence of this within their research of leaders.

The FE sector is, in some ways, very similar to that of HE and the compulsory education sector, similar in terms of leaders can experience very similar journeys. As studies have suggested, leaders across the compulsory and HE sectors experience different stages or phases as suggested by Gronn (1999), however in many ways it is different. There are different factors affecting the FE sector now, such as funding changes as well as the move towards incorporating HE provision within an FE environment. As the literature finds and surmises, leaders within FE seem to enter teaching either at later stages within their working life or after changing career paths.

The research will seek to define a clear pathway demonstrating the life histories of FE leaders, in the hope to identify significant stages or phases that leaders experience. From this, it will derive or form a clear picture for those future leaders within FE allowing them to see first-hand the stages or phases they will experience and to encourage those future leaders to take the next step within their leadership journey with confidence.

The review of literature clearly identifies the extent that Gronn (1999) and Ribbins (2003) model of leadership applies to the journey to leadership of FE Principals. It is apparent and described in detail the stages and phases that these educational leaders go through on their journey. The literature has provided an insight into the lives and careers of educational leaders in a variety of educational contexts and settings. Across academies, schools and HE institutions, a range of educational leaders have described the influence of school, family and career in their journey to leadership. Literature suggests that both the accession phase and the formation phase are clearly identified and evident in the journey to leadership. It is believed that this thesis will also find that these two phases will not only be evident in the journey to leadership of FE Principals but similar findings of significant people / incidents, family, career as well as peers and mentors will also prove critical in the journey to leadership just as was described within schools, academies and HE institutions.

The literature also suggests that self-belief is influential in the journey to leadership, thus supporting research question four. Additionally, literature implies that socialisation is influential in the journey to leadership and this is firmly based around not only early childhood experiences, but also socialisation in terms of growing into the role of a leader. Socialisation for some leaders changed as they adapted to their new roles as leaders. This was clearly identified in school leaders, academy leaders and HE leaders. Again, the researcher holds a firm belief that this thesis will also present similarities in FE Principals.

### ***Towards a 'New' Conceptual Framework***

This review of literature has provided a solid theoretical basis with clear evidence that the Career Pathways model created by Gronn (1999) and Ribbins (2003) models of leadership provide a concrete base of which to start to research the journey of leadership for FE Principals. The first two phases of the Gronn (1999) model, formation and accession being the most significant, and which have provided the underpinning theoretical framework from which this research has been developed.

The researcher wishes to pursue those aspects of the educational leader experiences through the journey to leadership, including how self-belief is developed, influences or significant people, the role of family, career and school. The literature review has confirmed that these are important aspects, and this is currently under researched in the FE setting. Equally the researcher wishes to pursue how leaders became leaders, how identity change is mediated, and what part does socialisation play in this journey.

As previously mentioned, there is little to no research produced on FE educational leaders hence the interest by the researcher to explore if FE educational leaders experience similar lives and careers.

In the following chapter the approach to the research is explained in detail including the methods chosen.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH APPROACH AND METHODS**

### **Introduction**

This chapter will seek to justify the chosen research design and methodology. A clarification of the philosophical approach will be placed within an ontological and epistemological context in order to provide the reader with the conceptualisation of the research strategy. This chapter will include the wider frameworks, the research strategy, data analysis and finally crucial sections on validity and reliability.

A motivation for embarking on this research project is firstly due to a gap within the literature focusing on the journey to leadership of college Principals in relation to the life phases or stages that are experienced by these leaders. There is a breadth of research undertaken within the field of education and in particular compulsory education and now more than ever within HE. There is in-depth research that exists focusing on career pathways/journeys of school leaders including Gronn (1999) and Ribbins (2003) as well as a recent research project being undertaken on the journey to becoming an academy Principal (Mackenzie-Batterbury, 2012).

### **Research Focus**

The questions underpinning this research are:

1. To what extent does the Gronn (1999) model help us to understand the journey to leadership of FE College Principals?

2. To what extent does “socialisation” influence the journey to leadership?
3. How is identity change mediated in the journey to leadership of FE Principals?
4. To what extent does “self-belief” influence the journey to leadership of FE College Principals?

This research project focuses on FE colleges based within the UK, in particular the West Midlands, and the study focuses on the life and career journeys of FE college Principals. The motivations for this research were derived from a number of curiosities, firstly the researcher’s own interest in the journey to leadership and in particular FE college leaders and Principals, and secondly the researcher not only noted but also observed the gap in the literature for such FE research. The main concern within FE which has been documented and described by authors such as Rhodes et al (2008) is the potential for a leadership crisis within the UK and internationally. In the UK, dwindling numbers have been reported in the educational press (Ward, 2004 and Shaw, 2006). There has been increasing evidence to suggest that bureaucracy and high workloads have discouraged potential leaders from taking up posts, especially headships (Draper and McMichael, 2003; Hayes, 2005; Bedford, 2006; Hargreaves and Fink, 2006; Fink and Brayman, 2006).

The researcher was keen to explore this potential crisis and by doing so delve into the lives and careers of these leaders to seek to gain an insight or an understanding of stages within their career. There have been vast amounts of research undertaken within similar fields such as the work of Day and Bakioglu (1996) and Gronn (1993 & 1997) and Ribbins (2003) who explored the careers of educational leaders focusing on school head teachers, more recently authors such as Inman (2007) who explored leader academics in HE and Mackenzie-Batterbury (2012) who conducted a study of academy Principals. From this, the researcher was keen to undertake a

similar study that focused on FE college Principals; this is significant for the researcher who due to a personal desire is considering the possibility of working up to a Principalship within the FE sector.

The research is underpinned by the influential work of Peter Gronn who created a career pathway model for secondary school leaders (Gronn, 1999). The researcher seeks to pursue the career journeys of FE college Principals, exploring experiences throughout both their personal and professional lives; the research intends to unearth what influences, if any, have underpinned their own choices and chosen career path. The findings and conclusions of the research will be linked and compared to the works of Gronn and the stages model. The researcher hopes to provide insight into whether the Gronn model can help guide or broaden expectations of potential or newly appointed Principals within the FE sector, the model will provide an insight into the stages that can occur and seek to reassure potential candidates. The research may also inform any preparation to leadership or Principalship courses or programmes.

## **Research Approach**

This section will set out the theoretical framework for this particular research. As Mackenzie & Knipe (2006) suggests, it is imperative to clarify the theoretical framework as:

“Without nominating a paradigm as a first step, there is no basis for subsequent choices regarding methodology, methods, literature or research design” (p.11)

This research sits firmly within the Humanistic Domain, which is taken from the model created by Gunter and Ribbins (2003) known as the five ‘knowledge domains’. These are conceptual, critical, humanistic, evaluative and instrumental; this sets out the core philosophy of the

researcher and helps to set the scene of the position of the researcher within the research. The

Humanistic Domain:

“Seeks to gather and theorise from the experiences and biographies of those who are leaders and managers and those who are managed and led” (Gunter and Ribbins 2003, p.262).

The researcher seeks to explore and gain personal accounts and experiences of the interviewees; as such the most suitable method for collecting data is through conducting interviews. The researcher was inspired by loosely structured narrative interviews that last longer the ‘standard’ semi-structured interview and enable the interviewee to tell their personal story in a great deal of depth. The researcher decided to use the semi-structured interview method but with the flexibility of unstructured interview. This allows the researcher to gain in-depth accounts of experiences and biographies. Thompson (2016) describes unstructured interviews as ‘a guided conversation, giving the interviewer the freedom to vary questions from respondent to respondent and so they can follow whatever lines of enquiry they think are most appropriate depending on the responses given by each respondent’.

The research draws upon those early childhood experiences leading through to the career journeys experienced by these Principals, the humanistic approach will allow for detailed descriptions of accounts that are discussed by the interviewees, it will allow the researcher to explore these experiences linking them to the Gronn model. It will also allow for narrative accounts on these particular leaders and events or circumstances that led them on the career journey that they have embarked upon. According to Bland and Debrobertis (2017), focusing on narratives and life stories is the ideal means of understanding where individuals have been and who they are becoming, in addition the Humanistic approach addresses societal conditions that promote or impede development and personal identity. The research will explore the ‘self’ concept of these college Principals and in their own words will document their individual and



very personal experiences of early childhood, schooling, upbringing, influences or influencers as well as any significant or critical incidents that may have shaped their character and or their career journey.

The Gronn career pathway model underpins this research and acts as a reference framework, as it allows the researcher to explore distinct life phases or stages that are experienced by FE college Principals, this model has been used in previous research when exploring the journeys to leadership of school headteachers by Mackenzie-Batterbury (2012) who focused on the first two phases of Formation and Accession. This same theory will be utilised in this research and the focus will be on the same two phases. Firstly, the model allows the researcher to identify how a leaders' identity is constructed personally and socially, secondly it allows for a discussion on 'self' including character structure.

The findings from this research could inform any future CPD and or training programmes for aspiring Principals and may even contribute to the wider debate surround leadership in education and in particular within the FE sector.

This research project seeks to understand the journey to leadership of FE college Principals. It was not the intention of the researcher to purposefully set out to improve practice or improve policy; however, the researcher believes that the findings are beneficial, and suggestions will be explored in chapters five and six. It is viewed that the findings might be beneficial to an aspiring senior leader looking for promotion to Principal or maybe a newly appointed Principal in order for them to gain an insight into the career journeys.

## Research Design

It is important for researchers to allow the readers to see the strategies and consequently methodological approaches to the research.

This particular piece of research sits within the 'Interpretive' paradigm. As Cohen et al (2009) state, "the 'interpretive' paradigm is to understand the subjective world of human experience" (p.21). The humanistic theorists present a model of a person that is positive and stresses their own involvement with the life experience itself (Cohen et al, 2007, p.19).

Miles and Huberman (1994) identify three approaches to qualitative data analysis, these being Interpretivism, Social anthropology, and Collaborative social research. Interpretivism includes phenomenology, social anthropology includes ethnography and collaborative social research includes action research. As this research project sought to explore human experiences and each individual's perception may be different, this can be thought of as interpretivist research.

Similarly, Briggs (2003) states

"An interpretative approach acknowledges the ontological concept that people experience reality in different ways and it would also be based upon epistemology which considers knowledge to be found in the complex world of lived experience" (p.61).

A further advantage is the humanistic style of approach, as it bases its inquiry on the lived experiences of people in the everyday world (Denscombe, 2003). This study focuses upon the lives and career journeys of a small number of FE Principals; it seeks to explore life experiences in a very detailed account. In terms of disadvantages, the very nature of the study, which is those descriptive accounts, could be criticised for being just that; descriptive. The researcher argues that from those descriptions some form of analysis can and will take place, especially with the exploration of 'self-belief', socialisation and identity change.

## Research Methodology and Methods

As Denscombe (2003) suggests, when exploring the process of designing and putting together a good piece of research the researcher is faced with a number of options and has to make a number of decisions about which to choose. There are some strategies or methods that are better suited than others; the chosen methods should be ‘fit for purpose’ (Denscombe 2003, p.3) and of course justified to the readers.

Cohen et al. (2009) state that:

“If methods refer to techniques and procedures used in the process of data gathering, the aim of methodology then is to describe approaches to, kinds and paradigms of research” (p.96).

Research was undertaken in order to decide upon an approach to this study, a number of approaches were considered and explored in great depth. After much debate it was decided that the most appropriate research approach for this study was that of Biographical.

A biographical study

“involves gathering data about a specific individual, either living or deceased, but also interpreting these data in order to create a representation or portrayal of particular aspects of the subjects’ life and times.” (Given, 2008, p.61)

The biographical study according to Ribbins (2002) ‘allows readers to connect and identify with another human being and identify with their journey through the vicissitudes of life’.

This approach will allow the researcher to study the complexity of educational management with sensitivity to contexts (Heck and Hallinger, 2005, p. 235).

Biographical studies have been widely debated and utilised by many including Kelchtermans and Vandenburghe (1994), Gronn and Ribbins (1996), Ribbins (2002) and Heck and Hallinger (2005) to name a few. This approach has been undertaken in previous studies where there has been a need to explore a person or persons’ life histories. An example of this is Gronn’s

documented biographical study of Sir James Darling, who was an educational leader who had the role of a headteacher for 32 years.

As Kelchtermans and Vandenberghe (1994) suggest:

“professional behavior and its development can only be understood properly when situated in the greater context of a career and personal life history” (p.1).

For the purpose of this research the biographical study was used as this enables the researcher to explore differences within and between each of the Principals interviewed. The idea is to replicate findings across the cases and comparisons will be drawn and linked to the various stages or phases as explored earlier.

This approach lends itself well to this particular study as the research focuses on the lives and career journeys of academic Principals within FE colleges.

Biographical studies as described by Gronn and Ribbins (1999) facilitate ‘theorizing about leadership. As detailed case histories biographies may be inspected for evidence of the development and or a learning of leadership attributes. A comparative analysis of leaders’ career paths as revealed in biographies can answer broader institutional level questions. For example, share common attributes’.

Plummer (2001) also argues that:

“biographical research data do not claim, or seek the impossibility of the exact replication of a life the requirement is that the research refer to lives in such a way as to illuminate them in relation to a research objective” (p.12).

One of the research questions this thesis aims to answer is about self-belief and if it is evident in the journey to leadership, according to Schulze one of the most useful tools to gain an understanding of self and how its developed is biographical narratives.

Data collection for biographical studies tends to be the interview method. There are different types of interviews that have been used in biographical studies. Due to the very nature of

biographical research and when exploring life / career history the interview lends itself to the researcher to ask questions that allow for in depth information to be shared. Careful consideration was given to the method of data collection, previous studies in educational leadership were explored and have led the researcher to adopt the interview method. One of the main reasons for this is it allows for a set of questions to be asked however, allows the order of these questions to be adapted to the individual interview.

## **Methods**

Interviews are the chosen method of data collection for this research:

“The interview is a flexible tool for data collection, enabling multi-sensory channels to be used: verbal, non-verbal, spoken and heard. The order of the interview may be controlled while still giving space for spontaneity, and the interviewer can press not only for complete answers but also for responses about complex and deep issues” (Cohen et al., 2009. p.349)

Interviewing as a social research method is widely used and has been described by many authors as a good tool for data collection, described by Robson (2002) it ‘involves the researcher asking questions, and hopefully receiving answers from the people you are interviewing’. Denscombe (2003) suggests that ‘the researcher ought to be able to justify the decision to go for depth rather than breadth in the material’, he also suggests that if the researcher is collecting data/information based on emotions, experiences and feelings then this can form justification for the use of interviews. This is echoed by McGrath et al (2018) who states that:

“Qualitative interviews afford researchers opportunities to explore, in an in-depth manner, matters that are unique to the experiences of the interviewees, allowing insights into how different phenomena of interest are experienced and perceived”.

Denscombe (2003) goes on to describe that by using interviews to gain ‘privileged information’ from people who are seen, as ‘key players’ again is justification for its use.

“What they offer is an insight they have as people in a special position ‘to know’”  
(Denscombe, 2003. p.165)

Interviews have also been described and noted by King (1994) as a ‘valuable tool for unearthing the history underpinning the development of a particular phenomenon’.

As this research seeks to unearth historical accounts of each of the Principals’ journey to leadership as well as detailed accounts of significant stages throughout the Principals careers the researcher can justify the use of the interview based upon the works of established authors who have provided in depth studies to showcase just how important an interview can be when researching within education. The data / information to be collected are rich and very personal to the Principals who will participate in this research project.

Before embarking upon this research project, the researcher gave careful consideration to the method of data collection, reading in depth the advantages and disadvantages of using such methods when embarking upon educational research, the works of Gronn (1999), Ribbins (2003), Rhodes and Brundrett (2008) and the more recent works of Inman (2007) and Mazkenzie-Batterbury (2012) were all explored. From this, the researcher could glean a greater understanding of interviews and how they have been used throughout educational studies and in some cases within in very similar contexts. Further justifications using interviews as a tool of data collection include the response rate. The response rate as described by Denscombe (2003) was high, this is namely because interviews are prearranged in advance and held at mutually convenient times. There are many types of interviews, there are different ways in which they can be conducted, with the Internet now playing a big part in today’s society, and in particular, within education it made sense for the researcher to consider all options available. It is well documented by many authors who suggest that the face-to-face interview in particular has a high response rate, especially when interviews are pre-planned and booked at mutually agreeable times with both the participant and the researcher. Consideration was given to the option of telephone or Skype interviews, the reason being the researcher could potentially

access a broader range of Principals from a wider variety of regions across the UK. The second reason being that of time, time is always an issue within education and especially of those who are in senior/leadership positions. The researcher had to consider one's own time also, ultimately having undertaken lots of reading on previous studies undertaken within education where there was a particular focus on journeys and lives and careers it was decided that the best option would be that of the face to face and in person interview. It not only shows a dedication and commitment to the research, but also has a more personal and enjoyable feel in a non-critical environment (Denscombe, 2003. p.190). Semi- structured interviews also allow some flexibility to explore further any comments, probe, and further develop ideas. Semi-structured interviews allow freedom, to some degree, with the wording of the questions. These can be adapted to suit a particular interviewee or further explanations can be given dependent on the interpretation by each individual. This is why a pilot study should be undertaken to iron out any difficult questions and to test the wording and most importantly the responses from the interviewees. This is critical for the researcher as interviewing is very time consuming and requires time to be given by the interviewees who are in senior positions within their FE colleges and will be reluctant to give the researcher too much of their valuable time. Getting it right before undertaking the full cohort of interviews for such an important piece of work was imperative. Field and Morse (1989) suggest that by undertaking a pilot study or indeed at least undertaking one interview previous to that of the others scheduled can 'minimize the risk of 'stage fright' in interviews'. A pilot study was undertaken with the researchers' current college Principal, the justifications for this is it could be deemed too close to home to use the researchers own work establishment, and although in theory the researcher has nothing to lose, there is the notion of power differences and this could have been seen as biased. The researcher could learn a lot from the college Principal both in terms of whether the interview questions

were well written, but it also provided the researcher the chance to iron out any nerves when interviewing those of a higher employment status.

When designing the semi-structured interviews / unstructured interviews, it was important to consider the types of questions that the researcher would ask. The nature of this study is to glean an insight into the career journeys of FE college Principals, a detailed account of each of the interviewees career journeys is needed and so there will be very descriptive answers required in order to gain the full picture and a good biography of their career journeys. This means the use of open questions was crucial. It was also good to consider questions that invite factual responses and those that invite opinion (Cohen et al. 2007) as the researcher was seeking to explore the actual / factual journey of each of the college Principals interviewed careful consideration was given to the research questions and how they were to be worded. Robson (2002) notes concerns with using the semi-structured interview ‘the lack of standardization that it implies inevitably raises concerns about reliability’ and this will come down to professionalism from the researcher and this is where the experience of a pilot study has enabled the researcher to limit or minimise some of those concerns highlighted by Robson (2002). On the contrary to this,

“The interview is not a soft option as a data-gathering technique; emphasising qualitative data has the potential of providing rich and illuminating material” (Robson, 2002, p.273).

Interviews can also be time consuming as previously mentioned, the actual interview itself will require time and in order to be of any value needed to be between 45-60 minutes in length, anything over an hour is deemed by Robson (2002) as unreasonable and could have put demand on busy interviewees. This could also have impacted upon the number of interviewees willing to participate. The interviews all took place at the interviewees’ place of work apart from two who preferred mutually convenient places away from the college at which they worked, this was deemed to be more convenient for the interviewee and also encouraged participation within the study. Each of the interviews were recorded using a Dictaphone, this allowed the



researcher to concentrate on the interviewee and not worry about note taking. Once all interviews had been conducted, time was needed to allow the researcher to transcribe each interview undertaken, and as authors have suggested, this in itself is very time consuming and has taken up hours of the researchers' time.

Cohen et al (2009) propose that there were also ethical issues, which needed consideration when interviewing, for example, had the interviewee given informed consent? Have possible consequences of the research been made clear and have confidentiality / anonymity agreements been granted? Should the interviewees' identities be disguised? Once data / information had been collected, the researcher ensures it is to be used ethically. These issues are not exclusive to the research interview; however, they are highly applicable to this particular study and have been clearly discussed and described in the ethics section included within this chapter.

Denscombe (2003) suggests that preparing to undertake qualitative data analysis can aid the process and ensure it runs smoothly, simple considerations such as all materials in similar formats can help when sifting through material. He also suggests that raw data should be collected in a way that allows the researcher to include own notes and comments. This is where field notes can be quite useful. The researcher opted to use field notes at the end of each individual interview that includes a section for the researchers own comments alongside.

## **Sampling**

At the time of writing this thesis, there are 189 general FE colleges identified within England and of those 189, 27 are within the West Midlands and are classified as general FE colleges (AOC, 2017). The researcher decided to approach all 27 FE college Principals within the West

Midlands region; the West Midlands was specifically chosen due to locations of the colleges and because of ease of access for the researcher. As Cohen et al (2018) state this type of sampling is known as ‘convenience sampling whereby the researcher chooses the nearest individuals to serve as respondents’.

This sample size was chosen to ensure the researcher could secure the participation of at least 20 Principals. There is no clear-cut answer when it comes to sample size in education research and as Cohen et al (2007) suggest, it ‘depends on the number of the population under scrutiny’.

The researcher wrote to all 27 Principals to secure their involvement within the research.

Once a letter had been sent to the Principals across the West Midlands, the researcher followed up any none responses with an email containing all the details of the research reiterating the context and focus of the research. Where a further response was not received, a final follow up email was sent. Out of those invited, 20 agreed to participate, 4 declined the offer to take part and the researcher had no responses from the remaining Principals invited. Of those that declined, a number sited that they declined due to undergoing mergers or the pressures of external agencies like OFSTED, which was one example given. Once the Principals agreed to take part, the researcher sent a consent form and email confirming how Principals could withdraw from the research at any point, details of confidentiality and anonymity. Once the consent form was received back signed, the researcher confirmed a mutually agreed date and time for the semi-structured / unstructured interview to take place. The researcher acknowledged that securing a convenient time to conduct the interview could be problematic and that considerations would have to be given to the time of year the interviews would be undertaken.

Research undertaken prior to the approach of the Principals was necessary to include whether or not the FE colleges were due for an OFSTED inspection, as this can be a very difficult and a busy time of year for any members of staff within education but especially those within senior

positions like the Principals. After careful consideration, all 27 colleges were approached, and the University of Birmingham's ethical approval was obtained.

Where feasible, interviews were scheduled to allow the researcher to conduct two within the same day at colleges that were in close proximity to each other, to aid the researcher to complete a very demanding interview schedule. See Appendix One for the final interview schedule. The researcher aimed to conduct the interviews between the months of June 2016 – October 2017, this allowed the researcher to schedule as many interviews as possible with the willing participants and also allowed for an ample amount of time to be given to the perspective Principals whose diaries would potentially already have meetings and events scheduled in. The researcher chose June as a starting point as this tends to be a quieter time for colleges due to the summer break, as the researcher works in education it allows greater flexibility for when interviews could be scheduled.

The semi-structured interview allows the researcher to go in with a set of questions or issues, however with the semi-structured interview the researcher can adapt the order in which the topics are raised, it also allows the researcher to explore or elaborate on any key or interesting topics (Denscombe, 2003) as well as the flexibility to 'modify' a line of enquiry (Robson, 2011). The reason for choosing the semi-structured interviews / unstructured interviews is that it allowed for that little bit of flexibility during the interview, it allowed the researcher to explore topics that arose or ideas that formed during the interview. The semi-structured / unstructured interviews were scheduled to take no longer than one hour; interviews were recorded and then subsequently transcribed. Field notes were not completed during the interview to allow complete focus on the interview questions and schedule, and also to avoid any distractions and pauses.

As mentioned above, the researcher was able to secure 20 out of the 27 Principals that were written to, this means that the researcher was able to secure the participation of 74% of the ‘population’ of FE college Principals for the West Midlands region, and this in turn will provide some rich data and insights into the Principals in this area and their journeys to leadership.

### ***Characteristics of the Sample***

Firstly, the researcher thought it may be helpful for the reader to understand the researcher’s position in the research. The researcher holds a middle management position within an FE College and at the time of interviewing held the position of Curriculum Manager. Therefore, the researcher has an understanding of the FE sector as well as local colleges.

It is important to mention the genders of those interviewed, although the researcher has not included gender as a theme for this research it, should be mentioned that the Principal role within FE is one that is heavily male dominated across the West Midlands. Of the twenty Principals interviewed, eleven were male. This was not deliberate as the researcher, when writing to Principals to take part, wrote to all Principals across the West Midlands and interviewed all of those that agreed to participate. The gender in-balance will not be analysed as part of the discussion of the findings; however, the researcher believes this might be of interest and therefore this could be a discussion for future works. Another significant characteristic evident in this sample of Principals is ethnicity, this can be seen in Table Three in the subsequent chapter. The data clearly illustrates that the main ethnicity is white, again this is not a focus for this particular piece of research and will be considered in the future work agenda of this thesis.

The research explores career journeys, specifically focusing on stages and phases of that journey. It is also important to note that length of service will be included within this study as the researcher will explore this in order to acknowledge the stages or phases as described by Gronn (1999).

The interviews allowed the researcher to glean an in-depth look at the career history of the Principals and details length of service both past and present. It is important to note here that the length of service was not a particular interest of the researcher; however, it was of interest to be able to interview a range of leaders that were at different stages or phases of their leadership journeys. By this, it is meant how long they have been a Principal within the FE sector.

## **Data Analysis**

Once each interview was conducted the researcher instantly noted down key information including facts, feelings and observations from the interview. It was deemed necessary to write notes after each interview to explore where themes were starting to emerge as well as linking Gronn's career pathways model to the life stages that were apparent straight away. Hycner (1985) suggests that by completing a summary of each individual interview incorporating any themes that have emerged from the data is valuable. These 'field notes' as described by Denscombe (2003) are used by the researcher as informal notes to supplement the transcriptions of each individual interview.

Once all of the interviews were transcribed, consideration was given to whether or not the interviewees should have a copy of their transcript to read over before the analysis took place. The researcher decided against this idea as not only had all interviewees been given lots of

advance notice and time to answer each question during the interview, time is of the essence and could delay the data analysis significantly.

When analysing interview data, there are a wide variety of approaches, consideration was given to two approaches that were thought to be most suited to this research. The first was the narrative analysis approach, in a study by Rhodes and Brundrett (2008). This approach was used and allowed the researchers to compile narrative text that provided a lifelike account using as much as possible the exact wording from the participants. This seemed like the ideal way to present the interview data within this research, however after careful consideration it was decided by the researcher that the approach used by Gunter (1999) illustrates a simplified matrix that allows identification of key themes or issues that arise from interview data. It would be simple to read and interpret. This approach has six steps that needed to be followed, these are:

- Describe clearly and simply how you collected your data
- Present your data: your interview transcripts (un-edited) or reports of notes you took during the interviews.
- Analyse your data, (matrix grid as below) identify patterns and draw conclusions
- Develop a theory to explain findings
- Set your findings in the wider context: make generalisations, recommendations and predictions linking to literature.
- Suggest further research

The matrix used by Gunter (1999) is a simple matrix grid as shown below.

	Interview one	Interview Two	Interview Three
Theme one			
Theme two			
Theme three			

The idea is to include a tick in the box when a theme occurs and then an explanation note can be added. It is also important to make notes of insightful quotes. The matrix enabled the researcher to identify patterns that emerged across the interviews. This process reflected the true meanings of the interview data collected. Through this process the researcher was able to create categories that best demonstrated patterns of commonality across the interviewees. See the matrix grids in Appendix Three.

The researcher adopted this approach for this piece of research; firstly, it was used for the pilot study, which allowed the researcher to test this approach.

The researcher firstly read the transcripts to ensure familiarity with the data. The data was then examined to identify any current patterns after which the researcher developed overarching themes, and the researcher was then able to create categories conveying similar meanings to the interview data. Once completed, the researcher was then able to write down thoughts on particular themes and reflect on the literature in relation to Gronn's model which was the underpinning framework. Final themes are presented along with supporting quotations from the raw data. Brief detail of the demographic characteristics of the interviewees is also provided for contextual reference.

The researcher is confident that this is the right approach for both the researcher and the research.

## **Validity and Reliability**

Robson (2002) states that:

“Validity is about establishing trustworthiness and most importantly that the findings of your enquiry are worth taking into account” (p.93)

Robson (2002) also states that:

“Validity is concerned with whether the findings are ‘really’ about what they appear to be about” (p.93)

When using interview as a method of data collection, this itself can impact on validity and reliability.

Kirk and Miller (1986) define reliability as the ability to replicate or repeat research to obtain the same results. The environment within which this research takes place is ever changing and therefore not easily replicable. However, the researcher has carried out a number of steps to increase the reliability of the research findings.

Silverman (1993) believes that ‘one way of controlling reliability is to have a structured interview with the same format or sequence of questions for each interviewee’. Arguably controlling the wording is no guarantee of controlling the interview (Oppenheim, 1992). Attention must be given to the wording of the questions to maximise reliability; questions should be clear and unambiguous. Developing a consistent protocol can help.

A pilot study was used for this research project as Silverman (1993) suggests this can enhance reliability as the researcher is able to test the research questions and adapt them if necessary. Brooks and Normore (2015) suggests that the role of the researcher can impact upon validity and reliability, this is echoed by Cohen et al (2009) and Cassell (1993) who believe that the power difference between the researcher, who is the interviewer, and the interviewee. These authors believe that if the researcher is of a lower status than that of the interviewee, they could feel insulted or demeaned; these authors also believe that the interviewee’s answers may be guarded, as they need to maintain their reputation. Consideration is also given to the fact that all interviewees, as well as the researcher, are working within the FE sector and the researcher could be seen as a threat, especially working within a similar establishment. This said, the researcher confidently believes that as her



status is lower than those being interviewed, this should not cause any conflicts of interest. Both the researcher and the interviewees have nothing to gain or lose from this research in terms of jobs or monetary value, hence the belief that the interviewees have nothing to be guarded about.

As the research will record the observations of multiple respondents, it is imperative that the research findings are handled and processed with a degree of rigor in order to effectively combine the findings. One such method of achieving this is through Triangulation. Robson (2011) describes triangulation as a:

“Valuable and widely used strategy involving the use of multiple sources to enhance the rigour of the research” (p.158)

Denzin (1988) differentiated triangulation into a number of subcategories. Data triangulation addresses methods of data collection. After careful consideration it was decided that the only method of data collection was the semi- structured interview. It was deemed by the researcher that asking for CVs or other documentation would have added no value and would have only allowed for the confirmation of career path and dates, after analysis of the responses to the interview questions it was deemed not necessary to ask for a CV or further documentation as the data collected was rich and in depth. The researcher also believes that to further protect the participants' anonymity, the CVs would not be requested.

Whilst triangulation is said to aid the validity of research, it is not without issues. Observer triangulation addresses the number of observers taking part in the research. It is a feasible assumption to make that multiple observers may form differing opinions based on the same research findings. In this research, this issue will not factor, as there is a sole researcher involved. Furthermore, Bloor (1997) suggests that if different methods are used to obtain data, it can lead to data being produced in differing forms. Therefore, making comparison, performing analysis and drawing conclusion complex and difficult.

Inman (2007), in a similar study of how leader academics in higher education learn to lead, used the semi-structured interview as the single method of data collection and noted the limitation in that study, however went onto produce interesting and rich data that related to common themes and categories being discovered. The data collected from this study is rich and includes some very detailed accounts of each of those Principals interviewed. The level of detail and description provided by each of the interviewees was phenomenal with some very personal insights into their lives being described, this led to some very intimate and emotional descriptions being given and consequently some interesting themes emerged as well as the identification of the relationship to those career phases as detailed by Gronn. In some cases, there were some very significant / critical incidents that Principals opened up about, which demonstrated the level of trust given to the researcher for the agreed confidentiality and anonymity. The research questions were not provided to those that were interviewed in advance, this was deliberately done to ensure that Principals could not rehearse their answers and when asked the questions, the reactions and answers were more realistic and reliable. Given the level of detail and the intimate / emotional descriptions provided the interview was by far the best way to collect this rich data from the interviewees, the researcher would never have gotten this information from a survey for example.

## **Ethics**

Researchers have to strike a balance between the demands placed on them as professionals and the rights and values potentially threatened by the research (Cohen et al 2009). Each stage within the research project poses ethical issues; this can be due to the nature of the research and the type of data collection. This particular study focuses on factual and personal information of FE college Principals and requires in depth information about their life and

career journeys to Principalship. Some of the data collected may be considered as highly personal and sensitive, it is the job of the researcher to explain what is to be done with the data in order to demonstrate the ability to behave ethically. First, all interviewees completed an informed consent form, which provides them with details of the research project and protects their identity, both personally and professionally. Secondly, interviewees will be protected through the promise of confidentiality. Cohen et al (2009) explain that ‘this means that although the researcher is aware of who said what, this will never be made public’. Finally, all interviewees will be provided with anonymity as Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias (1992) explain, ‘the essence of anonymity is that information provided by the interviewees should no way reveal their identity’.

None of the interviewees’ places of work or any other information provided by the interviewees deemed to exploit who they are will not be shared within the research project. As the interviewees were college Principals, they are easily recognisable from certain characteristics and so careful consideration was given when writing up the research and analysing the data. The researcher ensured that none of the interviewees are recognisable within the research project. BERA (2018) states that all participants of educational research should be treated fairly.

“Individuals should be treated fairly, sensitively, and with dignity and freedom from prejudice, in recognition of both their rights and of differences arising from age, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, class, nationality, cultural identity, partnership status, faith, disability, political belief or any other significant characteristic.” (p.6, Guidelines)

The researcher considered and adhered to the guidelines as set out by BERA (2018) as well as the University of Birmingham’s ethical guidelines additionally. All interviewees were given the opportunity to withdraw at any point, no interviews were undertaken without a signed informed consent form and anonymity and confidentiality agreed.

The ethical use of information simply means respecting the author and not trying to pass off someone else's words, work or ideas as your own, by including a reference list you are showing the readers where and whom you have got sources from, this eliminates any risk of people not believing the facts (Briggs et al, 2012).

## **CHAPTER FIVE: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Introduction**

This chapter comprises two main sections, in the first section the ‘presentation of findings’ presents the findings emerging from the twenty semi-structured interviews that were undertaken. Themes that emerged will be presented as well as evidence from the interview data. The interview questions were structured around the formative years, in this case from birth to the end of schooling; the journey through their working lives and careers, leading up to their current post of FE college Principal.

The second section in this chapter, the ‘Discussion’, will discuss the themes that have emerged and address the four research questions.

### **Biographical Information**

In order to provide the context for the interview data, Table Two, Table Three, Table Four Table Five, Table Six and Table Seven details information about the interviewees in terms of their age, gender, ethnicity, social class (as described by the Principals during their formative years), length in their post at the time of interview, the length of time that the interviewees have held the position of a college Principal, and highest level of qualification held. The aim is to allow the reader to gain an insight into the Principals that were interviewed and provide some context. Of the twenty interviewees, there were 11 males and 9 females as can be seen in Table Two below.

<b>Gender</b>	<b>Number of principals</b>
Male	11
Female	9

**Table Two: The gender of the college principal**

Although the above demonstrates an almost equal gender balance, it is important to note that at the time of the interviews, the balance of gender was more male dominated with more male Principals in the sector on the whole. This research will not focus on the gender of the Principals however, this could be something that is explored as part of future works.

Table Three below demonstrates the lack of diversity in Principals in this sample, with white being the leading ethnicity. It is important to remember here that this is a sample of the West Midlands and not the wider field of FE. The researcher suspects that nationally it will be a similar picture. The researcher did not initially consider including ethnicity of the Principal in this research and after careful consideration decided that this could be included in future research. Ethnicity does not feature in the research questions as this is not the focus of this particular piece of research. The researcher would, however, be interested to study what the representation is across other regions in the UK. The lack of diversity in Principals is interesting, particularly because of the sample of Principals interviewed, most manage colleges that include very diverse students from wide ranging ethnicities.

<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Number of principals</b>
Asian	1
Black	0
White	19
Other	0

**Table Three: The ethnicity of the college principal**

Table four below identifies the social class of the interviewees, this is how interviewees described their social class when discussing their family background and upbringing. The researcher believes this to be of interest and is a significant outcome that will be discussed in more detail in Discussion section of this chapter.

<b>Social Class (as described by the interviewees during their formative years)</b>	<b>Number of principals</b>
Higher class	0
Middle class	4
<u>Working class</u>	<u>16</u>

**Table Four: The social class of the college principal**

Table five below identifies both the length of time in the Principals' current post at the time of interview, and also the length of time they have served as Principals in FE. This will allow the reader to gain an insight into the level of experience of the Principals interviewed. The researcher notes that the majority of Principals have been in post between 1-3 years, so relatively new to posts, with only two Principals having more than twenty plus years' experience. This will be discussed in more detail when identifying Gronn's phases.

<b>Year range</b>	<b>Length of time in current post at the time of interview – number of principals</b>	<b>Length of time served as a Principal in FE – number of principals</b>
Less than a year	1	1
1-3 years	9	5
4-7 years	3	2
8-11 years	4	2
12-15 years	2	6
16-19 years	0	2
20 years plus	1	2

**Table Five: The length of time in their current post at the time of interview and also the length of time served as a principal in FE**

The table below presents the age ranges of the Principals interviewed.

<b>Age range</b>	<b>Number of principals</b>
20s	0
30s	0
40s	3
50s	12
60s	5

**Table Six: Age range of the principals interviewed**

Table seven below demonstrates the highest level of qualification obtained by the Principals interviewed. As can be seen below, this demonstrates that most of the Principals are qualified up to postgraduate level. Principals were asked about their education and training, and this again was linked Gronn's phases. There is further discussion on these in the discussion section of this chapter.

<b>Qualifications</b>	<b>Number of principals</b>
Level 2	0
Level 3	0
Undergraduate	5
Postgraduate	15

**Table Seven: Highest level of qualification obtained by the principals interviewed**

In order to aid the reader, it is important to determine the terminology that will be used in this chapter to identify the number of interviewees in terms of the responses given during the interviews to particular questions.



The table below identifies each term and the corresponding number of interviewees.

<b>Term</b>	<b>Number of Interviewees</b>
All	20
Most	11 or more
Many	5 to 10
Some	1 to 4
None	0

**Table Eight: Terminology selected and the related number of interviewees**

The researcher acknowledges that ‘most’ could be misleading due to the range of interviewees that it includes. Hence where the researcher deems the number of interviewees is significant but does not include ‘all’ the exact number will be stated.

The researcher has also included examples of the matrix grids used when analysing the data, for ease these were and have been presented in a tabulated format in Appendix Three. This will allow the reader to follow how the researcher was able to identify key themes in the research findings.

The chapter will be structured into two main sections, the first focusing on the formative years including family influences, schooling, influential people, significant experiences and values underpinning ambition to teach. The second section; the journey to Principalship, will include job role and career opportunities.

## **The Formative Years**

This section includes the responses relating to the formative years, this includes from birth, early childhood and schooling up to and including university level. The first section will describe how the interviewees described their family background and how they identified their social class. The remaining section will detail family influences, schooling influences, influential or significant people, significant experiences or incidents and finally values underpinning ambition to teach.

### ***Family Background***

When the interviewees were describing their family background and upbringing they talked about parents' occupations and education (or lack of). The interviewees home environments including the educational background of parents were explored and interviewees also described family finances which, for most, included a lack of finances. It is quite evident that family background and upbringing had an impact on all of the interviewees lives and careers in some way or another. Many of the interviewees cited their experiences as a driver for them to do well in their lives and careers, with one using education as a means to get out of poverty.

“it’s weird but we came from this weird background where we didn’t have anything and school mattered to me and I hated school I hated it until I got to university but for some reason I didn’t become disengaged because to me it was my way out of poverty” (Principal, 12).

Most of the interviewees described their upbringing and family background with fondness, with only two of the interviewees describing family life as difficult. One Principal described his upbringing as violent and another having what they described as a ‘twin track personal life’ which saw them go from a privileged upbringing to one of high levels of deprivation.

“my background is a bit unusual in the fact that I had a twin trap personal life, many of my young years between when I was born and between when I was aged 11 or 12 I was privileged in the fact that I lived in Canada, my dad was a successful business man and you enjoyed the benefits of living in north America and in the 60s and 70s with a successful business family around you which was fantastic, sadly it all went wrong so from 12 onwards I had a very difficult adolescence ...with fairly high levels of deprivation and I had to survive that if you want and probably the most formative thing for me was having to survive that so I learnt to fight for want of a better phrase and that gave me the tenacity, many of the characteristics you really need to survive at senior level in FE and many other jobs” (Principal, 19).

“I had a very, very poor upbringing, violent family and broken parentage family kicked out on the street because of what happened I was only 9 so it was a difficult time which made me a really strong fighter” (Principal, 15)

It's worth mentioning that most of the interviewees described their family background as poor, deprived and / or lived in poverty. Many of the interviewees described their upbringing and social status as working class, however most said they were from loving homes / families that worked hard to look after their children, some stated that parents often worked long hours or multiple jobs to be able to provide for their family.

“My parents were very much about, you know, they would support me. I never used to see my dad because he worked long hours in a number of jobs but he was very much about; you can do what you want to do, but do your best at it and we will support you so I was fortunate my parents were together and still are together” (Principal, 6).

Many interviewees also stated that they didn't know any different, as many families during the time of their childhoods were in the same situations in a lot of cases. One interviewee said they wouldn't have recognised what it meant to be poor, they only recognise this now as they are older.

“I was bought up near to the college from a fairly poor background and from today's standards it's what people would deem to be disadvantaged. Amusingly that is a term I would not have recognised because people don't, this is why I feel bad when people talk about people with disadvantages because a lot of young people don't recognise what that means. I had a very good loving home life” (Principal, 8).

During the interviews it was very apparent that parents were an important source of motivation and drive, some said watching parents go through deprivation and / or poverty made them want

to do better. Some said that watching parents struggle helps shape you as a person, some also said it was parents that instilled in them work ethic.

Interestingly only some of the interviewees described their childhood as being privileged.

“So my parents worked abroad so I went to boarding school in this country and took my A levels, left, went traveling, did various bits of work, started up a business, sold it, made some money, did some more traveling. So I did basically about 3 years of bugger all” (Principal, 10).

“I have travelled the world, I was brought up abroad in Africa where education is a gift and people are very, very appreciative of education”. Principal, 4).

Parents appear to be influential in many of the Principals’ lives, whether it was their support and drive to ensure they had a good education, or it was from observing parents work hard to provide for their families. It was apparent throughout most of the interviewees that most felt they had a very fond childhood where, even in times of poverty or being poor, these Principals felt supported to do well. Most of the parents were educated and valued education, those deemed as uneducated recognised the value of education and pushed or supported those Principals to do well. This was recognised by most of the Principals.

### ***Socio-Economic Background***

The socio-economic background of the interviewees is primarily given by the occupations of parents and their education (or lack of).

Most interviewees described their family as being poor, with some stating very poor. Most of the interviewees described their socio-economic status as working class and described watching parents struggle, most also identified with a modest education, some described their upbringing as being privileged. There were some interviewees that identified that their parents were teachers, one of the interviewees described two successful parents with one being a teacher and the other a solicitor.

“Neither of my parents did full degrees they both had some experience of university, my mum and my father had a very, very short course of being in a university environment, he left school at 16, he was then trying to get into the air force who sent him on a 6 weeks course within a university. My mother did some kind of a teacher training qualification but I don’t think it was a full degree. They both had a deep respect for education, I think they valued it very much and I think both would have seen education as a way to access new opportunities in life, so they had a very, very high value for education and probably had a bend towards the arts certainly, an interest in the arts but neither were in that field. My father ran a small business and my mother taught but had a lot of health issues. I think it’s much about the value and encouragement that they give you” (Principal, 13).

Many described parents as being educated, with some identifying both parents as educated. That being said most identified that parents valued education and pushed or drove the interviewees to do well.

“I’m very fortunate, I have always been encouraged at every stage of my life to be the best I can possibly be so education you know, was a massive emphasis in my upbringing and good education was a good emphasis so I’m a product really I guess of that opportunity.... I have also travelled the world, I was brought up abroad, I was brought up in Africa where education is a gift and people are very appreciative of education.... parents pushed me to get a good education and both were well educated” (Principal, 4).

One of the interviewees described their parents as uneducated as they dropped out of university, this being said the interviewee still identified with having an intellectually stimulating environment.

“Ok it’s not very happy so I did all my education in the X and came from a very deprived background. It was an interesting deprived background because my parents, my father was an artist he was a playwright so I had the advantage of being in a stimulating and intellectual environment but being materially deprived so that was key I think because I knew from a really early age that the only answer to have a different kind of life was to get a good education” (Principal, 12).

Most of the interviewees described parents as being bright or intelligent even when they were not formally educated.

“Ok well I was brought up in X in X and my parents were market traders so none of my family had a formal education beyond the age of 15, but they were very bright and run their own businesses” (Principal, 16).

“My father he wasn’t formerly educated he never went to university but what he was, was quite intelligent and Imaginative, creative” (Principal, 1).

“my mother has no formal qualification, she has now because when she retired she went and did A levels and loads of qualifications after she retired... most of which I paid for, but she was a bright woman, my father was a very bright guy also he worked himself up from shop floor mechanic to run a massive car dealership” (Principal, 8).

### ***Schooling and Education***

When asked about school, most of the interviewees chose not to mention primary school nor did any discuss it in any detail. Those that did discussed positive experiences in primary school education with only some describing negative experiences. One interviewee described a headteacher in primary school as being influential in their career.

“Who were the people who had an impact on my life, and I would say a headteacher of my primary school who was a strong woman” (Principal, 6)

One particular negative experience resulted in one of the interviewees failing the 11 plus.

“I went to primary school but I moved schools due to the business doing well and I always remember going to this other primary school and my mum and dad drove me there and I went into the classroom and I saw long division for the first time and I ran away. I was absolutely petrified of this woman (teacher), absolutely petrified of her. So the next thing that when they brought me again I locked myself in the car and I wouldn’t allow them to get me out. The good thing about primary school was I was good at football and that’s what people thought I would become. This teacher said I was never going to do anything academically, there was this other teacher who said I was not going to do it, he’s a good footballer but he’s not going to make anything academically and sure enough I didn’t get my 11 plus” (Principal, 1).

Another interviewee described how they had moved around a number of primary schools and although this was portrayed as being a negative experience, the interviewee recalled quite fondly that they enjoyed the freedom with no pressure and that due to this fact they love change and that this has now made them adaptive to change.

“I had lots of schools because my parents moved around a lot, I think I had seven schools at one time before secondary, so I was a bit of a transient I suppose, but because of that I love change, you know how you look back and you think why am I moving around working in London and then Scotland and you look back and think .... when I was 6, I liked change and now I am 63 I like change...” (Principal, 2).

When interviewees were recalling their secondary school experiences most described positive experiences. Many said they had left school with a good number of GCSEs / O-levels, most described themselves as ‘average’ or ‘not one of the clever ones’ and most went to their local secondary school with only one attending boarding school.

“I was one of these who didn’t ever want to draw attention to myself either I was one of these who sits in the middle of the class and gets on with as little as possible really because I wasn’t one of them challenging ones at the back and I wasn’t one of the clever ones at the front, I was just in the middle, so I actually came out of school with 5 GCSE’s” (Principal, 3).

“at secondary school I started to like the subjects, so I liked science subjects, biology, chemistry, I didn’t like the school bit particularly” (Principal, 17).

“secondary school, O level’s, I got 8 or 9 O level’s or whatever, they were A and B grades, the school wanted me to go to university and so I debated at the age of 14 if this was something for me” (Principal, 6).

Only some of the interviewees said that they hated school, most used secondary school as a platform to move on into work or entered into FE or sixth form.

“It was a school in the borough that would take in all the other kids who were kicked out of other schools. So it was quite an alarming school, so I had quite a lot of friends who were not academically achieving. Although they were very bright that wasn’t recognised or developed that sort of culture was more to discipline and behaviour management really. I always found school easy in terms of that, I never liked school because I think it didn’t treat people fairly and only rewarded certain behaviour” (Principal, 5).

Of those that described negative experiences in secondary school, most said that they had received either really poor careers advice or none at all.

“I was quite odd, I knew I wanted to be an accountant at age 14, so I’m one of those rare people that had a plan, I didn’t get any careers advice the advice at school was rubbish. I was fairly clear and I went to a local comp I did ok you know academically, I could have done a bit better, my excuse was the world cup was on during exam time” (Principal, 9).

“I had no careers advice or anything in those days, you know in a girl’s grammar school you either become a doctor or did history or became a teacher that was basically it and I really didn’t want to be any of those” (Principal, 16).

“Terrible careers advise at school” (Principal, 11).

Many of the interviewees described what they thought was poor teaching experiences, whilst many enjoyed learning, they disliked the school setting with some detailing that they felt constrained.

Most of the interviewees achieved a number of GCSE / O-levels or CSEs, many of which described moving into FE either sixth form or a general FE college. Many of the interviewees described themselves as a 'product of FE', whereby they felt they had been given a second chance to study and achieve and or they tended to thrive in this type of environment, most described their time in FE as positive with many stating upon reflection that this was probably one of the reasons they ended working in and now Principal of an FE college.

"I was very fortunate to go to an FE college because I wasn't a person who played by the rules very well, I didn't like being constrained and I still don't. FE enabled me because it was less like bells ringing and formal, so I learnt quickly in FE I was hungry and I found it easy in FE because of the people, you weren't chased but I knew myself then that I had to chase myself as they weren't going to chase me. It was different and I just responded to that environment" (Principal, 2).

"I was a product of FE in a sense that I did well at school but thrived at college whilst studying my vocational qualification and it's probably one of the main reasons I am now a principal of an FE college, it's giving something back and making a real difference to people's lives" (Principal, 20).

Some of the interviewees described their time in FE as quite significant, one interviewee described that it was an FE teacher that had quite an impact on their career.

"It was something that I didn't know what I wanted to do and to be honest teaching seemed something that I could do; I had a great teacher (Anon) who taught me History at College. He had a fantastic way of communicating, and a lot of it was you know these days' Ofsted would say it was dreadful bloody teaching because it was didactic, but he engaged people within that didacticism he really put students in the centre and I related to him and I had learnt a lot from him about teaching. So when it came to me teaching the first thing that I was very conscious of was being like him" (Principal, 1).

Having questioned the interviewees about their qualifications, it became clear that most of the Principals had studied at degree level, most did this after college with only some going back to study at this level once in the workplace. Many had professional qualifications that they had worked towards whilst in work, this was usually whilst working in other sectors and not



education or FE, and it was pre entering into education for most. Interestingly most of the interviewees had taken the vocational route opposed to studying the A-level route. Many of the interviewees hold a teacher training qualification and tended to study towards this whilst in teaching positions or just starting out but not all, some of the interviewees have never taught or lectured.

### ***Influential People***

Parents were described as influential in the lives and careers of many of the interviewees. Many were seen as positive influences, some were influential in the way in which it drove interviewees to want better experiences for themselves but thought of parents as supportive, loving and hardworking who worked hard to provide for their family. Those who described parents as influential in terms of they had experienced negative parenting, used this as a driver or motivation to succeed and not end up in the same situation that they had found themselves in.

“In the end I wanted to become a success myself because I had been a huge disappointment to my family. I had a point to prove, and so I almost went out then to make sure I was successful” (Principal, 3).

Some interviewees commented explicitly that their parents had been a significant influence. However, their influences were evident in the descriptions of their upbringing and when they were asked to recall any influential people having reflected later on in their lives and careers.

“my father was also a very bright guy and worked himself up from shop floor to run a massive car dealership, so from that point of view my parents were a major, major influence no question about it” (Principal, 8).

“Oh yeah. My father came from a very humble background...” (Principal, 1).

“Yeah there was significant parental influence, my parents came from the Irish Republic in 1950; my mother came across as a nurse in East Birmingham and my father came across as a labourer. My mother was pretty well educated but my father left school at the

age of 12. My father was probably the major stamp on me the value of education ...he had to come up against great prejudice and bring up a family. I saw the hard times that they went through and the sacrifices that they had made for us, lots of love and nurture but not a lot of cash...It forms your spine and forms your values and your morals” (Principal, 18).

Teachers were also described as being influential. Teachers were described fondly by many as having a positive influence, there were some cases where teachers had been influential but in a negative capacity. Some of the interviewees recognised that they used these negative teachers to drive their career / education forward in spite of them.

“Went to school, secondary school, and during that time this teacher came and told me that I was not going to get anything academically and he was right. I hated school absolutely hated it. I got 2 CSE’s 1 in social studies and 1 in government citizenship CSE grade 1’s and that was in this teachers’ class so I was pleased about that. So I went to work in an abattoir and decided this wasn’t for me I had to get myself together, went back to college ...and who was my teacher, this same teacher. He taught law and I did O-level law with 5 others and passed everyone, my top grade was law, so I decided to do A - levels. I then got A-level law again taught by this same teacher. I then went onto university and did a law degree and again this teacher was there as my teacher and I couldn’t believe it. I finished my law degree with honours degree in public law which was this teachers thing, there was a thing in me with this teacher which I didn’t understand and I always remember you know leaving university, that was fantastic” (Principal, 1).

Interviewees that described positive influences at secondary school, of those interviewees most did not explicitly state that these teachers influenced their decision to enter into education or that it was the reason that they became teachers. It was apparent that the interviewees saw these influencers as people who played a part in the development or shaping of their character and that they learnt from these people.

“I would say a headteacher at my primary school, but it was more, I think that they’re strong women” (Principal, 6).

“I had some very good teachers particularly when I did my a-levels” (Principal, 17).

Some of the interviewees described university lecturers / college lecturers or heads of department as being influential and some stated that they entered into teaching because these people encouraged them to.

“in my final year, one of my lecturers was working in a FE college alongside teaching at university and suggested I think about it and thought I would make a good teacher” (Principal, 5).

“At college I had a teacher, she was a really, really good teacher and the head of department was great as well but this teacher was, she was really strict always looked professional always really high standards with the students and I think that had an early influence” (Principal, 11).

### ***Significant Incidents / Experiences***

The significant experiences described in the formative years were quite varied, most of the experiences revolved around either the interviewees time in education or their family home life and upbringing. One of the interviewees described the death of a parent at a young age, another interviewee described being made homeless.

“my dad had an injury at work and ended up in hospital for six months, he did his back in, basically broke his back, so house goes with the job, so we were homeless, he was in a hospital in Wales somewhere for six months and we were hungry and homeless” (Principal, 20).

Some of the interviewees recalled having to work at a really young age, as young as 12 and 14 years old and this was to be able to support financially at home.

“my goal was to get into a really good university and then I really started to enjoy things but the other thing was I had to start working at the age of 14 and I have been continuously employed without interruptions since the age of 14” (Principal, 12).

One of the interviewees described themselves as having ‘a broken parentage’ that involved violence, and another interviewee described their chronic illness as having quite a significant impact on them and their chosen career path.

“I went to university and did a geography degree, geography and sociology, so I did 3 years there. It was actually during my finals I got a very, very bad illness like, a chronic illness, so I decided that rather going straight into a job that I would do a post graduate teaching year so I thought I could cope with that, and little did I know...” (Principal, 10).

It is important for the researcher to state that although these experiences were identified as being significant, none of the interviewees were resentful of their upbringing it was actually quite to the contrary and most used this as a driver to succeed.

“I know I didn’t want to have the kind of life my parents had.” (Principal, 12)

One of the interviewees described passing the 11 plus as a significant experience.

“I was the only kid where I lived that passed the 11 plus so effectively I got ostracised by everybody around because around that time you, the norm was you went to work at ... and I didn’t I went elsewhere in education I went to university and became something different” (Principal, 8).

Only some of the interviewees commented that there was no particular experience or incident during their formative years.

When interviewees were asked if they had learnt anything during their formative years that they apply now, most described ‘self-belief’, many said confidence and many stated work-ethic.

“The other thing is never believing that you can’t achieve something” (Principal, 1).

“Definitely self-belief or confidence in your own ability, my parents weren’t particularly driven, but I had watched them struggle to put a roof over our heads and I didn’t want that for me. I have always believed in my own ability, both in my education and jobs and think I could do a good job in whatever I applied for, otherwise I would never have applied” (Principal, 18).

“Work ethic, my parents worked very long hours, mom had two jobs and always worked hard, neither were educated, my dad left school at a young age and my mum left school and went straight to work and of course you could in those days. They would always say you can do what you want as long as you work hard at it and be the best at it, I always remember that, it’s definitely where I get my work ethic from now” (Principal, 7).

## **The Journey to Principalship**

This section details the responses to the accession years, the journey to Principalship. This includes the period from university graduation through to the post immediately prior to FE

college Principal. This section will be structured by the themes that emerged from the interviews, these will include, influential / significant people, significant experiences or incidents, enabling and constraining factors and values underpinning ambition to lead.

The second section will focus on the Principal's preparation for the role.

### ***Work Experiences / Industrial Experience***

Of those Principals interviewed, it was interesting to find that most had worked in industry before entering into FE. This is quite significant as most of the Principals also stated that they had leadership roles or positions whilst in industry and many of those stated that they also learnt from these experiences and use some of that which they learnt in their current post of FE college Principal.

One of the Principals said their experience with and qualification in Human Resources (HR) that they had studied during their time pre-FE, helped in their current role.

“I studied a HR post graduate diploma and then went to work for (unnamed) in HR for five years which was really good actually and the contrast between working for a normal firm and (unnamed) was a bit of a shock.

In my job now, the hardest thing and it's nothing to do with the funding and all of that, it is always the people. I learnt through the HR course that, this is the most difficult, working with people properly and dealing with very unpleasant people and you can also get some very difficult student complaints or employer complaints or people threatening to sue you etc.” (Principal, 17).

“I learnt how to speak to people when they are quite stressed about something that is quite personal to them actually. It was pretty good preparation to speak to people in different environments, so I think of some of the planning I used to do and the finance those little things, picking up those things helped me in education that was quite useful in terms of education” (Principal,5).

It's clear that high value is placed on previous experience whilst not in FE has played a pivotal role in the career journey to Principalship. Most Principals placed high value on these experiences documenting how they have helped them along their leadership journeys. Most described previous leadership roles whilst not in FE had taught them a lot about how to manage

people and in some cases lead in quite difficult and challenging environments. Some described how these previous roles had helped shape them as a leader whilst others said they learnt how to cope with change in the FE sector, and in particular colleges, due to the nature of the sector being ever-changing. Many Principals when asked also discussed how they had learnt a lot from people, leaders and managers some of which were described as mentors. These key people were not in the education sector. Some described very positive influences and spoke very fondly about some of their previous relationships with these people. Others described in some detail some quite negative people who they still felt were mentors but in a very different way, for example how not to manage or lead people or learnt how not to go about things. Amongst the Principals there seemed to be a few names that recurred a few times from different Principals, one in particular was mentioned by at least four of the twenty Principals, this person was clearly very influential for various reasons. Interestingly each of the Principals learnt different things from them, the one trait that did seem to stand out for all four was the way he conducted himself, especially in external meetings.

### ***Influential or Significant People***

It was evident throughout the interviews that there were a number of people that have had an impact on the lives and careers of these college Principals. Most interviewees described people from jobs pre entering into FE, most also recalled people that were influential once they had entered into the FE sector. Some interviewees described parents as being influential at this time in their lives, most interviewees described parents as being the most influential on them during their formative years. It appears to be colleagues, managers or bosses that have had the most influential impact at this stage in the Principals' life. Some of the interviewees described senior managers / leaders as being influential, this was apparent once the interviewees were in FE.

One clear distinction was that most cited a previous Principal as the most influential, in both positive and negative ways. Many cited that they had learnt a lot from previous Principals with some recalling being nurtured or prepared for the Principal role.

“Probably my biggest mentor was the previous principal who worked here, I never realised, and I never saw it myself. I never realised it was him who said I was quite creative I suppose I’ve got qualifications, lots and lots of qualifications which I think are important, they do help you, they do make you improve, they do give you a lot of knowledge and they also get you through the door. You want get through the door without qualifications. (Anon) was a brilliant mentor, quite a few years back he said that one day you will be a principal he also said that I would be the principal of this college and I laughed, I had no concept of it. Somehow he saw that I understand, that I can see some people where they’ve got this immense potential and he was hell bent on supporting me” (Principal,8).

“Yeah when the college first merged the principal then was adamant that I was going to be a principal one day. You are influenced by people who you are working with, I have experience of working with both the good and the bad. I remember thinking if I ever turn out like that and I ever line managed like that shoot me. Somebody who was directly line managing me, was the worst 3 years of my life it was hell and so that taught me an awful lot about handling and how not to manage people” (Principal, 3).

Some cited that they learnt how not to do things from a previous Principal, some also described senior leaders that had recognised their potential.

“There was a lady called (Anon) who was the youngest manager for ...and she ended up working in this firm where I did and she was the office manager, I worked a long side her, she was the office manager and I managed the money and she was the most disgusting, ruthless business women I have ever seen in my life, she made grown men cry, she was evil. She used to test me, she was evil and a ruthless businesswoman so I learnt business from her, the sharp end, the dirty end” (Principal, 9).

Some interviewees described more than one Principal as being quite influential:

“I learnt a lot of things from (Anon, 1) about wheeling and dealing, “negotiating” is the right word, negotiating and influencing confidence, resilience, other things, (Anon, 2) was a real entrepreneur you know (Anon, 2) would put out lots of ideas out, if you caught them you went with them great but he didn’t get really upset he’d move onto the next thing, so he was very forward thinking on lots of things you know, and he was probably never given credit for it. He did lots of mergers, he taught me lots about mergers, about dealing with people” (Principal, 6).

Out of those that did not identify a Principal as being influential some did however, stated that previous managers were influential.

“I think in industry some of the people I worked for, I had good and bad and some were really good and I took a lot of their best practice and also reflected on the other side when I thought gosh I didn’t want to be that type of manager or that type of person so I had good and bad in both” (Principal, 11).

“I was just blown away with the head of department. I still remember her name over 20 nearly 30 years ago now, its 30 years gosh, and she just blew me away she was so professional. She suggested that I should apply for the teaching job advertised at the local college” (Principal, 11).

### ***Significant Experiences / Incidents***

Throughout the interviews there were a range of experiences that were deemed as being significant. Many of the interviewees recalled working with difficult managers or Principals. This is evident from above where some of the interviewees commented upon the fact that they learnt how not to lead. Some of the interviewees stated that they were overlooked for Principalship at some stage and this was significant for them.

“Principal job came up and I applied for it and it was a national thing and I got short listed and then there was this 2-day gruelling thing and I made it through the 1<sup>st</sup> day and only 3 of us made it through the 2<sup>nd</sup> day and I didn’t get it. I know I made it to the top 2 and it was the 1<sup>st</sup> time in my whole life I couldn’t believe it I had never, never ever not got a job that I didn’t go for then. I thought to myself you know what this is what having failures early on in your life are important like if you fail your driving test or something that is actually is important, I was into my 40’s and never had a failure and boy did it hit me. I was devastated I was like “whoa” I couldn’t handle it I had never failed at anything in my whole life and I was just mortified” (Principal, 12).

Some said that previous Principal’s retirement or leaving suddenly as the significant experience that led them to apply or be given the post of Principal.

“so (Anon, 2) he’d applied for another Principals’ job but I didn’t think that he would go but I realised through talking with him that he would go, which he did, so I decided that if he wasn’t there and we had somebody else would I feel the same way, so I spoke with my husband and he said if you go for the principal post I’ll look at early retirement and be with the children, so not the traditional turn of events” (Principal, 6).

“but she welcomed me, I felt very much part of the team and I learnt a lot from her even though within 2 years she retired and I got the job. I learnt a lot from her and she was very impressive. I’m not the same person as her but I did ask her for a list of tips she could give me and I still remember some of those things, in the case of my current job she would be a key person” (Principal, 7).



Some of the interviewees recalled attending CPD training and experiencing encounters with aspiring Principals as an influential experience. These significant experiences for some of the interviewees was the defining moment, these interviewees acknowledge that whilst they thought that they did not get anything out of the Principals' preparation programme, in actual fact some of the interviewees recognised that this experience was quite pivotal in their journey and for some it was the defining moment that led them to believe they could become a Principal. For some this experience prompted them to apply for a Principal position.

“yeah I went on the AOC senior leadership management development course, but that wasn't the idea of becoming a principal it was more of an idea I wanted something, to have time out of it and develop and develop my skills but going on the course you see a lot of aspirational managers and you say to yourself I don't want to be a principal and I thought if this is the talent pool out there I think I might think about it. It probably did prompt me yeah. I could do this so that was the key preparation I did” (Principal, 5).

“There was a principal too that you could say was quite influential, I learnt a lot from him about how to manage staff. He was influential too in my decision to apply for his replacement when he moved on. I am actually still in touch with him now and very often used to call him for advice and still do really” (Principal, 6).

Some of the interviewees stated that taking on an interim Principal role was quite significant, none were prepared for it, in these cases it was as a result of a Principal leaving or retiring suddenly. These interviewees were asked to take on the role rather than applying or seeking such a position. These interviewees acknowledged that this was a defining moment in their career, and it was clear that each of these interviewees learnt a lot from these experiences.

“I was finance director one minute, and the previous principal decided that he was going to go onto bigger and better things and I was the most senior person left and so they said right move into this office and you're going to be interim principal, do you want to do it? And of course I said yes and that was a tough period” (Principal, 9).

“So I got thrust into all sorts of positions, opening new UTCs and schools so things well out of my comfort zone and I dint know anything about them. I had some really tough challenges but I came out of it which probably did me a lot of good. So when they appointed me I thought if I can get through that I can do anything really so bring it on. I really thought about it and I didn't put my application form in until the week before it was due” (Principal, 9).

Similarly, many of the interviewees had previously held the position of Deputy Principal or Vice Principal as they are known in some FE colleges. Interestingly, all of those interviewees that held this position felt they had gained a lot from the experience, especially those who had a very encouraging or supportive Principal pushing and championing them, alternatively those of the interviewees who had dealt or worked with a very difficult or challenging Principal, also acknowledge both of these extremes meant that they learnt how to or how not to lead in their opinion.

Some of the interviewees stated that a significant experience for them was either being advised to leave in order to gain a promotion or put forward for a promotion elsewhere.

One Principal stated that the sole reason he got into FE was his manager at the time insisting he find a new job. This turned out to be a very significant and pivotal moment for that Principal.

“The reason I got into FE, and I was doing a good job for her and the board, I was destined for bigger things, I think I would have done really well there. I remember her coming in one Wednesday and she through HR weekly at me, you couldn’t do that now and she said it’s time you look for a new job, and I said I thought I was doing a good job and she said you’re doing fine, its time you look for a new job because we are going to hold you back now”, (Principal, 9).

As can be seen, some of the Principals underwent more than one significant experience throughout the journey to Principal with all impacting on their journey in one way or another. Most of the Principals either had a positive or negative experience that resulted in them embarking on or securing Principalship. Similarly, to Principal 9’s experience, Principal 13 was also working in industry and not in education when they were approached or headhunted if you like to apply for the Principal job. This interviewee recognised that they had no intention of, nor had they thought about, entering education let alone the Principal of a college. What was evident though during the interview was how much they have relished this opportunity and recognised that this experience was significant in its impact on their career.

All of the Principals interviewed identified that they had some form of a significant experience that either resulted in them entering into FE or ultimately impacting on their decisions to apply for the Principalship.

### ***Talent Recognition***

During the interviews it was hinted at by Principals that during their careers some had experienced some form of talent identification or recognition, many talked about it during the move into management, with some describing being identified for more senior positions or being told by peers etc that they ‘should go for it’ with one describing being recognised early on ‘as a rising star in FE who would one day make a good Principal’.

“The principal valued position and me and talent spotted me, I do the same here, I have 3 senior managers who have moved onto deputy jobs and one deputy who has moved into a principal position” (Principal, 4).

As can be seen above this Principal valued talent recognition so much so that they supported managers to move up even if it meant leaving their organisation.

It was not the intention of the researcher to ask about talent recognition and it is not a main focus of the research as can be seen from the research questions, however it is key in the journey to leadership and it was thought to be too significant not to include in the discussion. Talent identification links to significant experiences or influences. The reason for this is that when detailing any significant influences or experiences talent recognition became an obvious theme with the Principals.

Interestingly some Principals, when describing what they believed leadership involved, cited ‘talent spotting’ as they put it, in their own organisation with one particular Principal detailing an in house management programme dedicated to exactly that.

“Talent spotting is a thing of mine, I am constantly observing people to identify their potential. I believe in growing your own, these people now the organisation, they are probably doing a really good job and people can learn management skills, now I am not saying everyone can or even should [laughter] but you can normally recognise those who have the potential , talent really to go far. We invest in it here and we have our own inhouse management training programme right from lower level management up to senior level” (Principal, 19).

“I think it’s important that you manage people and then again, it’s about the longer-term process that we’ve talked about. Part of the long-term process is you must secure outcomes for the next ten years not just for year next year and the year after that. So, the business version of what you’ve just said is succession planning, is it fundamentally about picking good people. So yeah, I think that’s really important and again something that has not been in place but not been placed but the building blocks haven’t been either, part of succession planning must be great performance management” (Principal,14).

Talent recognition is evident in the journey to leadership of these Principals. In relation to the Gronn model, it is recognised that there are significant influences / experiences / significant people who have an impact on the leadership journey, the model however is not explicit in highlighting talent identification or recognition and rather focuses on people like peers, friends, mentors and family. It is evident that those who are identifying the talent of these Principals are often mentors or colleagues in senior positions. This will be further explored below with some recommendations to the model.

### ***Professional Development and Training***

When the interviewees were asked about their education, the Principals detailed the types of qualifications they had achieved or worked towards throughout their careers. Most of the Principals studied some form of leadership / management qualification whilst in FE and in a

management position prior to any deputy or Principalship. Most saw this as more of a ‘tick box exercise’ and helpful in terms of applying for the role rather than anything really useful, with some stating that they were hoping to learn key leadership or management skills to help them become good leaders / managers in their job roles.

“the qualifications / training gets you through the door, you won’t get through without them” (Principal, 8).

When asked about preparation for their current roles, most stated that they had learnt the most from observing or working with previous Principals.

“So it wasn’t that that prepared me, I don’t think anything can prepare you because you have to work in the environment and you pick up and you are influenced by people who you are working with” (Principal, 3).

Most of the Principals stated that they had learnt a lot in their previous roles and mainly from other Principals. Some were nurtured or talent spotted for the role of Principal and recognised this when reflecting on their career journey. When the interviewees were asked about significant people in their careers, those that had clearly learnt a lot from Principals spoke very fondly about their experiences and what they had learnt. Not all interviewees felt their experiences were always positive with some describing how they learnt how not to be a Principal or how not to perform the role of Principal.

“I have learnt a lot from previous Principals both how to and how not to do things, I didn’t believe in some of the things and the way in which some things were handled and I thought to myself I won’t be like you” (Principal, 7).

When asked about any formal training and / or development that they had received the general consensus amongst the Principals was that most had negative experiences, and most felt that they did not find the formal training useful. In terms of formal training and development most of the Principals either studied Principals Qualifying Programme (PQP) which was awarded

by The Centre for Excellence in Leadership (CEL) or studied the Aspiring Principals qualification as part of their journey to Principalship. Neither of these formal training / qualifications was held in high esteem by the interviewees. The regulations stipulated that Principals had to hold, or be working towards, the PQP qualification and whilst some chose to undertake the Aspiring Principals programme or the Senior Leadership and Management Development Programme, most that studied towards the PQP were put forward or told they had to work towards the PQP. One interviewee went as far as to say that the programme was ‘awful’ and ‘so bad he dropped out’ (Principal,19).

When questioned about their experiences during this training and development most described it ‘has something that they had to do’. Interestingly most of the interviewees who studied towards the Aspiring Principals programme described the experience of meeting other aspirational Principals / leaders as quite significant in their own decision to go for the Principalship. One Principal stated that “I thought if this is the talent pool out there I think I might think about it” (Principal, 5).

Even though most Principals described these programmes as being ineffectual, most of the Principals, when describing their experiences, did express that the residential element of the programme, whereby they were asked to create a timeline and reflect back on their lives and careers, found this very useful.

“when I was principal it was mandatory that we had to do the Principals qualifying program and within the senior leadership program one of the exercises they did was put you in tents and you had to do a timeline and you really had to reflect back about things that influenced you about life, things that I had never thought about before, role models, influences, having done that there were things that hit back, who had an impact on my life” (Principal, 6).

“Did I get anything out of the course? Probably not if I’m really honest. Having said that there were a number of residentials as part of this course and the very first one ever we had to march up a hill and put a tent in the middle of nowhere and sit in it and really reflect back on when you were a child, your journey and why you ended up being the

person you were and that really for the first time ever made me identify who I was and why I am the way I am” (Principal, 3).

One interviewee also stated just ‘being able to take the time out away from their role was beneficial as it provided time to think and some breathing space’ (Principal, 5).

When describing their journey to leadership, most of the Principals stated that they had studied for an MBA. Most thought it was useful, with a number of those stating that it was particularly helpful with finance, whilst those interviewees with finance backgrounds stated that to be able to reflect or meet other candidates was most useful. Interestingly most Principals found this far more useful than the Principals training programmes. The general consensus was that these were general courses and within FE colleges no college is the same and all will have different challenges that they face.

The lack of formal preparation is also captured very clearly by one interviewee who stated:

“There was no formal preparation for this role, no course or programme really prepares you. The courses around consist of 3 days here and there, even now talking to other Principals who did undertake the PQP course it didn’t really prepare them for the job, most will tell you that there are elements that are useful, but they don’t cover things like how to merge colleges, how to run your finances or really allow you to gain any practical experience in running an FE college nothing prepares you for that you rely on previous experience or you just have to do it and work through whatever is thrown your way, your basically learning on the job” (Principal, 19).

What was very clear from the interviewees was the expectation that once promoted, there was the assumption that the Principal has all the answers and knows how to be a Principal, and this is very often not the case. This was summed up by one interviewee who stated:

“I was asked to be the principal and so I took the role and I knew nothing about how to run a college I had done my MBA and management qualifications but I’m not a finance expert. I’ve done unit obviously on my MBA and I think it’s about having the right team around you but also asking. So as soon as I took over I rang (Anon) a principal at another college and said right what do I need to do about this, I don’t know about that would you do some mentoring for me and I also spoke to (Anon) the previous principal who I had still kept in contact with and said would you do some mentoring” (Principal, 11).

### *Coaching and Mentors*

Most of the interviewees when describing their journey to leadership and their move into leadership positions talked about a mentor, or for many, more than one person that they described as a mentor. Only some of the interviewees mention a coach, those that did stated that they were allocated a coach once in the position of Principal and all found it really useful this also tended to be those first-time Principals, and this was their first post.

“I was lucky, it was very valuable to have those coaching sessions about 6 sessions or so from someone with a great deal of experience” (Principal, 13).

Although not all Principals had a coach, those that did stated that it was good to have someone to talk to and bounce ideas off, those interviewees also stated that it would have been useful to have a coach prior to gaining the Principal position.

One interviewee described having a coach allocated to him during his MBA when he was in a senior leadership position. He too echoed the value of this.

“I had a coach when I gained a post as a senior management team member here, as someone who had stepped up from middle manager to senior management and I remembering asking what do they do and this coach was really good in settling me down, but I only had that for about 3 weeks as the course was close to finishing but it was the best bit of support I had. I think coaching works well and I think that was quite useful” (Principal, 9).

Many of the interviewees described having a mentor as really useful, many said they had access to other Principals, whether this was at another college or their previous Principals with which they were able to have / maintain contact. This was clearly very valuable to these Principals, most Principals stated that being able to meet with or speak with other Principals was valuable as they could share experiences. It appears that whether formal or informal, mentors have been quite significant or pivotal for most of these Principals. Of the Principals interviewed, it was obvious that most had what they recognised as informal mentors; these were people they could



approach for support. These Principals also recognised the role in which these mentors had played in their journey to Principalship with many stating that they were directly responsible for them gaining or striving towards the Principalship.

### ***Values Underpinning Ambition to Lead***

Most commented that they were ambitious and wanted to progress in their careers, most also stated that they intentionally sought promotions to leadership positions throughout their career. After their first leadership positions most of the interviewees went on to seek further promotions. Only some of the interviewees set out to be a college Principal early in their careers. Most stated that whilst they were ambitious and sought further leadership positions, most had never considered the Principal position. For most they only started to think about such a position after being recommended or asked to undertake interim Principal positions. Many also described being nurtured or supported by a Principal having an impact on their decision to go for the leadership position of Principal, with some describing the significant experience of attending the preparation to Principals programme quite significant in their decision to consider or apply for the Principal position.

It was evident during the interviews that the Principals had been driven and had the determination to do well in their posts, with many determinedly still striving to do well and establish themselves within the colleges that they work. Many were well established and very confident in their roles.

### ***Drivers / Motivational Factors Underpinning Ambition to Lead***

Many were driven by past experiences, including childhood upbringing, wanting to make parents proud and some expressed their desire to fulfil personal ambitions. Many Principals were driven by the impact that they felt they could have, with many describing the opportunity to change lives of many students.

“The reason I changed my job is because it gives you a chance to have a positive impact on so many people, so what drives me, I think, is the idea that we will make a better college that will get people a better life and better skills with better pay and more contentment so, that’s what drives me I think”, (principal, 14). (See interview transcript of principal 14 in Appendix Two).

Some Principals stated that they simply just couldn’t bear the thought of being led by anyone else, whilst others who had worked hard in interim Principal positions recognised that they had worked hard and wouldn’t want anyone else to come in and lead them. This was a key driver for applying for the Principals’ job.

“the more I thought about that the more I thought “why would I want anybody else to come in and line manage me when actually it was me who’s done all of the work”. Although I panicked big time thinking I can’t do that job, in the end I thought to myself why not and so I applied”, (Principal, 3).

Interestingly most of the Principals were self-motivated and realised that they could do the Principal’s job. As discussed previously, Principals had experienced self-belief in their early childhood which appears to be earlier than the Gronn model suggests. This is a reflection of FE college Principals and one of the subtle differences that these different leaders go through when comparing school headteachers. The interview data also shows that Principals believed in their own abilities and self-belief is evident, what is interesting is that many of the Principals still needed some form of validation from peers who they believed to be experts in their field or in this case their position. It could be argued that if Principals needed validation, then do they really have self-belief? The researcher has evidence from the interviews to support this

notion of self-belief and when questioned, Principals were able to explain or describe that it was not validation of their abilities but that it was a job worth doing, it was noted that Principals felt safe in previous or current positions before considering or seeking the move up, it was what they knew it as their area of expertise or they had a good track record. By seeking a promotion to Principal, Principals felt they were putting themselves into such a position that the focus would be solely on them, as one Principal stated it was their head on the block. The motivation for the move to Principal for many stemmed from an eagerness to give something back and to be able to potentially change or impact on students' lives for the better. This came through really clearly in the interviews and for one Principal was quite an emotional response.

For some Principals, it was seen as an opportunity to prove to parents they could do it or to prove parents wrong for one Principal.

Many Principals identified with the type of students that they had in their colleges as many were also from working class backgrounds or in areas of high deprivation.

One of the over-arching drivers to lead came from the self-concept that was apparent, this is something that had been developed and often nurtured along the Principals career journeys. This will be discussed further in the self-belief section of this chapter.

### ***Constraints***

Finances, OFSTED, and the changing nature of FE were all described as constraining factors by Principals. Most of the Principals interviewed talked about the impact that the wrong staff in the wrong positions had on the college. Some of the Principals also highlighted that finances have resulted in mergers with other colleges and this too had impacted on their role, most said it took up a lot of their time and that they had to rely on other senior managers to help to run the day to day of the college. One of the many changes that has happened to the FE sector was

Incorporation, from this we know that the Principals' role has significantly changed, one of the big changes was the move from Principal to Principal & CEO, meaning a shift in the type of role that it has now become. Those principals who have held the position for a number of years described their roles as now involving, closely monitoring of finances, working collaboratively with external employers and local councils etc. and in many instances dealing with new builds and mergers. Some of which were deemed to be very time consuming and meant that they had to rely on their senior management teams to run the day-to-day aspects of the college. The lack of funding in the sector was included when Principals discussed finances and most of the Principals stated that this was their biggest challenge or constraining factor as it often resulted in a merger of two colleges and or cuts to provision. All of the Principals stated that nothing has prepared them for these types of constraints, no formal training or previous experience had prepared them for this. Whilst some described the usefulness of the MBA in terms of helping build confidence with finance, all those Principals without any finance history or a background in finance stated that they have appointed or have senior people in a finance position who are deemed experts and often deal with the finances. One interviewee described having an understanding of the finances and stated the importance of understanding the finance otherwise you can be "vulnerable" this Principal also stated that the Principal cannot be the "jack of all trades" (Principal, 3). Hence having a strong senior management team to support.

### ***A Reluctance to Lead***

The researcher discussed in the earlier chapters of this thesis that there has been a reluctance lead or take on the most senior leadership positions. Research suggests that this is a reluctance of middle managers making the move to either headship or Principalship. The researcher thought it would be of interest to the reader to identify if this is the case for FE college

Principals. As detailed throughout the thesis, those interviewed for this research hold the position of Principal and as a consequence have not been reluctant in the move up to the most senior leadership position, or has there?

The researcher was able to gain from the interviews a clear picture, including the career trajectory of those Principals interviewed, and in doing so discovered that many Principals did not set out or plan to become FE college Principals. Some admitted to thinking about it at some stage in their careers once in FE, whilst others said it only really occurred to them when put forward for it either by a colleague or someone in the position of Principal themselves.

As existing research by authors such as Browne (2004) and Henshaw (2016) suggests, the reluctance includes school headteachers and according to Roberts (2019) work life balance, accountability and removed from teaching and pupils are the top 3 recorded reasons for middle managers not seeking or moving up to headship in schools. Roberts (2019) also suggests that responsibilities, having increased in recent years, has also impacted on managers decisions not to move up. Therefore, the researcher thought it was important to set out the differences and / or similarities of the reluctance to step into the role of Principal in FE colleges. The findings are thus, firstly and similarly, this research found that work life balance was noted as a bone of contention.

“The opportunity just came up, the principal was retiring and I was perfectly happy doing the job of Curriculum director which was the vice principal role as there was no vice principal, all the directors went for role and thought I should, I wasn’t looking for a principals’ job, definitely wasn’t looking and I have never had it as an end goal. If I am honest I had to really think about it, my main worry was the work life balance, I had watched the previous principal put in some hours and actually go through some rough times. I wasn’t sure I wanted that but as I said I thought I should go for it as all the other directors went for it. (Principal, 7).

This was also expressed by other Principals, with one Principal stating that before they applied for the position, considerable thought was given to whether it was the right move for them.

“I gave careful consideration to the role and life balance came to mind, I will explain a student interviewed me and she asked me about this work life balance, and it was really interesting. When I read the article, I thought oh did I say that, yeah I believe in that I’m glad I said that [laughing]. And I believe in a life balance not work life balance because work is such a part of life you’ve got to get your life right don’t you and your balance right so I think that having the right attitude .Coming in and thinking yeah what we are doing is so important and to not lose sight of that because that’s what gets you through the tough bits” (Principal, 12).

This was also suggested by (Page 2011) who affirmed that professional and lifestyle balance was questionable and in fact implies this reluctance is in fact resistance.

Similarly, to those findings of Roberts (2019), many principals also declared that the move from teaching and their subject area was also considered when exploring the option to move up to middle management. This is supported by Gleeson and Knights (2008).

On the contrary to what Roberts (2019) suggests in regard to responsibilities having increased which in turn brought with it accountability and pressures; some Principals identified with this noting that it is ‘hugely stressful’ and ‘not much family time’ (Principal, 4).

Some Principals also related that leaving a comfortable position in teaching to move up to management was a difficult decision.

This research revealed that the change in role, namely citing the move from Principal to CEO was seen as more significant than, just an increased or change in responsibilities, it was seen as a real constraint with many saying that they had now become more concerned with business and external agencies rather than focusing on curriculum and students.

“The role of principal as you will know, has evolved over the years and I have been fortunate, or some may say unfortunate [laughing] to have witnessed some significant changes in the role. I would say now that CEO is probably the right title for what the job actually is, it isn’t like it used to be colleges now are operating more and more like a business. I have senior managers that often say to me how do you do it? I couldn’t do it, or they aren’t interested in doing it” (Principal, 16).

The role of Principal is obviously very different to that of a headteacher in a school and whilst there are similarities as mentioned above, there are quite clearly some significant differences. When questioned about constraints of the job all said financial constraints including constant funding cuts, interestingly this was all Principals number one answer. Many also said it was a lonely job and due to the very nature of the job felt they had been removed from curriculum to deal with other priorities, that in turn left them feeling isolated.

Some Principals, when describing further constraints, talked about the pressures, the changing nature of the sector and the environment that they operate in as well as the challenges of the role itself. Those that had been a Principal in FE for a significant period of time revealed that in comparison to other sectors such as HE and schools, they felt FE really suffered and it was almost accepted by many of those interviewed that this was just the nature of the sector. These are the cards they are dealt with and they have to deal with them. The researcher found this very interesting.

“Well the biggest challenge we have is the financial climate we’re operating in and it’s just the FE sector is just you know we are so decimated against in terms the way we’re financed. The cuts we’ve had to suffer, just to tell you the cuts in 2009 were astronomical no business could survive but we’re having to do it and we’re doing it really, really well. so, I think the biggest problem is that the average member of staff doesn’t understand that, all they know is their day to day experience and they’ve got their day to day frustrations and it’s not their job to know all that and carry all that burden really. When I have to make a tough decision like if I have to go to a team and say we’re over staffed here I have to reduce by whatever it is, it’s such a shocker for them and it rattles their whole stability it rattles their whole world. And I think one of the biggest obstacles is to think about, ok how can I effectively communicate this in a way that people are going to understand it, and not become disenfranchised and kind of angry and I think it’s not such a obstacle as a huge challenge I would say, I guess the obstacle is we are expected to deliver quality with very limited money and when you compare it with the HE sector and compare it with the school sector it’s just ridiculous what we’re being asked to do” (Principal, 12).

When asked about constraints, one Principal suggested that a ‘barrier’ was that “FE is not recognised for what it does” (Principal, 4).

### *A Principal's Descriptions of Leadership and What Leadership Means to Them*

Most of the Principals described leadership as setting the vision or the direction of the college, most described having an overall strategic outlook or plan that is then shared with staff.

“leadership is all about vision, it’s ensuring that you have a view about how the college should progress as an institution, and how you transmit that view to others and then you get a collective view about how you go forward. In many ways it’s all about communicating that vision, now that vision, wasn’t just about leadership in terms of Staff and students within that college there was a wider sense of leadership” (Principal, 1).

Many Principals felt that it was about both setting the vision and managing or leading staff, interestingly most Principals described vision as one of the key elements of leadership, closely followed by managing and leading staff. It was interesting to see that only some of the Principals discussed culture as part of what they believed leadership to be, there was definitely a bigger focus on staff and vision, with many describing developing or empowering staff as also key in leadership.

“It’s many things at different times but I think probably at the core of leadership is being able to inspire a team to deliver strategy and in a way it’s enabling other people to deliver to the very best of their ability” (Principal, 13).

“It’s leading people it’s really the desire to want people to follow you so develop people at the same time it’s not about me it’s about leading a team” (Principal, 3).

“Well I mean fundamentally it means changing the culture and the organisation putting in processes, control and also regimes in place that allow business and the academic side to work effectively” (Principal, 14). (See interview transcript of principal 14 in Appendix Two).

What was apparent was how many Principals, when talking about leadership and what it meant to them, most of them stated it was a “multifaceted job” where “one day is never the same as the next” (Principal, 6).



“I am now faced with keeping all the plates spinning here and actually doing, trying to bring in a lot of systems and practices you know, some things which are happening to your college and actually dealing with some of the challenges around under performance” (Principal, 7).

### ***Training Needs***

When asked about what training and development these Principals would have liked to have obtained, there was unanimity that these Principals would have liked some development at the beginning of their Principalship role. As one interviewee expressed:

“I think people, you know, Principals, are very different and I think you’ve got to whether it’s training or whether it’s exposure to various things that are hitting your sections it’s very important that you try to stay up to date on things and it’s a very changeable landscape so that type of training, real life situations, what to do if have you’ve got unions on your back or human resource related areas” (Principal, 7).

This was also echoed by another interviewee who also stated:

“I suppose and I’m just coming to terms with it what I don’t know but the first year was quite easy, which is probably because there’s loads of things I’m not doing, but there’s nobody there to tell you that there is something you should be doing this or you should be doing that. So yeah I think there should be some sort of course or training to prepare Principals for the job that would be useful I think” (Principal, 5).

Most Principals felt that they would have liked some training on specific issues, particularly how to deal with a merger, human resource related issues and OFTSED seemed to be the most discussed.

It appears that those interviewees that had exposure to, or access to, mentors who were existing Principals was deemed to be most beneficial. Those interviewees who were not fortunate enough to have this type of exposure described wanted the opportunity to meet with other Principals or have access to a mentor or coach would have been a great benefit.

It appears from the responses that training, and development is an important issue for the interviewees and quite a passionate one. Very few spoke positively about it and this was really

based on their experience of what training the interviewees felt that they had received. There is clearly a training need for the role of Principal and one that has training on the practical and purposeful aspects of the job.

### ***Identity Change***

When asked to describe their career journeys, interviewees described how they had changed as they had entered into leadership positions. Interviewees described experiencing significant people or experiences during their journey to Principalship and detailed how these had impacted on their current role of FE Principal as well as the type of leaders that they had become.

One of the interviewees stated that:

“You are influenced by people who you are working with, I learnt a lot from a direct line manager” (Principal, 3).

Most Interviewees recalled the transition from teacher to manager and many recalled the move from senior manager to Principal. One interviewee described their lack of confidence when transitioning to the role of Principal:

“I haven’t got a lot of confidence in myself, so I really have to challenge myself and I really have to beat myself up to do things, and I really have to prepare well in advance to go and do things like a presentation” (Principal, 3).

“My role in industry before I took the position of Principal was very different to the corporate job that I had come from and I struggled to transition in the first instance, there is a really good FE management network in Birmingham and other principals work very well together and these were a very good support network for me” (Principal, 14). (See interview transcript of principal 14 in Appendix Two).

Most interviewees described drivers and barriers in their roles as Principals and when asked about their roles as Principals, most recalled that they often had to work with external agencies

such as OFSTED and employers. Whilst they appreciated the significance of these for their respective colleges, they said that most of their time was spent dealing with these external agencies rather than day-to-day life in the college.

One interviewee recalled:

“I have a senior management team who deal with the day-to-day running of the college including curriculum and I focus on local LEP, working with employers and dealing with the merger and what comes with that, I have to keep all the plates spinning”. (Principal, 7).

Another interviewee commented that:

“As a college we have managed to get capital investment through the LEP so I spend quite a lot of time doing that as well as working on other bids, I work with local MPs as well as local employers and I get asked to do work for the AOC a lot, all of which can take up your time and take you away from the college” (Principal, 17).

Interviewees, when asked about preparation for the role of Principal, most stated that nothing could prepare them for the role. Others recognised that previous experience in industry had prepared them, but this tended to be more to do with dealing with the finances.

One interviewee described their previous experience as a finance director as being beneficial to the role and recognised the importance of these skills in their current role of Principal.

“having a finance skill you have to be in every part of the business, so every decision has a pound sign in front of it or behind it, whether it is quality, a student trip, bus passes, number of teachers we’re employing, the estate, furniture, IT everything has got money or an impact so you have to understand what you are investing “(Principal,9).

Some Principals described being unprepared for events such as college mergers, where they were responsible for bringing two colleges together. However, they described having learnt much from such experiences having now gone through them.

One interviewee stated that:

“Mergers taught me lots, about dealing with people and how to bring two colleges together” (Principal, 6).

Principals recognised that their identities changed over a period of time. Many Principals spoke of the transition from FE lecturer to manager and the shift in focus from producing good results and lessons to now being responsible for redesigning curriculum and being more finance and figures driven. One Principal stated that they ‘didn’t enjoy the job as much as they used to and missed the curriculum development and student access’ (Principal, 4). This same Principal described a complete change of who they were, stating they had to ‘reinvent themselves’. Most Principals spoke fondly of their time in the classroom, with one Principal describing how they had just been promoted to middle management but could not find a teaching replacement, so they ended up teaching for two terms as well as undertaking their new management post.

“It was a baptism of fire and very different from my teaching role, I had to adapt very quickly and learn how to be a manager, everything since then has been easy” (Principal, 5).

One Principal described themselves as having an adaptive leadership style.

“leadership has to change, and you have to adapt to the context you are in, for example at my previous college my leadership needed to be directive, the college had a 7-million-pound turnover but a 16-million-pound deficit. People just wanted to know what to do in order to turn it around quickly. In my current role I empower my senior leadership team and trust people to get on with the job” (Principal, 6).

This demonstrates that a Principal’s identity changes, not only when embarking upon the Principalship position, but throughout the career journeys and specifically when they are promoted or move up. The transition that seemed most significant and that was discussed the most appeared to be the move from teacher to middle management,

Many Principals recognised the change of their social class status, most of the Principals perceived themselves to be working class during their childhood and formative years but noted that now they would be considered to be middle class because of their job role and income. Interestingly many Principals still see themselves as working class regardless of status. The

researcher believes this to be significant in that it provides an insight into why many of the Principals enter into FE with many describing themselves as a 'product of FE'.

"FE is about transforming life chances of young people, many of whom are working class like me, like I and my family were. FE gave me a second chance, if it wasn't for college who knows where I would be now" (Principal, 5).

"I'm a product of FE I grew up on a large council estate and people from FE gave me a job opportunity and for me, it that is to give back the opportunity to other people. Making a difference to people's lives, it's not about me" (Principal, 6).

"I am a product of FE, I loved FE and climbed the ladder quickly" (Principal, 4)

As can be seen in the findings of this research Principals have recalled and described different identities throughout their careers. This will be discussed in more detail in the subsequent chapter.

### ***Self-Belief***

During the interviews, Principals were asked to describe the reasons why they became a leader. During the formative years, interviewees recognised that in some way or another they believed in themselves and were driven by a work ethic which many recalled learning from observations of parents and how hard they had to work to be able to support their family. Interviewees were also asked if they had learnt anything that they apply now to their current roles.

One interviewee recalled their time in FE as a student:

"as a student of FE, I was in a business studies class, in the boys' and girls' class I had to learn how to hold my own with the lads and I think that's my whole drive in life and why I believe in FE" (Principal, 16).

Another interviewee also recalled that it was during the formative years that their self-belief emerged.

“failure was never an option, second was never an option so being driven to succeed and being competitive was the very nature of what I did. So, in everything second was never an option, it was my belief that I could do things that got me to where I am, obviously I mean it’s the main driver there were other reasons that I have mentioned” (Principal, 8).

Another interviewee also recalled their time during education that again hints at self-belief emerging at this stage.

“I think education can give you anything apart from a domain of expertise or a technical skill it needs to give you a self confidence in yourself and the ability to learn, and an ability to tell your own story to yourself in such a way that it gives you confidence. So, there’s a thread there that’s been through me and I think in terms of me it’s sort of that people who have inspired me, tied into a bit of self - confidence that’s got me to where I am today in my career” (Principal, 13).

“I passed the exam to get into Cambridge University and that was great, that was probably my finest hour to go to Cambridge and it was at this point I started to believe that I could achieve anything I wanted” (Principal, 14).

Some of the interviewees when asked to describe enabling factors / drivers on the journey to Principalship revealed CPD as being influential. One interviewee described the reason that they became a leader was from attending a CPD programme for aspiring Principals, a role they thought they would never do however, they described their experience during this CPD as significant as it was at this point the realisation that they could do the job and more importantly do the job.

“I went on an AOC senior leadership management development course, but that wasn’t with the idea of becoming a Principal it was more of an idea that I wanted something to have time out and develop my skills, but going on the course you see a lot of aspirational managers and it was at this point I realised if this is the talent pool then I could do this (Principal, 5).

“I undertook my MBA and then the Centre of Excellence and Leadership Programme which at the time I thought why am I doing this, but when you reflect you realise that actually you can do the job (Principal 6).

When the interviewees were asked about any barriers or constraining factors in their journey to leadership, most described feeling ready for the next level but hadn’t has the opportunity to apply for the Principal job.

“I felt like I was running the college, so when the Principals position came up I thought to myself I may as well apply for the position” (Principal, 6).

“I had been the deputy for some time and the principal came to me and said he was going to leave. My immediate thought was I don’t want to be managed by anyone else, what if they come in and change what we do. My style of leadership was very similar to the Principal and we worked really well together and I just didn’t want anyone else to come in and change that I had also felt for some time that I was ready to move up so I applied for the position” (Principal, 12).

Most of the interviewees described the opportunities to be Vice / Deputy Principals also enabled them to become leaders, it is during this stage that some of the interviewees recalled that they believed they were ready for the next step and were confident they could do the Principal job.

“I think frustration as a vice principal that there was always someone who was telling you what to do all the time, the principal pulling the strings telling me what I could do and couldn’t do. I was very frustrated, so I actively started to apply for Principal positions” (Principal, 15).

I loved my job as a deputy but when the Principal told us she was leaving there was me and this other guy, this other guy was drooling for it and I thought what if I don’t get it and I have to work under him, I knew I could do the job that was never in question I had learnt a lot from the Principal so I decided to go for it. It was nice actually because when the Principal first started she said one day I would make a good Principal” (Principal, 12).

The researcher has presented interview data that identifies self-belief and the journey to leadership, this will be discussed in more detail in the subsequent section of this chapter.

## **Summarising the Findings**

The above section in this chapter has outlined the key findings emerging from the twenty interviews conducted with FE college Principals. The findings relate to research questions one through to four, of those twenty Principals interviewed for this research project there is evidence to suggest that experiences like their childhood, schooling as well as their individual

career journeys has played an immense part in their leadership journey and made these leaders, the leaders that they are today. The latter part of this section includes the presentation of interview data that relates to identity change and self-belief, these are relevant to research questions three and four.

The findings have been structured into sections to include the formative years, which included the time from birth to early schooling, this was followed by the journey to Principalship. Within these areas' categories emerged. Subsequent sections include that of identity change and self-belief. This section has described and identified these emerged categories and made links to the interview data where appropriate. These will now be discussed in detail in the successive 'Discussion' section of this chapter.

## **Discussion of Findings**

This research has explored the lives and career journeys of twenty FE college Principals. The section above 'Presentation of Findings' has provided an outline of the findings from the research relating to research questions one through four:

1. To what extent does the Gronn (1999) model help us to understand the journey to leadership of FE College Principals?
2. To what extent does "socialisation" influence the journey to leadership?
3. How is identity change mediated in the journey to leadership of FE College Principals?
4. To what extent does "self-belief" influence the journey to leadership of FE College Principals?



The following section in this chapter provides a discussion of the findings identified above, firstly relating to research questions one and two and then finally research questions three and four will be discussed and addressed. In doing so the researcher hopes to provide a framework to reflect the new knowledge obtained in addressing the research questions.

### **Research Question One:**

1. To what extent does the Gronn (1999) model help us to understand the journey to leadership of FE College Principals?

In order to address the first research question, this section will use the model of leadership formation and accession based on school headteachers (Gronn, 1999) as a framework to explore if leaders in this study have gone through identifiable stages / phases in their life history, this will then allow the researcher to discuss how the model helps us to understand the journey to leadership of FE college Principals. In the formation stage, as described by Gronn (1999), family and schooling are key in order to illuminate a leaders' character and so therefore the researcher asked the Principals to describe their early childhood experiences to include schooling and family background.

#### ***Family and Social Background***

Of those twenty Principals interviewed, most of the interviewees described their upbringing with affection even if, as some recalled, that times were tough, and in some cases quite challenging. Two of the interviewees described family life as difficult, with one describing their family life as 'violent' and another recalling how they entered into deprivation after losing their home. During the formation stage Gronn believes that this is the stage where

the character of the leader is built and that these early childhood experiences shape the character / leader that they become.

When describing their family backgrounds, most of the Principals identified themselves as coming from a working-class background, again with only some describing their upbringing as privileged. This clearly had an impact on the interviewees and was noted as a driver or motivation for them wanting to do well in terms of their own individual lives and careers. None of the interviewees stated at this stage that they had the mind set or the ambition to become a leader. Most wanted to better their own parents' situation. One of the interviewees stated that they didn't see themselves as deprived or poor because others around them were in the same position, it is only now, later in their life and after reflection that they now recognise that they were classed as 'poor'. This identifies with Gronn's formation stage as it alludes to the impact or influence that these early childhood experiences and or family including parents, impacts or influences the shape of the character of the leader and subsequent decisions in their careers. Mackenzie-Batterbury (2012) also found that most of the participants in her research of academy Principals described their up-bringing or family background as 'working class' and similarly the FE college Principals identified this as having impacted their views on education and or actions in their adult life.

The term 'working class' is believed by the researcher to be quite significant in defining how these leaders saw themselves as well as impacting on how these leaders behaved and underpinned their values.

The interviewees also described having parents who valued education, although not all of the interviewees had well educated parents, however most interviewees described parents as placing value on education. This supports the findings by West-Burnham (2009) whose findings cited that family, parents, siblings and friends valued education and this had

influenced the headteachers. Interesting to note that none of those interviewed for this particular research mentioned siblings, emphasis was very much about parents.

The interviewees all stated that in some way or another that their childhood experiences, good or bad, were very influential in their leadership journeys. This family exposure is deemed significant and supports Pace's (1987) findings that much of what these eventual leaders bring to leadership is learnt from family exposure. This is contrary to Bass (1960) who concluded that future leaders were likely to come from homes where they have the opportunity to problem solve. Although this wasn't apparent in the findings of this research, it could be argued that some of the FE college Principals hinted at this when describing having experienced events like being made 'homeless' or 'parents working hard to support their families' could have observed / learnt problem solving from observing parents. For example, one interviewee described watching parents working two jobs in order to support a roof over their head, another described his father as being a 'great businessman who had the foresight to erect a mast to enable a local town to get television signals transmitting'.

Some of the Principals identified a family member as being quite influential, however none of the interviewees identified their parents as role models. It was more evident that observing parents work hard, and in some cases two jobs, was key to them valuing work ethic, some used it as a driver or motivation for the success of their adult lives and careers. When describing their family backgrounds and parentage, most of the interviewees spoke of coming from very supportive and loving homes, even if times were hard. This supports the findings by Hartman (1999) and Wells (1998) who state that 'relationships with immediate family affect development at this stage in their lives'. Madsen (2008) argued that leaders in this generation may not come from supportive and enriching family environments and therefore master leadership competencies in different ways. There is evidenced from

this research to support Madsen's (2008) findings as there were some interviewees that were influenced by people outside of their family or later in their working careers.

### ***Schooling and Education***

In Gronn's (1999) study of the life and career of the famous headteacher Sir Charles Darling, he found that during the formation stage, which involves primary and secondary socialisation experiences, schooling was an important factor. When the interviewees in this research were asked to describe their schooling, recollections of their primary schooling were very briefly touched on and not discussed in any great detail by the Principals as it was not deemed significant in their journey to Principalship. Only two of the interviewees thought that their time during primary education was significant. One recalled an influential headteacher, whilst the other interviewee recalled a teacher stating that he would never make anything of himself academically. These results differ from those of Inman (2007) whose study found that participants recalled significant teachers that had shaped their desire to lead.

This research found that most of the interviewees described themselves as 'average' or 'not one of the clever ones' during their secondary school time, though most described this time as positive. Most of the interviewees moved into an FE college or sixth form, this is deemed quite significant by the interviewees as most described themselves 'as a product of FE, with some interviewees stating that they were given a second chance or they stated that it was during their time at college that had impacted significantly on their journey to leadership. Most of the interviewees recalled that one of the reasons for entering into a position in an FE college was because of their own experiences in FE. This differs from the findings from Mackenzie-Batterbury (2012) who found that respondents, whilst in their leadership positions, tended to want to provide opportunities for all students from similar 'working class' backgrounds. Teachers akin to those in the research of Gronn (1999), Inman (2007)

and Mackenzie-Batterbury (2012) were also found to be influential in this research however, it was more about shaping them as a character or their reason for entering into a teaching career that was evident in the interview data rather than the reason for them entering into leadership.

### ***Significant Experiences***

Significant experiences were described by the interviewees and tended to be recalled during childhood, these were quite varied experiences with one interviewee citing being made homeless as pivotal. Another interviewee stated that the defining moment for them was observing his father in desperately trying to support the family, another interviewee recalled losing a parent at a very young age as very influential. One particular interviewee described having to work from a young age and sees this as being a defining moment in their childhood that severely impacted their career journey into FE college Principal. These are just some of the examples derived from the interview data, this highlights the type of experiences that not only impacted the shaping of these individuals but resulted in some of their decision making in their later careers and lives. This supports the research undertaken by Bennis and Thomas (2002) who also found that a critical incident or significant time in their lives during childhood played a vital role in the development of leaders and that their success as leaders stemmed from these early childhood experiences.

### ***Influential People***

During the formative years, a number of people were identified by the interviewees as having influenced their lives. There was a differing degree of influence described across the interviewees.

These influential people included parents and teachers, it was mainly during secondary school, college or university that these teachers were mentioned. When interviewees were recalling these influential teachers, they not only spoke very fondly of them but could remember in great detail conversations, names and places of these influencers. Through their encounters with these teachers, the interviewees recognised the impact they had, some positively and some in a negative way by discouraging them academically. Interviewees described wanting to enter into teaching because they were either persuaded or encouraged to do so by these teachers.

As previously mentioned, the interviewees recognised the importance of parents with the tendency for one parent to be referred to as significant. This influence revealed itself through their support, selflessness as well as through encouragement for them to do well. When interviewees were recalling or describing their parents, they were clearly overcome with emotions when discussing the impact of this parent or parents on their formative years.

The researcher has acknowledged that the role of the parents was largely significant during the formative years, reinforcing the findings of Gronn (1999).

During their career journeys, most of the influential people were located predominantly outside of the education sector pre entering into FE and tended to be previous managers.

Interviewees recollected learning a lot from these managers, for example resilience and confidence. One interviewee referred to an influential manager as ‘disgusting’ and ‘ruthless’

however, stating that they learnt a lot from this person and recognised that they were very influential in their career journey to Principalship.

Interestingly most of the interviewees entered into FE in their later careers after forging careers within other sectors, with many of the interviewees undertaking some form of leadership role in these other sectors before embarking upon a career in FE very few followed the same career path. This conflicts with the work of Gronn (1999) who found that respondents in schools all tended to follow a more traditional career trajectory, similar findings were also found by Inman (2007) and Mackenzie-Batterbury (2012).

Most of the interviewees cited whilst in FE that previous Principals were most influential, with many citing that they demonstrated leadership qualities that were either very inspiring, some interviewees recalled encounters with these Principals negatively and as a result of this inspired them to be better, some stated that they influenced their career pathways. This supports the findings from West-Burnham (2009) who found that respondents were influenced by colleagues whom they held in high regard for their abilities and also those findings by Parker (2002), where respondents were inspired by effective leadership. The interviewees recalled that these qualities and skills of these Principals in some cases positively influenced their own ambition to lead, some stated that they were encouraged by these Principals to seek such positions themselves. It was evident when the interviewees were describing these influential Principals that they valued their encounters and their contributions to shaping their leadership character.

When interviewees were providing descriptions of these inspiring Principals, they placed high value on the opportunities to learn from them. Interviewees, when describing those uninspiring Principals, recalled feelings of frustration and animosity.

Some interviewees indicated that attending CPD with aspiring Principals as influential and placed high value on the experience this supporting the findings of West-Burnham (2009) and Mackenzie-Batterbury (2012). Although this only includes a small number of interviewees, the researcher thought it was important to note as this led to the emergence of a renewed sense of confidence and self-belief in their own ability in becoming an FE college Principal. The researcher believes that the result of this should not be underestimated.

It can be gleaned from the findings and discussions in this chapter that the Gronn (1999) model helps us to understand the journey to leadership of FE College Principals; it is evident that these Principals go through distinct life stages as described by Gronn (1999). As Gronn (1999) presents in his findings, the Principals in this research have too described influences from family and schooling experiences. During the formation stage it is evident that these experiences are influential in the shaping of the character as recognised by Gronn. Similarly, during the accession stage self-belief is apparent. By using the Gronn model the researcher has been able to identify the career journeys of the Principals interviewed, it has illuminated key stages in their lives and careers and provided an understanding of the journey to leadership, detailing important aspects along the way. These have included family background, up-bringing and schooling right through to adult hood. It has given us an insight into very personal experiences, including significant influences revealing events and people that may have shaped not only their character but their career journeys.

### ***Talent recognition***

As discussed in the literature review, talent recognition is important to the development of leaders. Cowie and Crawford (2009), along with Rhodes (2007), all allude to this in their



research. The impact that talent recognition can have on a leader could be key. The researcher identified in the earlier chapters that the FE sector needs to be succession planning, and as Gardner (1992) defines there are key characteristics that are looked for when identifying or recognising talent, these include learned skills, intelligence, knowledge and motivation something that could be argued that educational leaders, especially those seeking senior leadership positions like a Principal should possess. According to McLoughlin (2018) and Hart (1993) leaders need to be nurtured, by recognising talent in leaders and for those talents to be developed could be critical in supporting not only succession planning but the said reluctance to take on such roles. Many of the Principals described being pushed or nominated for leadership positions including that of Principal. This is evidence of talent recognition, many made reference to the fact that they had confidence in their own abilities by having opportunities to be supported by key people who many called mentors or coaches, and it was these mentors who, for many of the Principals interviewed, were in quite senior positions, either Principals or Assistant Principals for example. For some of the Principals this happened at various stages in their career journeys, it was deemed significant though during the final move up.

Firstly, and as mentioned above, self-belief is evident in the earlier formation stage, there is also evidence from the data to suggest that external influences impact on the journey to leadership during the accession stage. It is identified that mentoring and coaching are significant, whether these are formal or informal mentors. This is a critical point for FE leaders and often where they can be reluctant to take on the role of Principal. Without their own self-belief, coupled with access to some form of mentor or influential person like a Principal, the aspiring leader could be indecisive regarding progression to Principalship. The researcher believes that by having access to such a person has removed the issue of

reluctance in this particular set of Principals. This is not only supported by the two studies undertaken in USA and Singapore who found exactly that, that mentors or coaches are key to the development of leaders. This is clearly evidenced within the rich interview data whereby Principals themselves have identified key people who they see as a kind of mentor or coach, it is noted that the Principals do not always describe these key people as mentors or coaches, although some did, those that did not did accept that these were key people who has pushed them or supported them to move into senior positions such as the Principalship. This is clearly established in the presentation of findings section of this chapter.

## **Research Question Two:**

2. To What extent does “socialisation” influence the journey to leadership?

The researcher recognises that socialisation influences the journey to leadership of FE college Principals. Whilst undertaking the analysis of the interview data using Gronn’s model (1999) it became apparent that early socialisation is very important in the journey to leadership. Both Gronn (1999) and Ribbins (2003) identified in their research that early childhood experiences shape the character of a leader. The interviewees in this research recalled their early childhood experiences, documenting their family background identifying any significant experiences or influential people during this period of their lives. It was found that parents were very influential in the socialisation of these interviewees and most described their social background as working class, this became significant in their career journeys as it was an underlining influence when embarking upon their journey to FE college Principal. This supports the findings from Gronn (1999) and Ribbins (2003).

Most of the interviewees, when recalling their journey to leadership, identified a mentor or a number of mentors who they describe as influential. This supports the findings from Browne-Ferrigno and Muth (2006) who suggests that mentoring builds confidence and aids socialisation. The interviewees also described observing other senior leaders such as colleagues holding Principal positions as very valuable, the interviewees learn a lot from these leaders in terms of leadership qualities and skills, interviewees described these opportunities as invaluable and instrumental to their development. This is supported by Rhodes and Fletcher (2013). Many of the interviewees were given the opportunity to hold the position of Interim Principal or Vice Principal, this was described again as an invaluable experience and formed a big part of their professional development and their decision to take on the Principal role. This is similar to those findings by Chow (2003) and Daresh (2004) who also discovered that mentoring formed an integral part of a leaders' development. These findings are also echoed by Bush and Middlewood (2013) who found that of those that had experienced some form of mentoring tended to become headteachers.

Where the interviewees were given opportunities to undertake the role of an Assistant Principal / Interim Principal or work closely with Principals they felt better prepared for the role of Principal. This supports Oleszewski et al (2012) who also found this to be the case. Of the twenty interviewees none described being identified or prepared for these elite roles during their childhood, most of the interviewees stated that they never intended nor did they have the ambition to become an FE college Principal, some were reluctant and most said that they only felt ready for the role as they had got to or had previously held a form of senior leadership positions. This is contrary to those findings by Armstrong (1973) and Gronn (1999).

To conclude socialisation does influence the journey to leadership and does play a part in shaping the leader, their experiences during early childhood coupled with those experiences during their working careers including some form of mentoring all aid socialisation as suggested by Browne-Ferrigno and Muth (2006).

### **Research Question Three:**

3. How is identity change mediated in the journey to leadership of FE College Principals?

During the accession stage as described by Gronn (1999) it is recognised that it is during this stage that individuals explore their capacity to lead. Interviewees in this research had all held some form of leadership position whether this was in the FE sector or in other sectors outside of FE before embarking on their post of FE college Principalship, during this time Principals recalled experiences as well as influential people that had influenced their journey to leadership. The interviewees, when recalling their leadership journeys, described how they had learnt how to perform their roles through observing others in these positions. This is similar to the findings by Withers (1998) who also found that leaders learnt from others including peers. Some of the interviewees recalled how they had to change in order to become a Principal. This supports Withers (2000) who stated that leaders had to 'reinvent themselves'. Some interviewees described their lack of confidence whilst many described feeling 'isolated' with the role being a 'lonely job'. This supports findings from Withers (1998).

When interviewees were asked to describe their career journeys many described how previous job roles as well as significant people had influenced them as a leader, many of the interviewees described in great detail some of those people whom they found to be very

influential. Interviewees also recalled past experiences during early childhood through to adulthood and how these had impacted on the type of leader they believe they are today. This supports Scribner and Crow (2012) who suggest that past experiences 'construct' identities and Wenger (1998) who suggests that we can define identities 'by who we are and where we have been'.

Some interviewees described the professional development in the form of the Principals' preparation programme as helping them to reflect on their life and career journeys and how past events / experiences had impacted on them as leaders today. Although most stated that such programmes were not helpful in preparing them for the role, it did inspire some to seek the Principal role and for some it validated their self-belief in their own abilities.

Many of the interviewees when describing their role as a Principal described the change from Principal to Principal & CEO, these interviewees detailed how they had become more corporate or business-like and felt they were moving away from curriculum and the day-to-day life of the college, again this supports research undertaken by Withers (2000) who found in his study of college Principals that they too felt they were spending time away from curriculum.

Many Principals recognised that identity change occurs when transitioning between job roles, not just to that of Principal but earlier in their careers when many made the move from lecturer to middle management. Principals had similar experiences as mentioned above when transitioning from what some recalled as a safe environment in the classroom where they were in complete control and in their comfort zones to now being responsible for curriculum development and being figures driven. Some Principals relished the opportunities whilst others sought help or support from peers. Interestingly none of the

Principals mentioned any training that they had received when discussing the move into middle management and as discussed in previous chapters authors like (Husband and Lloyd (2019) Chow (2003) and Daresh (2004) all suggest how important it is for development, identity change needs to be addressed and supported within FE, the reluctance to lead coupled with the fact that Principals in the West Midlands at the time of this research are nearing retirement means that succession planning is needed (McLoughlin, 2018 and Hart, 1993), middle managers need to be nurtured to develop as future senior leaders.

When describing the move up into Principalship it was evident that not many of the Principals had undertaken or been the recipient of any real formal training, none that they recognised as being helpful with the transition. We know from authors such as Rhodes (2013) that school headteachers go through a transformation when moving into headship, we also know that headteachers in school have a dedicated training programme to support this transformation. When we look at FE Principals there is no such programme, the researcher mentioned earlier that there is a Principal's Preparation Programme, however this is not compulsory and nor do Principals either undertake this or do not value it as useful. It can be argued that FE college Principals follow different career trajectories to those of Headteachers who seem to follow a more traditional route. Colleges, as described by Ruiz Valenzuela (2017), are also responsible for a huge number of students in comparison to schools and also have to deal with the constant policy and funding changes and challenges. Principals in FE, and especially those aspiring future Principals or future leaders, need to be nurtured. The researcher does not believe that a formal structured programme would work in FE, this was evident through the interviews, what Principals need and clearly many sought for themselves was a coach or mentor of sorts to work with, one with experience of being a Principal. Many Principals, whether formally or informally, had some sort of mentor

that could support or guide them in their roles in order to help with the identity change that many experience, which for most Principals was a major change.

To conclude, identities tend to change during a career journey and identities are influenced by experiences and often by significant people. Having analysed the interview data, the researcher recognises that identity change in some cases is conveyed and this is either via support from senior leaders or from observations of senior leaders (in this case it tended to be Principals that the interviewees had worked with). Some recalled mentors / coaches that had helped them to transition into these new roles and find their identity within this new role. Some also recollected professional development as helping to shape them as leaders and in turn their identity.

#### **Research Question Four:**

4. To what extent does “self-belief” influence the journey to leadership of FE College Principals?

This is in contrast to Gronn (1999) who suggest that the self-concept happens during the accession stage and whilst the findings from this research support this concept with many of the Principals interviewed describing or providing evidence of self-belief during this stage, it can be argued that self-belief actually forms or begins to emerge during the formation stage for FE college Principals which differs from the findings of Gronn (1999).

The findings also suggest that influential or significant people who had believed in them also played a part in developing the leaders’ self-belief in their own ability to undertake the role of FE college Principal. When asked about values underpinning their ambition to lead,

most stated that they realised that they could do the job, this supports Gronn's theory that the self-concept is developed at the grooming stage during accession. Most also described having this sense of self-motivation. The researcher believes that this realisation of their own ability to do the job is one of the biggest indications of self-belief in these leaders.

When asked to describe their journey to Principalship, interviewees described some of their previous posts or roles as either leaders or managers as being quite influential. Most interviewees when describing this time in their careers as beneficial with many stating that they had learnt lots during this period and developed their own skills and values as leaders. Many interviewees also acknowledged that they had been taught a great deal by colleagues in more senior positions, in particular those in Principal positions, interviewees recalled these experiences as a great benefit and or influential in their own careers. This supports Gronn's (1999) research that identified that during the accession phase leaders test their potential by comparing themselves to existing leaders. These findings also mirror the findings of Browne-Ferrigno (2003) who discovered that leaders were more confident in their leadership journey when given opportunities to role rehearse. Both Gronn (1999) and Browne-Ferrigno (2003) found that such opportunities develop self-belief, this supports the findings from this study.

The researcher has presented interview data that identifies self-belief and the journey to leadership, it is obvious at this point that this notion of self-belief is critical for these Principals, it is a consistent theme throughout the Principals career journeys as well as during their early childhood and education. It appears to underpin everything for these leaders and without which for some it is clear that they would not be where they are today. Some were nurtured to improve or develop their own confidence in their abilities whilst others recognised their own self-belief from the beginning. The fact that all of the interviewees are Principals demonstrates their own



self-belief in their ability to do the role. Some of these leaders talked about a reluctance however this was clearly overcome. Bandura (1986) suggests that the power is in our own hands and that we can produce our desired results. This reaffirms that it is a person's self-belief that enables people to get to where they want to be. Bandura (2012) also believes in mastery and this is supported in the findings in the interview data, Principals valued or recognised the value of the opportunity that they had been given to role rehearse. For many Principals this was either an Interim Assistant Principal position or an actual Assistant Principal position, this position enabled the interviewees to practice or undertake some of those tasks or responsibilities that they would act out as a Principal.

Some of the interviewees in this research identified that they were aiming for the Principals position and many interviewees felt ready to take on the role of Principal. This is similar to research undertaken by Draper and McMichael (1998) who found that people with strategic approaches to their career felt ready to take on the role of headship. The researcher argues that this is further proof that self-belief is influential in the journey to Principalship.

The researcher suggests from the data analysed that there is the potential to update the Gronn (1999) model for those Principals that enter into FE Principalship as they tend to follow a different career trajectory to those of headteachers.

### ***Proposed adaptation of the Gronn model to fit FE***

The Gronn model is applicable to the career journeys of FE College Principals in terms of Principals do too go through phases. The findings in this research suggest that whilst there are some similarities in the Formation stage of the Gronn model, these include family and

schooling. These same two factors play a role in the early socialisation of the Principal. Where the model differs from the findings of this research is that during this period of early socialisation self-belief is already evident. Principals also really emphasised their social class when describing their early childhood and background which is believed to be significant. Where Gronn includes reference groups, this also differs. Gronn's model establishes peers, friends and mentors as being part of a leaders shaping media, it is different for FE college Principals who seem to ascertain that it is significant experiences or significant people at this stage that are part of their shaping. Mentors / coaches appear to come at a later stage for FE college Principals. During the Accession Stage again this research found some differences to that of school leaders. This is where Principals valued mentors / coaches, the chance to role rehearse or learn from key people and quite significantly quite often have their talent recognised. There is an argument for the Gronn model to include talent identification or recognition, as this was evident in the career journeys of most of the interviewees.

Gronn's model does not factor external influences, for example the change in role or the changing nature of the sector. This can be quite significant and can be linked to a reluctance to lead. This is where, for the Principals interviewed, mentors / coaches often became key. It is also at this stage that self-belief is really cemented in terms of them believing they can do the role.

The researcher believes that the Gronn model, although can be followed to demonstrate the career journeys of FE college Principals, does not demonstrate the subtle differences described by the Principals in this research. Due to this, the researcher proposes the adaptation of the Gronn model to encompass the differences, this will be discussed in the future research section.

## **Conclusion**

The researcher has explored the career journeys experienced by FE college Principals, the researcher explored the first two stages of the Gronn model (1999) ‘formation’ and ‘accession’ as the underpinning theoretical framework. The researcher also considered the range of literature outlined in Chapter Two. During this section of Chapter Five the researcher has illustrated where research findings emerging from this study support those in previously identified literature.

It is evident that interviewees go through similar experiences during the formation and accession stages as identified by Gronn (1999). This is demonstrated through their explanations and descriptions provided by the interviewees when detailing their life histories / stories.

The research highlights a strong awareness of self-belief, through their career journeys the interviewees have developed as leaders and as a result have successfully secured leadership posts.

This research identified that interviewees have been supported by a number of key influences, these influences include significant influences / experiences and influential people. This Chapter has outlined the details of these and the contribution to the development of each of the interviewees.

## **CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION AND A FUTURE RESEARCH AGENDA**

### **Introduction**

This research focused on FE colleges and explored the life and career journeys experienced by twenty Principals; this chapter will discuss the four research questions originally presented. Each of the research questions will be tackled and will identify relevant findings that emerged from this research.

### **Research Questions**

The research questions that underpinned this thesis are:

1. To what extent does the Gronn (1999) model help us to understand the journey to leadership of FE College Principals?
2. To what extent does “socialisation” influence the journey to leadership?
3. How is identity change mediated in the journey to leadership of FE Principals?
4. To what extent does “self-belief” influence the journey to leadership of FE College Principals?

### ***Research Question One***

This question sought to explore to what extent the Gronn (1999) model could help us to understand the journey to leadership of FE College Principals, it specifically focused on the formation and accession stages of the model as these were the two relevant stages when exploring the journey to leadership. The two later stages were not applicable as these focus on when in-post.

The researcher appreciated that such journeys would be rich, complicated and diverse experiences but sought to understand and identify the significant, critical factors that were commonly encountered by the interviewees.

The findings acknowledged that FE College Principals experienced similar, if not some identical, elements as described by Gronn (1999). The research concludes that Principals during the formation stage recalled family and schooling experiences that were described as influential to their career journeys as was found by Gronn. During the accession stage Principals recalled developing their leadership skills as well as experiencing a range of roles equipping themselves in preparation for the Principal role.

These insights highlight the importance of significant people namely mentors / coaches, many of which are described as influential in their career journeys. Principals also described opportunities to role rehearse was also key. Where Principals had held the position of Vice Principal or Assistant Principals, they felt this enabled them to demonstrate their abilities and also found this a valuable experience.

As discussed, Principals in FE largely tended to come from outside of education and enter into the education sector later in their careers. Principals tended to work in industry first with many citing this as useful. Some described skills that they had mastered or learnt in industry as being beneficial in their current roles.

The researcher believes that this allows the reader to understand the backgrounds of these Principals and what has impacted on their career journeys, the researcher also believes that it is a good starting point for the reader to gain an insight into or understanding of the nature of these characters as well as their career trajectories.

### ***Research Question Two***

The intention of this research question was to explore socialisation and the influence that this may have on the journey to leadership. It became evident that socialisation was a significant part of the journey to leadership of the interviewees and it was during this stage that interviewees were influenced by key agencies such as family (especially parental influence) and school influence. Most notably the impact of observing parents' struggles. It's during these stages that the leaders' character is formed, and values and drivers are recognised.

Most interviewees spoke fondly of their early childhood experiences even those whose experiences were deemed negative, the interviewees mainly described themselves as 'working class' or 'poor' and this is part of the socialisation, or character formation, of these Principals.

### ***Research Question Three***

The intention of this research question was to explore identity change and how it is mediated. The identity of FE College Principals has evolved over the years witnessing not only a change in title from Principal to Principal & CEO, but a change in the role, this is mainly due to government policy as well as the changing nature of the sector and external agencies frameworks such as Ofsted.

It is believed that identity is about who we are, where we have been and what we do. Whilst exploring the Principals career journeys the interviewees reflected upon what experiences or influences had made them who they were today. Whilst describing their career trajectories interviewees evidently described different roles that they had undertaken on their journeys. The

researcher was able to glean from these recollections that their identities had changed somewhat as they had gained more confidence and developed their skills. Some Principals recalled the transition to Principalship as one of isolation, this was also discovered by Withers (1998). Some interviewees felt they were unprepared for the role.

Social class was very important to the Principals with the majority of them describing themselves as working class during their childhood. Although many recognised that they would not be described as working class in the present time, most still identified with working class.

Interviewees described influences that had impacted on their identity, these included values, work ethic as well as the type of role that they were undertaking.

The research concluded that identity change for some was mediated and this was commonly supported by mentors and or senior managers.

#### ***Research Question Four***

This question aimed to explore self-belief and to what extent it influences the journey to leadership of FE College Principals. Interviewees described a number of experiences and influences that have impacted on their career journeys to leadership. This research found that self-belief is evident in the journey to leadership, many of the interviewees recalled self-belief during the formative years.

Interviewees recalled their belief in that they could achieve or accomplish certain things, examples given included being successful during their years in education; for example, passing an entrance exam to a prestigious university. During their career's interviewees recalled gaining promotions, and in many cases seeking the next level as interviewees felt ready for the

next move up.

Of those interviewees that actively sought Principal positions many stated that they knew they could do the job; some had been indorsed by colleagues in more senior positions and this too developed their self-belief. Some Principals recalled experiences during CPD that allowed them to recognise their own ability to be able to perform the Principals role.

Interviewees when describing their transition to Principalship firstly described a sense of efficacy and secondly felt competent and confidence to fulfil the role. Interviewees also described feeling valued by colleagues, these are characteristics also described by Gronn (1999). For many interviewees self-belief was the very reason that they decided to seek a Principalship.

### ***General Conclusions***

The Gronn (1999) model was used as the theoretical framework for this research exploring the career journeys of FE College Principals, research undertaken by Inman (2007) and Mackenzie-Batterbury (2012) found similar findings to that of Gronn (1999). These studies found that school headteachers, academy Principals and Higher Education leaders all acknowledged similar career journeys during the formation and accession stages as set out by Gronn.

The model, however, does not encompass a number of key differences that are experiences by FE College Principals. Due to these very facts and having explored all of the interview data at length the researcher identified the potential to adapt the model to include some sub categories for FE College Principals, the researcher suggests that during the formation stage where family and school are located, a further two sub categories could be self-belief and social class; This



research found evidence to suggest that the self-concept was also evident in the formation stage with interviewees describing their belief in their own abilities during early childhood. Interviewees recalled early accomplishments as well as self-motivation as a driver to their career journeys this would be before leaders had exposure to peers and mentors as described by Gronn (1999).

During the interviews it also became apparent that many of these interviewees had worked in sectors outside of education before embarking on a career in education and this was quite significant as it was during these experiences that they were able to role rehearse and potentially become better prepared for leadership roles within education. Interviewees described some of their experiences in these other sectors as invaluable and many described being able to apply what they had learnt in the different sectors to the role of Principal. Mentors / coaches as well as talent recognition were also identified as key factors that the researcher felt needed to be included in the proposed new model.

The researcher acknowledges that more work would need to be undertaken in order to cement a formal adaptation to the model and therefore would suggest if given the opportunity that a bigger sample size across FE College Principals would allow for this new concept to be explored and if so updated.

## **The Contribution**

The research has been successful in contributing to the knowledge of understanding the journey to leadership of FE College Principals. The findings from the research provide an understanding regarding:

- The types of experiences which have been most significant in the leaders' journey to Principal
- Socialisation and the influence on the journey to leadership
- The benefits of having influential people in leaders' lives to guide and develop them
- The stages that FE College Principals go through on their journey to leadership
- The importance of mentors / coaches
- The role of talent recognition and the impact of this on a Principal
- To what extent self-belief influences the journey to leadership
- The opinions of leaders to the value of generic training and development programmes.

The contribution of this research could be used to assist aspiring Principals to the complexity and isolation of the role. Not to put off potential Principals but to prepare them. Hopefully what will be learnt from this research is that surrounding oneself with experts or those in senior positions who can support the development of the leader as well as act as a sounding board when undertaking senior level duties.

The findings of this research also aim to broaden these potential Principals' knowledge and understanding of the influences and experiences gathered on the journey to leadership and how best to advise them to achieve their professional aspirations in the light of organisational constraints and other demands on their time. The research hopes that aspiring Principals will learn from the experiences of those interviewed in this research.

The research may also help those responsible to devise meaningful and useful training and or development programmes for middle managers and aspiring Principals. The development of a leadership training programme that is beneficial to aspiring Principals is clearly needed. Talent needs to be recognised and where this is happening leadership development is good.

### ***A Future Research Agenda***

This small-scale research study has explored the critical factors influential on the lives and career journeys of twenty Principals of FE Colleges.

The Researcher recognises that the relatively small sample size with the focus on the West Midlands does not allow for generalisation across FE colleges. As a result, an opportunity to repeat this research project with a larger cohort across different counties would be valuable.

An area of further interest for subsequent research may include the exploration of the next steps after interviewees become Principals, the Gronn (1999) model could be applied using the final two stages of Incumbency and Divestiture.

A further area of interest might be to explore gender and how these career journeys might differ depending on gender. There were hints of a gender in-balance during the interviews, this was not pursued at the time as this was not a focus of this research, it was too important though not to mention and there is real potential for future research to explore this in some depth. The researcher suspects that some Principals have experienced being treated differently or will have had to work harder to move up due to their gender.

There is also clearly a lack of diversity in those Principals interviewed as can be seen in Table Three, with the majority being white. The researcher finds this interesting and wonders whether there are reasons why other ethnicities aren't progressing into key leadership positions, or whether this is just true of the West Midlands region. It would make an interesting follow on from this piece of research.

Interestingly during the interviews many of the interviewees recalled either an aspiring Principals programme or a preparation to Principal programme and whilst the interviewees initially said that it was not helpful or beneficial to them, once they had time to reflect upon this experience, most did acknowledge that it helped them to realise influences on their careers as well as for some cement their belief in their own ability to fulfil the role of Principal. Further exploration might be undertaken to assess its usefulness in the current FE climate.

Finally, talent recognition was important and so hence why the researcher suggests including this in an adapted model, and it could be explored further in future research. As discussed in this thesis there is a potential leadership crisis coupled with a reluctance of managers wanting to progress to senior leadership positions, like that of Principal. It might be of interest to explore how talent recognition could be further supported, whether this is part of a training programme for aspirant Principals or support in terms of a mentor or coach. Again, mentors and coaches were key in the development of Principals. Most of the Principals said that they had not received any training that had helped them prepare for the role and those that did ,undertake the Principals preparation programme stated that the most useful element of it was the access to peers and time out from the job. A new training programme could be explored based on some of the findings from this research, a programme that encompasses some form or mentoring or coaching would be deemed beneficial for aspirant Principals as suggested by many of those Principals interviewed.

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# APPENDICIES

## Appendix One: Interview Schedule

Principal number:	Interview date:	Interview time:
1.	23 <sup>rd</sup> November 2016	11am
2.	23 <sup>rd</sup> June 2016	3pm
3.	4 <sup>th</sup> October 2016	3pm
4.	11 <sup>th</sup> August 2016	12pm
5.	22 <sup>nd</sup> November 2016	2pm
6.	23 <sup>rd</sup> November 2016	4pm
7.	24 <sup>th</sup> January 2017	10am
8.	27 <sup>th</sup> September 2016	3pm
9.	11 <sup>th</sup> October 2016	4pm
10.	19 <sup>th</sup> October 2016	3pm
11.	9 <sup>th</sup> November 2016	3pm
12.	6 <sup>th</sup> December 2016	4pm
13.	22 <sup>nd</sup> August 2016	2pm
14.	24 <sup>th</sup> September 2016	9am
15.	3 <sup>rd</sup> April 2017	3pm
16.	23 <sup>rd</sup> March 2016	10am
17.	4 <sup>th</sup> July 2016	2pm
18.	3 <sup>rd</sup> November 2016	3pm
19.	30 <sup>th</sup> November 2016	11am
20.	24 <sup>th</sup> October 2016	11am

## **Appendix Two: Interview transcript Principal 14**

Doctorate Interview

Interviewee: Principal 14

Interviewer: Kelly Rogers (KR)

Date: 24<sup>th</sup> September 2016

Time: 4pm

**KR: Thank you for agreeing for me to interview you.**

Principal 14: That's OK

**KR: So, can you tell me how long have you been in this current post?**

Principal 14: Yeah ok so I joined the college in May 2 years ago, so I have been in this post 2 years and 3 months and before that I worked for X for 4 years as managing director for X and then I was international managing director of X.

**KR: In terms of leadership can you tell me what that involves for you as the leader of the college?**

Principal 14: Well I mean fundamentally it means changing the culture I think of the, the organisation and putting in processes and controls and also regimes in place that allow the business and the academic side to work effectively. I do see it very much as a job that is quite similar actually to my industrial experience. I don't draw on it, it's quite different obviously I don't think it is. In terms of culture it's all about getting the reality of putting students first and things in place. Everybody says it as a trite thing, but actually when you really look at a lot of colleges, I look at my own college when I started, did not put students first. And so I see fundamentally my job is changing the culture to really put students first, but not in a kind of dewy eyed way, no in a really hard-nosed way as in putting students first to give them the best education you can give them, but also to give them the best pastoral support and make sure they have a great time and to make sure everything you do at the college you are only doing it to provide that.

**KR: Yeah sure**

Principal 14: ... I've found certainly in my college that there's lots of self-serving things that support departments didn't think they supported students, they thought that somehow they didn't help by helping, they helped by requiring information and you can give them lots of stuff and to fill in spread sheets and what have you.

**KR: Yeah**

Principal 14: Actually, that's all that's changed around. You have got to access to a proper support department. So yeah, it's fundamental that it's about the culture change and fundamentally it's about quality.

**KR: What are the drivers and barriers to your aspirations as leader of this college?**

Principal 14: I want it to be [pause] regarded as the best college to come to, we have something you know over 20,000 students so I don't think we will ever be the highest results because we take people from across the X so I do think it's about the way we add value. I would like us to become known as the place that gives you the maximum added value that might not be the exact words people use, as it's used but they say actually you'll do really well and I'd like us to be a great place to work so that people really love what they do. I would like us to be seen as a natural partner of business and I would like us to be a well-run organisation and those are our 4 corporate goals.

**KR: Yeah**

Principal 14: Best place to be, best place for students, great place to work, part of business and really well run.

**KR: Yeah**

Principal 14: Hopefully and actually part culture is people

**KR: To get on board with it.**

Principal 14: And to know what those things are.

**KR: Yeah**

Principal 14: What my challenge is I've noticed actually, a kind of Sinicism is too strong a word, but it's yes its fine that's all management theory, but it doesn't apply to me. No, it really does apply to everybody and actually our lecturers and our teachers and our marketing team and our HR team, actually I want them all aspire to do those 4 things.

**KR: Yeah, yeah**

**KR: What are your drivers?**

Principal 14: The reason I changed my job is because it gives you a chance to have a positive impact on so many people, so what drives me, I think, is the idea that we will make a better college that will get people a better life and better skills with better pay and more contentment so, that's what drives me I think.

**KR: Yeah, sure**

**KR: What would you say your barriers are?**

Principal 14: [pause] well I mean I think barriers are given for any business, you've just got to deal with them.

**KR: Sure**

Principal 14: But what they are is and if you look in house then there's a kind of barrier to change around culture and existing people's perceptions internally of FE and what we can and can't do. How good we can be I think government policy has a number of schisms in it and for example I think it doesn't think well of FE and what's worse is that it seems to be rewarding universities hugely for similar qualifications and not helping FE. I think the academisation policy, whilst I understand it, is I think providing very poor career advice to young people therefore not really lighting up the vocational route that we might offer, so the barrier of government policy and it's reduced funding as I've said. I think that's probably it, really, I mean I think the sky's the limit actually for the sector and there are some really good things which you'll probably ask me about in the minute [laughter]. But those are the barriers, I think.

**KR: Yeah [laughter]**

**KR: My next question was what are your enabling factors?**

Principal 14: Again, it's to start inside and then outside. Inside I think that it's seen as a vocation and so you've have very committed people, so whilst there's a slight drag in terms of change as I've talked about actually, if we can get them I think people still have a vocation and are still really committed to students, really committed to their profession. So, I think that's an enabler. Once it's harnessed, I think that the Sainsbury report about the apprenticeship levy are all really good things that will be refocusing parents and students minds on vocational routes through and so I do think that there's a time in terms of people starting to feel "yes ok well it's less risk to take vocational qualification" because at the moment you probably did it, I probably did it, from a level 3 - didn't know it was a level 3 at the time [laughter].

**KR: [laughter]**

Principal 14: Then to a level 5 then to level 6, you went to the University of Birmingham and it's ok in terms of risk, your parents didn't say to you "are you sure it's the right thing but if you do a level 2, level 3 qualification in vocational and then take a jump, it's actually only a jump to a level 4 level 5 apprenticeship actually there's a lot of people "oh are you sure that's right. they don't pay you very much, forget the fact you're going to take fifty grand of debt out on one, and on the other you might actually get pay, but still it's kind of not getting enough money, so I think there's a kind of risk bit there and I think it should be reduced over the next few years.

**KR: Yeah**

**KR: If it's ok then can I ask you about your formative years, if we could start with your schooling and education?**

Principal 14: So, I went to a local comprehensive school in the X of X. Stayed on at school where I did A-levels then went onto university, I went to X and then in my late 20's I did an MBA at X, so school, university then job for several years, 6 years and then the MBA.

**KR: So, what did you do after that?**

Principal 14: Before I did my MBA I did a number of X jobs and X jobs, started off doing X and doing X sales then to X and then after my MBA I worked for X for 7 years and then I spent 12 years working X it's probably a big chunk of my CV. I ended up chief executive when .....X

**KR: During your formative years were there any significant people or incidents?**

Principal 14: Parents? Not specifically I think their influence was very ethereal because they didn't ever have specific things that they wanted me to do so they didn't force me into being a bank manager, when I was growing up the big thing to do was to be an accountant or bank manager or work at X that was kind of the thing as well and businesses around there. So limited explicitly, I suppose the only thing looking back is they kind of focused me on sciences because I was a boy. There's still inherent sexism all over the place my version of that in the late 70's was that because I was a boy I did sciences, but they were always very encouraging and encouraged me, I was the one of last people to take the exam for X so they encouraged me to do that and supported me to do, which was great that was probably my finest hour going from a X to X university. Although I hated it.

**KR: Hated it, really?**

Principal 14: [Full of laughter]

**KR: So, prior to this post now as a principal, could you tell me if there have been any significant people/ incidents in your career journey?**

Principal 14: Yes I look at a number of people really, followed people maybe in more senior roles sometimes my boss, sometimes it's somebody else, actually success, I think, in most people's career need a sponsor or sponsors but I had a fantastic sponsor who sadly who's died his name was X in the early part of my career then I worked with a guy called X on the X who is now X and who runs X he's a great man. So yeah a number of people from my career, I think that's key to getting on, I don't mean getting up, I mean getting on, developing yourself, and I think people confuse the two, is to keep changing and to keep transforming yourself if you only transform yourself if you can see role models, that are not you, that you can change and modify to your own style.

**KR: What made you move up, to want to take up the leadership or management positions?**

Principal 14: I don't know really; I don't think of myself as being particularly ambitious. I like running businesses. I like the intellectual challenge of running a business, I've always wanted to do something that meant something so it might not sound like it but in X with my X background X, it was a good move towards that. The X and X again you know my X business used to X.... a year. I felt that was a good thing taking them to X to and from college you know and enjoyed that and hence the move to the college.

**KR: What made you move into FE?**

Principal 14: I think it was presented to me as an idea. I'm not a natural corporate person anyway, so I thought it would be nice to get out of the corporate world really the listed company world to get into FE to do something worthwhile. The FE setup, as you know, is charities so there's less corporate stuff. There's still the government. But less, you don't see shareholders and safety meetings and that sort of stuff.

**KR: Did you do any preparation from the move from business to into FE, preparation courses or mentors? Did you have any formal training?**

Principal 14: Oh yeah, yeah courses, not courses lots of work and I talked to people. I have been involved with education skills with the X and we had set up our own apprentice school where we've had our own apprentices and maintaining investments, so I've kind of had a little bit of bargaining in terms of skills and it was a natural move and really ethos of FE is not so different from X so whilst the actual thing you're doing is quite different, I learnt that management is not so different and just like with the X while not giving many lectures like management people do.

**KR: As this is your first role as principal did you talk to other principals did you network to learn things from them?**

Principal 14: Yes one of the good things about FE is there's a nice network, my role in industry before I took the position of Principal was very different to the corporate job that I had come from and I struggled to transition in the first instance, there is a really good FE management network in Birmingham and other principals work very well together and these were a very good support network for me.

Certainly now in X all of the principals work very well together, although there's only 3 of us left but the X of us, we work very well together and together with the wider circle we work together with the other 5 or 6 in the area.

So, I think yeah the support network is really good and one of the most positive things is that it's not really the easiest job in the world and it's good that you've got the support network, and you know, I did quite a lot of research before I did it.

**KR: Yeah. Is there anything that you have learnt from industry that you've brought to this new post with you? Anything that you apply now?**

Principal 14: I suppose one of the biggest things what surprised me was that an area which needs a lot of attention to be maintained is really good business planning and I don't mean that, again, in a kind of all dream to make profit, business planning in the proper sense of how do we improve the quality, how we improve control, how do we manage financial stability. So, in how to run it properly as a college, not as a sort of ... it's a business. But I do think the setting of targets and being really clear how the plan fits together. One of the things which I was really surprised at when I took over at the college was, I had a curriculum planning process which was completely separate from the financial planning process, so again completely inadequate to me. To me, the job is we're all working, I'm working, to provide great education. That's it. You cannot, in my mind, have a curriculum planning process which is not completely integrated with the financial planning process, because financial priorities – it's obvious when you say it – they have to be linked to your curriculum and your quality aspirations and pastoral support, and all of the other things I have talked about. So yeah so bringing those two together was one of the first thing that I did, and I say



again once you say it to people it's really obvious but not obvious enough that they had done it.

**KR: Of people have done anything about it?**

Principal 14: So it's just really weird and then making sure that you apply some rigour to the curriculum planning I think again one of those things we're still working on, still a work in progress, is to really improve the longer term approach to education because I think FE is almost too good at fire-fighting but is not so good, has not been so good...and we've still got lot's to do.

**KR: Yeah, we are very reactive as a sector**

Principal 14: Yeah and I think that's to our detriment. I think that's partly why our universities get so much focus is that they do have a long-term view.

**KR: Yeah, Yeah**

**KR: Is there any type of training that would have been useful or that you would still like now?**

Principal 14: You learn a lot on the job [laughing] to be honest, there was talk of me doing the principal programme, and I think this is through the AOC or something like that, we have been busy with Ofsted and trying to improve the colleges finances so everything has taken a back seat and other priorities have taken president. I am not sure there is any training I would need or like to be honest and haven't really thought about it.

I am a firm believer of developing oneself but more importantly for me at the moment is to develop staff and make sure the staff we have at the college are supported. There are a lot of good staff, talented staff at the college and we need to nurture that.

**KR: Have you had any planned or formal training or development for leadership? Could you outline what you have had and how helpful it has been is there any type of training or development that you would have liked or would still like?**

Principal 14: I haven't had any formal training for leadership however I studied for an X in X a few years ago now which developed my marketing knowledge, over the years as director of X and being CEO of X and X allowed me to develop my management skills but no formal training. This is something that I am very conscious of, I try to recognise good staff who could move up into management, always succession planning in my mind, I think this is something that I learnt from working in the private sector.

**KR: Sure so you talent spot. So you identify people within the organisation where you think would be quite good to move up into management?**

Principal 14: Yes, I think it's important that you manage people and then again, it's about the longer-term process that we've talked about. Part of the long-term process is you must secure

outcomes for the next ten years not just for year next year and the year after that. So, the business version of what you've just said is succession planning, is it fundamentally about picking good people. So yeah, I think that's really important and again something that has not been in place but not been placed but the building blocks haven't been either, part of succession planning must be great performance management. You can only have great succession planning if you know who's doing a great job and who needs to be developed and who's doing a bad job. And with that information you can then say, over time, you can say so "OK, we can nurture these people in this particular way, and we develop them and they provide great succession". But the building block must be in place so now I think we've got management more fully in place moving onto making changes. We've got some massive, some big challenges one of the things when I came in was that the college was very insecure financially so in my first year I had to reduce staffing by 20% so this last year has been a very tough year because we've lost X staff and so that's kind of the big bump last year so candidly we've got a lot of work to do and I don't think we've had a particularly good year in terms of all these aspirations set out I had to take X people out to secure the future and then we've had to do all these things so as it is with the teams is we mend the plane whilst flying it. It's quite a difficult thing to do that sometimes it can be a bumpy ride.

**KR: Yeah I suppose your business experience that's got to have helped in FE? With having to deal with the sheer amount of people and I guess with redundancies and that?**

Principal 14: Well I think actually the job I've done isn't the job I expected to be doing but what I've done is too completely, whilst flying it, is to resize it and reshape the college. I'll tell you stuff but I don't really want to tell you stuff [on the recording].

**KR: yeah that's fine tell me what you don't want including and I'll take it out.**

Principal 14: But you know it had to be done but it means the quality piece is a year further down the line and it's again whether I get the time, time and space to do it with existing with Ofsted will come in again this year and reflect on you know what a struggle we've had and not give us any of the context but they just say how good or bad it is but not giving you the context.

**KR: Yeah, so my final question is where next? Any aspirations for the future?**

Principal 14: They don't stretch further than getting the college sorted out actually it's a huge job to do and it's, you know, one of the biggest colleges in the UK. There's significant culture change to carry out. We have had a really tough year this last year, current year we've got no excuses year, so everything is in place now all the staff are in place we haven't lost a number of people there were no redundancies, nice and financially secure again so now it's kind of, using my plane analogy, taking off again and providing the quality and that's really where I see it. I would like us to live, to get to that point I said right at the start, being the college that people go to because it adds the most value to its students, where ever that might be and you know we have over 40% of our students who come from disadvantaged background so that's why I'm doing this because to provide a huge impact with X with your neighbour's the other one is I forgot the fantastic economic prospects that we have, not least including X and with X up the road, etc etc.

**KR: Yeah it's going to be fantastic. Do you think you will stay in education and FE?**

Principal 14: Yeah as I've said I've just got a lot to do. So, I wouldn't have said that I was particularly pushy and I'd like to think that I was doing a really good job and that's really important and that's what's striving me to do to get there.

**KR: Yeah, thank you very much for your time and you've answered all my questions**

**X** denotes withheld information to protect and ensure confidentiality of the principal.

### Appendix Three: Interview Matrix Grids

#### The Formative Years: School/education

X denotes withheld information to protect and ensure confidentiality of the principal

Principal	Primary school positive	Primary school negative	Secondary school positive	Secondary school negative	Boarding school	Felt inadequate at school	Naturally intelligent/clever	Sixth form / college positive	Sixth form / college negative	Failed at school	Dropped out of sixth form / college	Went back to college / studying	Bored at School	Enjoyed learning	Good teaching experiences	Bad teaching experiences	First person to go to university
1		Didn't like the teacher		Hated school				Teacher						X at Uni			
2																	
3									Dropped out								
4																	
5		Hated school		Hated School								Had to start again					
6																	
7																	
8																	
9														X			

10																	
11																	
12				Hated school													
13																	
14																	
15																	
16				Hated school													
17																	
18																	
19																	
20																	
Total	10	4	12	4	1	1	5	10	3	2	2	4	1	4	3		

### The Journey to Principalship: Influential / significant people

Principal	Principal (one which they had worked with at some point in their career)	Former managers (either in industry or a non - principal)	Colleagues	Husband/ wife	Parents / family	Teacher	Peers on CPD programmes	Senior leaders	Uninspired by current principal	Believed in self	Board member
1											
2											
3											
4											
5											
6				Husband							
7											
8											
9											
10											
11											
12											
13											
14											
15											
16											
17											
18											
19											
20											
Total	15	9	3	1	2	2	1	5	2	10	3

## **Appendix Four: Interview Questions**

### **Interview questions**

#### **The Journey to leadership**

##### **A study of Further Education Principals**

I have chosen your establishment as it is a Further Education College within the West Midlands and you are the current principal within this establishment. In the first instance can you tell me how long you have been in post please?

##### **Current post**

1. In terms of leadership can you tell me what that involves for you as the leader of the college
2. What are the drivers and barriers to your aspirations as leader of this college
3. Enabling/constraining factors

##### **Formative years could you tell me about your formative years please? In terms of:**

- Parental influence
- School/education
- Peer/ref groups
- Drivers/motivational factors
- Significant people/ incidents
- Leadership positions
- Learn anything which you apply now

##### **First post**

I now want to look at how you became a leader: career history could you tell me what your first post was – why chosen?

- Drivers/motivational factors
- Significant people/ incidents
- Learn anything which you apply now?

##### **Career development**

Could you please outline your career following on from your first post until your current post?

- Drivers/motivational factors
- Significant people/ incidents
- Learn anything which you apply now?

**Future**

Where next – any aspiration for the future or retirement?

**Training and Development**

Have you had any planned or formal training or development for leadership? Could you outline what you have had and how helpful it has been is there any type of training or development that you would have liked or would still like?