The Role of Early Childhood Educational Leaders in Developing Preschools as Learning Organizations

---

A Capstone Project

Presented to

The Faculty of the School of Education and Human Development

University of Virginia

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

---

by

Faye Turini Leier

B.A. Emory University

M.A. University of Virginia

May 2025

UNIVERSITY of VIRGINIA | SCHOOL of EDUCATION and HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Doctoral Capstone Approval Form

Leier, Faye, T	fst5dt@virginia.edu	[redacted]
Name* **Last, First, MI*	**UVA Computing ID**	[redacted]
03/24/2025	Admin & Sup (EDD)	Signed by: Faye Turini Leier 5798A7FCD1DZ46E...
Defense Date	**Degree Program**	**Student Signature**

This doctoral capstone has been approved by the Graduate Faculty of the School of Education and Human Development in partial fulfillment for the degree of Doctor of Education.

Approved Title of Doctoral Capstone*

The Role of Early Childhood Educational Leaders in Developing Preschools as Learning Organizations

**Please ensure the title matches the final approved title on the capstone document exactly.*
**Please follow appropriate approved title format. Here is a helpful tool, an APA title case converter.*

Approved Capstone Committee

Michelle Beavers **Chair**	Education Leadership, Foundations, & Policy Education and Human Development, University of Virginia	DocuSigned by: Michelle Beavers 6B20F83E8382482... 4/14/2025
Co-Chair (If applicable.)		
Sara Dexter **Committee Member**	Education Leadership, Foundations, & Policy Education and Human Development, University of Virginia	Signed by: Sara Dexter 3/27/2025
David Eddy-Spicer **Committee Member**	Education Leadership, Foundations, & Policy Education and Human Development, University of Virginia	DocuSigned by: David Eddy-Spicer 3/27/2025
Michael Hull **Committee Member**	Education Leadership, Foundations, & Policy Education and Human Development, University of Virginia	DocuSigned by: Michael Hull 3/27/2025
Committee Member		
Committee Member		
Committee Member		

Executive Summary

Dr. Michelle Beavers, chair

This study explored preschools as learning organizations and the role of early childhood educational leaders in developing preschools as learning organizations. As the literature notes, organizational learning is a powerful and necessary framework for schools to foster continuous improvement and enhance student outcomes (Mulford et al., 2004). Senge's framework (2012) further underscores the importance of organizational learning for schools and students to adapt to and thrive in the ever-changing state of the world. Educational leaders are critical in facilitating organizational learning and developing schools as learning organizations (Leithwood & Louis, 1998). While much of the existing literature on organizational learning in schools focuses on K-12 schools, this study extends the research to early childhood education. Early childhood is a crucial period for development, and with 60% of U.S. children enrolled in preschools (National Center for Education Statistics, 2024), the potential impact of these institutions can be significant. Investigating and applying educational leadership practices to develop preschools as learning organizations can drive meaningful school improvements and enhance student outcomes, addressing the pressing need for excellence in early childhood education.

Several bodies of literature were analyzed for this study, including the literature on organizational learning in schools, the role of educational leaders in facilitating organizational learning in schools, and the importance of early childhood education. The conceptual framework for this study was grounded in the theoretical and empirical research on organizational learning in K-12 school settings by Mulford, Silins, and Leithwood (2004) and the Leadership for Organisational Learning and Student Outcomes (LOLSO) Research Project (2003). The research identified four defining characteristics of learning organizations, including establishing a trusting

and collaborative climate, having a shared and monitored mission, and taking initiatives and risks, all within the context of ongoing and relevant professional development. The research also identified key dimensions of educational leadership that influence the factors defining organizational learning. These dimensions include vision and goals, culture, structure, intellectual stimulation, individual support, performance expectations, and community focus. The conceptual framework for this study honored this relationship between the factors defining schools as learning organizations and the dimensions of educational leadership for developing schools as learning organizations and applied them to early childhood education. Additionally, the conceptual framework for this study honored the role of organizational routines in developing preschools as learning organizations. The literature posits that by creating, maintaining, and adapting organizational routines and structures for their schools, educational leaders can influence organizational learning within their schools (Pentland & Feldman, 2008; Spillane, 2011). The inclusion of organizational routines in this study and conceptual framework aimed to provide a practical framework to guide early childhood educational leaders in developing preschools as learning organizations.

This qualitative, multi-site case study took place between August and September 2024. Data collection included semi-structured interviews with school leaders and a teacher survey. The survey administered was the “short form” of the Leadership for Organisational Learning and Student Outcomes (LOLSO) Project Questionnaire (Mulford et al., 2004), and the interview questions were modeled from the LOLSO Research Project to provide additional leadership perspectives on the phenomena. Research was collected at multiple sites and analyzed in a nested model by school and then across sites. This allowed for the study of the dimensions of

educational leadership and organizational learning within individual school settings and across schools.

Study findings revealed similar dimensions of leadership and support structures for developing preschools as learning organizations across different school contexts. Findings included a strong alignment between the educational leader's ability to enact a school's vision and the development of the school as a learning organization, a strong relationship between professional development and developing preschools as learning organizations, as well as the role of the educational leader in leading these efforts, and the role of the educational leader in developing community and school culture for developing preschools as learning organizations.

Resulting from these findings and drawing on the literature, I developed several recommendations for educational leaders to enact to develop preschools as learning organizations. These recommendations include: 1) Establish and monitor a shared school mission. 2) Clear and clearly communicated performance expectations. 3) Implement comprehensive teacher support systems. 4) Develop a culture of collaboration. 5) Strengthen parental engagement and communication. 6) Prioritize and protect professional development. 7) Incorporate cultural elements of well-being into school culture. Recommendations for research include expanding the research to broader populations and focusing on organizational routines for developing preschools as learning organizations.

Keywords: developing preschools as learning organizations, early childhood educational leadership, organizational learning in schools, organizational routines and structures

Dedication

For D, B, and other young learners:

As you embark on your own learning journey, I hope my work helps you find joy in discovering the wonders of the world, big and small. I am so excited for you to start preschool. Preschool is the beginning of a remarkable adventure of learning and discovery. May this work remind you that learning is not just about gaining knowledge, but also about discovering who you are and your endless possibilities. I hope my commitment to education — for myself, for you, and for children everywhere — will inspire you. You are my greatest gift, and I am endlessly proud to see you shine. Like our song, you are my sunshine.

Acknowledgments

After years of dedication and hard work, finding the right words to express my gratitude is both humbling and challenging. This journey has been shaped and supported by so many, and I am deeply thankful for everyone who has contributed to its completion. I hope that in expressing my appreciation, I do not unintentionally overlook anyone whose guidance and encouragement have been invaluable along the way.

This work would not have been possible without my committee. Thank you to my chair, Dr. Michelle Beavers, for guiding me on this journey and teaching me about educational leadership and life. Thank you to Dr. Sara Dexter for expanding my knowledge about educational leadership and myself as a leader. Thank you to Dr. David Eddy-Spicer for your dynamic scholarly lessons, unwavering support, and delicious breads. Thank you to Dr. Mike Hull for your statistical expertise, eye for detail, and great sense of humor.

Additionally, this work would not have been possible without my research sites. You welcomed me with open arms and provided invaluable insights and ideas for practice and research. Your passion for your students and early childhood education is inspiring.

To Cohort V, thank you for the encouragement, inspiration, and laughter over the years. It was an honor to grow alongside you. To my colleagues, thank you for allowing me to see best practices in action and for giving me the space to brainstorm ideas, even if they seemed outlandish at the time. To my friends, thank you for supporting me and bringing much-needed balance to this journey. To my teachers, thank you for nurturing and guiding me over all of the years. To my students, thank you for inspiring me. To Dr. B, thank you for always listening to my wonderings and outlining action plans

Last but not least, thank you to my family. Thank you to my mom and dad for inspiring my love of learning and cultivating environments for great discovery. Thank you to my sister for encouraging me to continue my educational pursuits and earn my doctorate. Thank you to Shepherd for being a constant presence and source of joy. Thank you to Matt for supporting me through this intense journey. Thank you to D, my honorary research assistant, for being my sunshine even on gray days.

Tables of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

Chapter I - Introduction

In the United States, schools are responsible for advancing student learning (Virginia Department of Education, 2021). While student learning should always remain at the heart of schools, it is also essential for schools to serve as places of learning for teachers. As researchers Leithwood and Louis (2012) explain, student learning and achievement are positively linked to teacher learning. When schools become places of learning for students *and* teachers, schools and children will be better prepared to not only survive, but thrive in our world (Senge, 2012). Educational leaders are crucial in leading this learning and "leading this learning is educational leaders' work in the twenty-first century" (Bailey, 2021, p. 164).

Today's world has created increasing pressures on schools to adapt to our times and improve student outcomes (McLeod & Dulsky, 2021). For decades, research promoting schools as learning organizations has stressed that in order for schools to successfully adapt to changing times and improve student outcomes, schools must function as learning organizations (Senge, 2012; Silins & Mulford, 2002). When schools are developed as learning organizations, continual learning is encouraged and facilitated at all levels of the organization (Senge, 1990). The role of the educational leader is critical in developing schools as learning organizations (Leithwood et al., 1998). Educational leaders serve as the "designers, teachers, and stewards" of learning within all school levels and are responsible for building their schools as learning organizations (Senge, 1990, p. 340).

While a growing body of literature explores the phenomena of schools as learning organizations, most of this research is focused on K-12 schools. This study researched organizational learning as applied to the preschool setting and explored the concept of developing preschools as learning organizations. The focus of this study was the role of

educational leaders in developing preschools as learning organizations. This study explored the dimensions of educational leadership that create the conditions for developing preschools as learning organizations and the organizational routines that educational leaders develop, maintain, and adapt to develop their preschools as learning organizations. In the subsequent sections, I further expand upon the problem of practice, describe the purpose of this study and provide introductions to the literature, conceptual framework, and methodology. Additionally, I address biases, assumptions, limitations, and delimitations of this research.

Problem of Practice

The problem of practice for this study was to better understand the dimensions of educational leadership that create conditions to support the development of preschools as learning organizations and the organizational routines that educational leaders develop, maintain, and adapt to help develop preschools as learning organizations. When schools function as learning organizations, they enhance student learning and lead to increased student achievement (Mulford & Silins, 2003). While the literature demonstrates that organizational learning is beneficial for schools and leads to increased student achievement (Mulford et al., 2004), unfortunately, many U.S. schools do not function as learning organizations (Senge, 2012). As Darling-Hammond (1996) explains, this is not because schools do not want to function as learning organizations but rather because "they do not know how, and the systems they work in do not support their efforts to do so" (p. 194). During the industrial era in the nineteenth century, U.S. education experienced massive expansion and developed a school system that would provide a standardized education for children, namely to provide U.S. children with educational opportunities beyond child labor (Senge, 2012). Despite the many decades since the industrial era and the many changes our society has undergone since then, the majority of U.S. schools still

maintain the structure designed during the industrial era and do not adequately equip today's children with the necessary educational skills for success in the modern world (Senge, 2012). Additionally, the past few years have presented dramatic challenges for U.S. schools due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the associated effects of the pandemic on society at large (U.S. Department of Education, 2021). To help develop U.S. schools as learning organizations that can survive and thrive amidst the changes of the 21st century and beyond, the leading research on organizational learning in schools posits that educational leaders can adapt their practices and the practices of their organizations to those of learning organizations (Senge, 2012).

Existing literature supports the development of schools as learning organizations and the critical role of the educational leaders in this development (Mulford et al., 2004; Senge, 2012; Spillane et al, 2011). One educational leadership practice necessary for schools to develop as learning organizations is the use of organizational structures and routines. The literature posits that organizational structures and routines are an integral practice for schools as learning organizations (Spillane et al., 2011; Sherer & Spillane, 2011). When educational leaders implement, develop, and/or maintain organizational structures and routines in their schools, they can promote organizational learning and increased student achievement (Spillane et al., 2011). With the many challenges facing schools and educational leaders today, developing schools as learning organizations will help provide schools with the necessary structures for success in our ever-changing world. Unfortunately, despite the literature supporting the development of schools as learning organizations and the critical role of the educational leader in this development (Mulford et al., 2004; Senge, 2012; Spillane et al, 2011), little research has been applied to developing schools as learning organizations for our youngest students - preschoolers.

The early childhood or “preschool years” are a crucial developmental period during which children experience the most rapid mental, physical, and socioemotional growth (Britto et al., 2012; Gomez, 2016). The preschool years (defined as ages 2-6) are critical in shaping a child’s overall development and lay the foundation for one’s cognitive, social-emotional, and physical development throughout life (Britto et al., 2012; Gomez, 2016). According to the literature, children who are able to achieve full developmental gains during their preschool years are likely to have more developed cognitive skills, higher lifetime earnings, greater productivity, and societal contributions (Britto et al., 2012). This rich developmental period for children does not take place in a vacuum, and it is important to note that the context is an essential determinant of developmental gains (Britto et al., 2012). For most American children, that context includes preschool (Britto et al., 2012; Gomez, 2016). It is estimated that 59-69% of U.S. children are enrolled in an early childhood educational program, such as a daycare or preschool, during their early childhood years (Gomez, 2016; National Center for Education Statistics, 2024). This number is expected to increase as maternal employment becomes more normative and as employees return to work after the COVID-19 pandemic (Gomez, 2016; Miller, 2021; Zaslow & Martinez-Beck, 2006).

The crucial nature of the early childhood years for development, coupled with the high percentage of young American children enrolled in preschools, highlights the need for educational leaders to focus on developing preschools as learning organizations, which aligns with the success of their schools and their students. For preschools to develop as learning organizations, the existing literature on schools on educational leadership for developing schools as learning organizations must be extended to include preschools and our nation’s youngest students during their critical development period. Bridging the gap between the literature on

educational leadership for organizational learning in schools and extending it to preschools can help guide educational leaders in developing their preschools into learning organizations for the betterment of their students and our society.

Purpose of Study

This study aimed to extend the literature on organizational learning and educational leadership to preschools. As the gaps in the literature demonstrate, more needs to be understood about the dimensions of educational leadership that create conditions to support the development of preschools as learning organizations and the organizational routines that educational leaders develop, maintain, and adapt to help develop preschools as learning organizations.

This study explored the phenomenon of preschools as learning organizations by examining the factors of organizational learning in preschools and the dimensions of leadership that facilitate their development. In addition, this study aimed to provide insight into the organizational structures and routines that educational leaders use to facilitate the development of their preschools as learning organizations. Applying organizational learning and educational leadership to early childhood education provided practical applications for educational leaders to develop their preschools as learning organizations.

Research Questions

The research questions in this study aimed to explore organizational learning within early childhood education and the dimensions of educational leadership and organizational routines that influence the levels of organizational learning present within early childhood education. To better understand these aspects of organizational learning in early childhood education, I investigated the following research questions:

1. How do the characteristics of a learning organization manifest in preschools?

2. What dimensions of educational leadership encourage the development of preschools as learning organizations?
3. How do educational leaders enact processes that facilitate the development of preschools as learning organizations?
4. What leadership practices and associated processes limit the potential for developing preschools as learning organizations?

Research question one aimed to investigate the extent to which each contributing factor for developing schools as learning organizations is present in preschools. Identifying the extent to which each factor is present served to help understand the phenomena of organizational learning within the preschool setting. Further, determining the extent to which each factor is present aimed to help identify ideal conditions for developing preschools as learning organizations and guide educational leaders in developing preschools as learning organizations. Identifying the extent to which these factors are present (or not) served as both an essential baseline for understanding the phenomena of preschools as learning organizations and as a guide for where educational leaders should focus their efforts to develop their preschools as learning organizations. This question was modeled after the LOLSO study by Mulford, Silins, and Leithwood (2004) and, through this study, was applied to the context of early childhood education in the United States for presumably the first time.

Research question two aimed to determine the dimensions of leadership that contribute to the development of preschools as learning organizations and the extent to which they contribute. Determining the dimensions of leadership that contribute to the development of preschools as learning organizations and the extent to which they contribute helped identify the leadership practices that can be implemented to develop preschools as learning organizations and

the level of priority with which they should ideally be implemented. As with research question one, this question was modeled after the work from the LOLSO study by Mulford, Silins, and Leithwood (2004), and to my knowledge, this study was the first time that this question was applied to the context of early childhood education in the United States.

Research question three examined the organizational processes that facilitate the development of preschools as learning organizations. By identifying these processes, this question aimed to identify actionable practices and structures that educational leaders can implement to help develop their preschools as learning organizations.

Research question four aimed to identify potential barriers to developing preschools as learning organizations. Identifying leadership practices and associated processes that may serve as barriers to the development of preschools as learning organizations aimed to guide educational leaders in best practices to implement, and those to avoid, to guide the development of preschools as learning organizations.

Introduction to Conceptual Framework

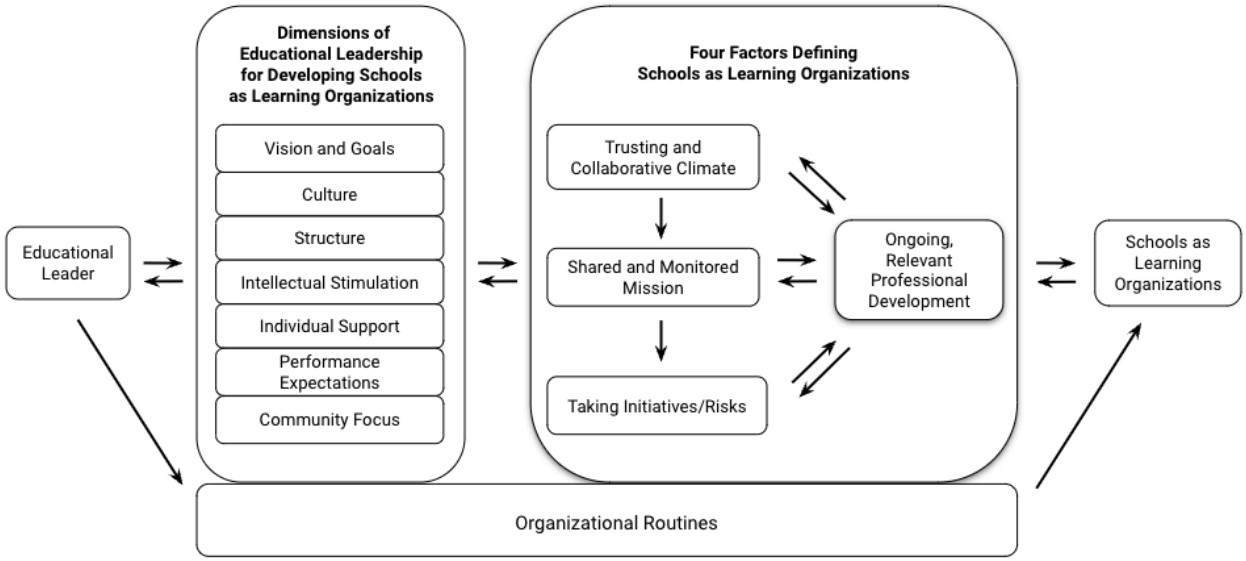
The conceptual framework for this study was guided by an analysis of literature on educational leadership for organizational learning in schools (Leithwood & Louis, 1998; Mulford et al., 2004). In 1998, researchers Leithwood and Louis presented a volume of research titled *Organizational Learning in Schools*. Based on evidence laid out by researchers Leithwood and Louis (1998), Mulford et al. (2004) present a theoretical framework of key factors of educational leadership that influence organizational learning in schools. Together, these theoretical frameworks for educational leadership for organizational learning help explain the phenomena of schools as learning organizations and help educational leaders implement leadership practices to develop their schools as learning organizations.

As Mulford et al. (2004) outline, four significant factors define organizational learning in schools. The conceptual framework for this study used these four factors as outcome measures of organizational learning in schools. These four factors include establishing a trusting and collaborative climate, having a shared and monitored mission, taking initiatives and risks, and ongoing, relevant professional development (Mulford et al., 2004). According to the literature, these organizational learning factors in schools are influenced by key dimensions of educational leadership (Mulford et al., 2004). These dimensions include vision and goals, culture, structure, intellectual stimulation, individual support, performance expectations, and community focus (Mulford et al., 2004). The conceptual framework for this study honored this relationship between dimensions of educational leadership and the four-factor model of organizational learning in schools by exploring the relationship between the dimensions of educational leadership in developing schools as learning organizations and the four-factor model for defining schools as learning organizations within the early childhood sector.

Additionally, the conceptual framework for this study honored the role of organizational routines and educational leadership for organizational learning in schools by exploring the organizational routines present in schools that demonstrate organizational learning (Pentland & Feldman, 2008). As Spillane et al. note (2011), by creating, maintaining, and adapting organizational routines and structures for their schools, educational leaders can influence organizational learning within their schools. By exploring organizational routines, this study helps to provide a practical framework to guide educational leaders in developing schools as learning organizations (Figure 1).

Figure 1

The conceptual framework for the present study



Methodology

This study employed a mixed-methods multisite case study design to investigate the role of educational leaders in developing preschools as learning organizations. As Creswell (2009) explains, a mixed-methods study design combines the strengths of both quantitative and qualitative methods to lead to a deeper understanding of the phenomena being studied. Additionally, the multisite case study design strengthens the knowledge of the phenomena by providing multiple perspectives (Stake, 2006). Combining quantitative and qualitative data collection methods in a multisite case study allows for a robust collection of data to better understand the phenomena of educational leadership and organizational learning in ECE. Data collection remained nested by school to study the dimensions of educational leadership and organizational learning present within each school.

For the first means of data collection, this study employed the use of semi-structured interviews with educational leaders of each preschool. Semi-structured interviews allow for more

participant voices in the data collection, which can help provide a richer understanding of the phenomena being studied (Hays & Singh, 2012). To capture qualitative data along with the quantitative data collected from the LOLSO survey, the interview structure and questions for this study were designed using the LOLSO survey by Mulford, Silins, and Leithwood in 2004. Given the critical role of educational leaders in this study, these interviews will be administered to educational leaders at each school site. To help ensure validity and reliability of the data, these semi-structured interviews were guided using a consistent protocol across schools. These interviews will be further described in Chapter 3, and a full structure and protocol list can be found in Appendix A. Interviews were coded using the codebook found in Appendix B.

The second data collection method was a survey on organizational learning and educational leadership present within each study site. The survey administered was the "short form" of the Leadership for Organisational Learning and Student Outcomes (LOLSO) Project Questionnaire (Mulford et al., 2004). This survey was selected for this study because it is an established and evidence-based survey focused on the themes of this study - dimensions of educational leadership and organizational learning within schools. The use of an established, evidence-based survey increases the validity of this study design. To deeply understand the phenomena of educational leadership for organizational learning in preschools through multiple perspectives, teachers were administered the survey. The full survey can be found in Appendix C.

Context of Study

The context of this study was three preschools in a metropolitan area in the mid-Atlantic. Given the purpose of this study, it was important that the preschools considered for the study only served children in the defined early childhood age (approximately 2-6 years). In order to

study the targeted dimensions of educational leadership, it was also crucial that the preschools included in this study were independent schools not bound to the federal government and/or national chains. As independent preschools, the schools and school leaders have the ability to demonstrate autonomy in curriculum, programs, and practices, which was essential for the purpose of this study. The preschools selected for this study also needed to be geographically accessible to the researcher and provide ease of access. Once these criteria were applied, purposive sampling was used to select the final preschools. Purposive sampling allowed for the selection of both suitable and accessible preschools for this study (Hays & Singh, 2012). Despite these similarities, the schools selected had different pedagogical approaches and curricula. By studying schools with these differing characteristics, this study aimed to investigate and identify key leadership characteristics for OL across differing preschool contexts to allow for a deeper understanding of the phenomena. School leaders and teachers received recruitment emails and study information prior to their participation in this study (see Appendix D:G).

Definition of Key Terms

The following terms were used throughout this study. I have provided definitions of these terms for the purpose of clarity.

Early childhood.

The period from ages 2 to 6 during which children experience substantial growth in all areas of development.

Early Childhood Education (ECE).

The formal educational organizations that provide schooling for children ages 2 to 6 are commonly referred to as daycares and/or preschools in the United States.

Educational leader.

School administrators who manage and influence the daily operations and long-term direction of ECE organizations (such as daycares and/or preschools). They are often referred to as center directors, principals, and/or heads of schools.

Dimensions of leadership.

The seven areas of educational leadership identified in the literature that contribute to developing schools as learning organizations: vision and goals, culture, structure, intellectual stimulation, individual support, performance expectations, and community focus. (Mulford et al., 2004).

Professional Development (PD).

Learning and support activities designed to prepare and enhance teacher work (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2021). PD may take a variety of forms and is generally delivered as one-time events, such as workshops and conferences.

Professional learning.

Ongoing PD as an integral part of the school community and culture that leads to improvements in teacher knowledge, skills, and practices.

Organizational learning.

A change in an organization's knowledge that occurs as a function of experience (Argote & Miron-Spektor, 2011).

Organizational learning in schools.

A practice defined by ongoing and collaborative learning and application of such learning by whole school staff (Silins et al., 1999).

Learning organization.

An organization that encourages and facilitates continual learning at all levels of the organization (Senge, 1990).

Organizational routines.

"Rules, procedures, conventions, strategies, and technologies around which organizations are constructed and through which they operate" (Levitt & March, 1988).

Preschool.

A school for children aged 2-6 years old.

Biases and Assumptions

Given my background and experience as a student, teacher, and school administrator within the field of education, there are a few inherent biases and assumptions that I bring to my research. First, I assume that educational leaders and teachers strive to create and maintain successful schools that serve as places of learning for both students and teachers. Second, I have an assumption that educational leaders and teachers represent the best interests of their teachers and students. Third, as a researcher somewhat familiar with the schools included within this study, I carry inherent biases and assumptions about the organizations. To minimize these biases and assumptions, I used only the data collected to inform this study and multiple means of data collection.

Limitations and Delimitations

Methodological limitations of this study included the school sample size. As outlined in the context of the study, the three preschools selected for this study were chosen for a variety of reasons, including their geographic proximity to the researcher. As such, these schools represented a convenience sample and were not necessarily representative of the broader, national pool of preschools. However, given the other conditions used to select these preschools,

including differing pedagogies and the researcher's efforts to minimize biases, it is hoped that the results from this study can be used to guide early childhood educational leaders striving for improved leadership and student outcomes in their preschools.

Another limitation of this study included the qualitative means of data collection. This study employed the use of semi-structured interviews, and data collected from interviews may be subject to personal bias and/or a lack of understanding (Patton, 2014). To ensure validity of data and a robust account of the phenomena being studied, this study employed qualitative and quantitative data collection methods, including semi-structured interviews and a survey (Patton, 2014).

A further limitation of this study included the current climate in which this study occured. At the time of this study, the COVID-19 pandemic led to dramatic changes for the world and for schools. As a result, many educational leaders were consumed with COVID-related work adjustments and prioritized student and teacher safety. Therefore, other aspects of school leadership, such as organizational learning, may not have been a priority. Additionally, the time in which this study occurred was a tumultuous political period for the nation, which may have contributed to school leaders prioritizing elements of cultural wellness and anti-bias efforts over organizational learning efforts.

A delimitation of this study was that student voice was not represented in this study. Due to the young age of the students enrolled in preschools, students were intentionally not included as formal study participants. However, it is hoped that the educational leaders and teachers included in the data collection represent the voices and best interests of their students.

Summary and Organization of the Capstone

This capstone project explored the practices of educational leaders in early childhood education and their role in developing preschools as learning organizations. Additionally, this study aimed to identify the organizational structures and routines that educational leaders develop, maintain, and adapt and their relationship to the development of preschools as learning organizations.

In the following chapter, I reviewed the literature on schools as learning organizations and the dimensions of educational leadership that influence the development of schools as learning organizations. I then explained the need to apply these dimensions of educational leadership for developing schools as learning organizations to preschools so that they may too develop into learning organizations.

Chapter II - The Literature Review

The purpose of this literature review was to better understand the role of early childhood educational leaders in developing preschools as learning organizations. The research demonstrates that developing schools as learning organizations can help schools sustain the changing external environmental pressures and implement systematic improvements (Senge, 2012). Additionally, the literature review aimed to illustrate the positive link between organizational learning and educational leadership (Leithwood & Louis, 1998; Mulford et al., 2004). The literature highlights certain conditions and practices that educational leaders can implement to develop their schools as learning organizations (Leithwood & Louis, 1998, 1998; Mulford et al., 2004). The leading research on these organizational conditions, practices, and routines is presented in this literature review.

While this literature review presented the existing literature on organizational learning in schools, there are two considerable gaps in the literature. The first gap is that while there is a growing body of research on organizational learning as applied to schools, the existing research largely covers general applications of organizational learning in schools rather than providing specific and applicable evidence on the mechanisms for developing schools as learning organizations. As Mulford et al. (2004) explain, the empirical evidence on the mechanisms for schools as learning organizations is "meager" (p. 210) and "clearly, much remains to be understood about organizational learning in schools" (p. 214). While Mulford et al. published some of their significant findings on organizational learning in schools in 2004, their research continues to comprise some of the leading research in the field today. As recently as 2019, Peter Senge, researcher of organizational learning and author of "The Fifth Discipline" (originally published in 1990 and updated in 2012), notes that despite the changing contexts over the past 30 years, the core disciplines (theories, tools, methods, and practices) which can help develop learning organizations have not changed (Senge, 2012; Senge & von Ameln, 2019) and thus this literature review explored some of these core disciplines of developing learning organizations.

The second gap in the literature was that while there is a growing body of research on organizational learning in schools, the majority of this research was focused on K-12 schools. There is little literature on organizational learning in early childhood schools and even less on organizational learning in early childhood schools in the United States. At the time of this study, a basic search using the search terms "organizational learning," "early childhood education", and "United States" on the ERIC search database resulted in less than ten search results.

This study aimed to help close the gaps in the literature on organizational learning for ECE and the role of the educational leader in developing preschools as learning organizations.

This review of the literature presents some of the leading research on organizational learning and seeks to understand what is known (and not yet known) in three key areas: 1) organizational learning in schools, 2) the role of the educational leader for organizational learning in schools, and 3) the need for extending organizational learning to ECE.

Search Methodology

To review the literature, I searched electronic databases, including EBSCO 7 Education Databases, PROQUEST, and Google Scholar, using various combinations of the following search terms: "organizational learning," "organizational routines," and "educational leadership." These search results led me to discover some literature on organizational learning from countries beyond the U.S. I noticed that many countries beyond the U.S. used the alternate spelling of "organisational" so I expanded my searches to include both spellings - "organizational learning" with a "z" and "organisational learning" with an "s."

At the beginning of my research, I aimed to better understand the development of the literature pertaining to the concepts of organizational learning and organizational learning in schools and thus did not limit my research to a specific timeframe. Once I found a quorum of research regarding organizational learning and organizational learning in schools across time, I then began to limit my search results to more recent literature (literature found within the last 10, 5, and then 3 years) to better understand the most recent literature on organizational learning in schools.

I then expanded my search terms to include various combinations of the previously listed search terms and "early childhood education" and "preschool." When I added these search terms, I discovered limited literature on organizational learning in schools in the context of early childhood education, which further validated the need for this study and continued research in

the area of organizational learning and educational leadership in the context of early childhood education.

While the existing literature presents research on the relationship between educational leaders and organizational learning in schools, the literature on the relationship between educational leaders and organizational learning in the early childhood education sector is limited to non-existent, especially in the context of the United States. For example, it is noted that the leading literature and studies on organizational learning and routines, like the study by Sherer and Spillane, Leithwood, and Mulford et al., all focus on K-12 settings (Sherer & Spillane, 2011; Leithwood & Louis, 1998; Mulford et al., 2004). These studies do not extend to the early childhood setting of Pre-K and younger grades. In a search on EBSCO 7 Education Databases through the University of Virginia Library, I searched using the terms "organizational learning", "educational leadership," and "early childhood" and found limited results. In fact, not a single search result accurately represented organizational learning and educational leadership for early childhood education in the United States. Given the existing literature, this literature review presents some of the international perspectives on organizational learning in schools and aims to draw the connection between international perspectives on organizational learning and ECE in the United States.

Additionally, while the literature presents evidence on the relationship between educational leaders and schools as learning organizations, less literature exists outlining the mechanics of developing schools as learning organizations (Harris & Jones, 2018), particularly in early childhood educational settings. This study aimed to address this gap in research on effective educational leadership for organizational learning, particularly in the early childhood setting.

Organizational Learning

In this section, I introduce the reader to the concept of organizational learning as it is defined in the literature. Over the years, several different subtheories and definitions of organizational learning have emerged, the full history of which was beyond the scope of this literature review. This literature review focused on the concept of organizational learning as prevalent and applicable to schools as organizations.

In the last few decades, behavioral and social sciences have experienced phenomenal growth and have expanded to include the study of organizations (Garcia, 2016). The concept of organizational learning in the study of organizations was introduced by March and Simon in 1958 from their research on knowledge management within organizations (Levitt & March, 1988). Through their research, March and Simon defined organizations as systems of coordinated action among individuals. Other researchers, including Argyris and Schön (1978) and Argote and Miron-Spektor (2011) built on the work of March and Simon and defined organizational learning as a change in organizational knowledge or behavior over time. Most researchers would now agree that organizational learning can be defined as "a change in an organization's knowledge that occurs as a function of experience," which is the definition that this study will use (Argote & Miron-Spektor, 2011, p.4).

Individual vs. Organizational Learning

As indicated by the definition of a learning organization as "a change in an *organization*'s knowledge that occurs as a function of experience," a learning organization places more emphasis on the collective than the individual. While individual learning is a component of organizational learning, researchers identify organizational learning as distinct from the collective sum of individual learning (Argote & Miron-Spektor, 2011). As French sociologist

Émile Durkheim (1982) explains, group knowledge is more than the sum of its individuals. The literature for organizational learning builds on the work of Durkheim and posits that organizational learning is more than the sum of individual learning. Scholars of organizational learning assert that "it would be a mistake to conclude that organizational learning is nothing but the cumulative result of their members' learning" (Hedberg, 1981, p. 6). The literature describes that while individual learning is a necessary component of organizational learning, organizational learning is "not just the sum of individual learning" (Leithwood et al., 1998, p. 245). Rather, organizational learning is a process of ongoing and collaborative learning at *all* levels of the organization (Silins et al., 1999). For this study, "we can think of organizational learning as a process mediated by the collaborative inquiry of the individual members" (Argyris & Schön, 1978). Organizational learning is thus considered a social process resulting from the interactions of individuals within an organization (Wallace, 2010).

While organizational learning is more of the collective sum of individual learning, theorists consider individuals as the agents of organizational learning. When the knowledge that individuals acquire is converted and embedded in an organizational routine or system that informs decision-making, organizational learning can occur (Argote & Mirion-Spektor, 2011; Shirvastava, 1983). Organizational learning theorists propose that organizations are social artifacts of shared cognitive maps of the individual members (Allaire & Firsituotu, 1984; Mauchet, 2011). As Hedberg (1981) states, "Organizations do not have brains, but have cognitive systems and memories" (p. 3). This concept is supported by the fact that organizational patterns persist despite personnel turnover (Mauchet, 2011; Weick, 1979).

Many theorists thus consider organizational learning to be a socially-constructed system(Senge, 1990; Weick, 1979). The literature proposes that organizational learning is " a

system of actions, actors, symbols and processes that enables an organization to transform information into valued knowledge, which in turn, increases its long-run capacity" (Schwandt, 1997, p. 370). As Garvin (1993) explains, when organizations create systems and processes for problem-solving, experimentation, learning and transferring knowledge, they can develop beyond the individual and into learning organizations.

Organizational Learning for Organizational Success

In this section, I present literature on the relationship between organizational learning and success. I explored literature that analyzes the relationship between organizational learning and the success of an organization, defined in terms of organizational performance and survival. This literature is presented because I believe understanding the literature on the relationship between organizational learning and organizational success is a necessary condition for understanding organizational learning for school success.

Organizational learning is considered to be vital for the success of an organization and is outlined in the literature as tied to organizational performance and sustainability (Argote & Miron-Spektor, 2011; Fiol & Lyles, 1985; Saadat & Saadat, 2016; Senge, 2012). As Argote and Miron-Spektor (2011) explain, an organization's ability to learn is critical to the organization's performance and long-term success. In his fieldbook for educators on organizational learning, American researcher and senior lecturer at MIT Peter Senge (2012) presents the idea that in order to be sustainable amidst changing times, schools must develop organizational learning systems. While Senge's fieldbook was written a decade ago, his message holds even more value now as schools must consistently change and adapt due to the ever-changing presentation of the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on schools. For schools, "the safest prediction is change" (Senge, 2012, p. 10). Organizational learning provides systems for schools and their leaders,

teachers, students, parents, and communities, to sustain change (Senge, 2012). In a literary analysis of the link between organizational learning and organizational success, Saadat and Saadat (2016) compiled existing literature and science on organizational learning and concluded that without organizational learning systems, an organization is not designed to sustain global changes and is likely to fail. Organizations can implement organizational learning to survive and succeed in today's ever-changing world (Saadat & Saadat, 2016). As Bailey (2021) describes, "the ability to learn deeply and integrate new learning into routines and behaviors exists as the only way that current schools will be able to meet the demands of this new era" (p. 6).

In a study of hotels in the Manhattan hotel industry, Baum and Ingram (1998) analyzed the effects of organizational learning on hotel survival and failure rates from 1898-1980. After collecting and analyzing over eighty years of data, Baum and Ingram (1998) noted that hotels that were able to learn and adapt were able to survive in the competitive Manhattan hotel industry, while those hotels that were not able to learn and adapt failed. For example, hotels that learned to adapt their structures to support travelers journeying by the newly booming automobile industry were among those who were able to sustain the impact of the automobile industry on the hotel industry. They thus referred to the organizational learning they studied within the hotel industry as "survival-enhancing learning" (Baum & Ingram, 1998). In their study, Baum and Ingram conclude that this survival-enhancing learning is not automatic, but is the result of organizational experience, systems and mechanisms that allow for adaptability.

While Baum and Ingram's study (1998) is focused on the hotel industry, their conclusions can be applied across industries. The literature notes that organizations that demonstrate organizational learning have greater survival rates (Baum & Ingram, 1998; Senge, 2015). Senge

(2015) describes how businesses in various industries have been able to sustain industrial changes in their respective sectors due to leadership elements of organizational learning.

Throughout the literature, scholars agree that organizational learning proves to be beneficial for organizations (Senge, 1990; Senge, 2015; Thompson, 2004). Scholars note that organizations fail when they have deficiencies in their learning processes and an inability to adapt to changing circumstances (DellaNeve, 2007; Phillips, 2003). Bridges (2003) asserts that "change is the name of the game today, and organizations that can't change quickly aren't going to be around for long." Schwandt and Marquardt (2000) conclude that organizations that do not implement organizational learning "will soon go the way of the dinosaur" (p. 2), while organizations that do implement organizational learning will survive and thrive. As Senge notes, "the organizations that will truly excel in the future will be the organizations that discover how to tap people's commitment and capacity to learn at all levels in an organization" (Senge, 1990, p. 4). As the next section of this literature review will present, when educational leaders and schools implement organizational learning systems, schools are able to sustain the inevitably ever-changing environment and help set themselves and their students up for success (Bailey, 2021; Leithwood et al., 1998; Mulford et al., 2004, Senge, 2012).

The Case for Organizational Learning in Schools

As illustrated in the previous section, the literature presents that organizational learning is vital for organizational success and survival (Baum & Ingram, 1998; Bunderson & Sutcliffe, 2003; Saadat & Saadat, 2016; Senge, 2015). As with other industries, organizational learning is also vital for organizational success and survival for schools (Senge, 2012). In this section of the literature review, I present some of the existing literature on organizational learning in schools.

The literature presented on organizational learning in schools that is most prevalent in the field and of specific relevance to this study.

The case for studying organizational learning in schools is strong (Kucharczyk, 2011; Leithwood & Louis, 1998). As Leithwood and Louis (1998) note, "schools qualify as organizations facing the changing, uncertain, and ambiguous conditions" (p. 3) and these changing conditions faced by schools support the need for organizational learning in schools. In recent years, there has been an upsurge in the literature on organizational learning in schools (Jack Lam, 2004; Kucharczyk, 2011). Researcher Jack Lam (2004) of the University of Hong Kong asserts that this upsurge in literature on organizational learning in schools signifies the need and desire for schools to survive in an environment that is increasingly turbulent. Senge (2012) notes that schools face a unique set of pressures and schools that adopt organizational learning are better prepared to sustain these pressures. The literature on organizational learning in schools posits that when schools have implemented organizational learning systems, they are able to sustain societal changes and serve the needs of their community members (Palanki, 1994). Further, the literature notes that when schools implement organizational learning, student learning is enhanced and student achievement improves (Mulford & Silins, 2003). Given the current status of the COVID-19 pandemic, which creates even more pressures for schools, the need for organizational learning in schools - and associated literature on this need for organizational learning in schools - is even more necessary now. Organizational learning provides a framework for schools to navigate the inevitable environmental changes from the pandemic and elsewhere and may provide a solution to help schools withstand such change.

In a conference presentation for the Summer Institute of Authentic Leadership in Action (ALIA) in Nova Scotia, Senge referenced the example of a K-2 school in Arizona that embraced

organizational learning through all levels of the organization - including the children (Senge, 2015). Teachers at the school were encouraged by school leaders to facilitate student reflections on learning. For example, students were encouraged to reflect on the time of day when they did their "best" learning, and if disputes arose on the playground, the students were encouraged to think about their role in play and how it contributed to the system as a whole. Senge noted an example of three boys who mapped out a diagram to show their role in the playground dispute and, with the help of their teacher, brainstormed solutions to the problem. Senge describes this kind of reflective learning as an integral part of organizational learning, yet one that is rare to find in organizations across all industries, from businesses to schools (Senge, 2015). After implementing elements of organizational learning within the school, the school went from having the lowest possible ranking for a K-2 school to the highest in just three years (Senge, 2015). Of note, the school in this example is considered a low-income school, with 90% free and reduced lunch (Senge, 2015). Even with the environmental difficulties that surround low-income schools, implementing elements of organizational learning throughout all levels of the school was able to help the school, and its students, improve in just three years (Senge, 2015).

A study conducted on organizational learning in schools by Louis and Kruse (1998) illustrates organizational learning in two urban schools. For their research, Louis and Kruse selected two schools (an elementary school and a middle school) in an urban setting. Both schools were described as desirable schools, but neither school scored well in terms of testing and both schools served many low-income families. Through interviews with teachers and educational leaders at the schools, the study concluded that these schools embodied a "steady devotion to the improvement of education for all students" (p. 22). The study notes that this devotion to student improvement was largely due to the educational leadership at the school.

Louis and Kruse found that the educational leaders at these schools provided environments that stimulated teachers, provided them with flexible expectations, and empowered them to have a voice in school decision-making. The educational leaders put in place both opportunities and arrangements to allow for this, such as grade-level meetings, optional peer classroom observations, and special projects (Louis & Kruse, 1998). Such opportunities and arrangements made these two schools desirable learning organizations for teachers and families, even given the schools' statuses as low-income schools. Additionally, in a 2012 study conducted in large urban school districts in the US, the evidence suggests that low-performing schools also had limited levels of organizational learning (Finnegan et al., 2012). The study suggests that structural changes, such as providing more professional development for teachers, can help improve levels of organization within schools, and therefore contribute to overall school improvement. In another 2012 study conducted in a large urban school district in the US, researchers identified organizational learning as an underlying condition for school success (Higgins et al., 2012).

While these studies help illustrate the positive impact of organizational learning for student improvement, (Leithwood & Louis, 1998; Louis & Kruse, 1998; Senge, 2012), the empirical evidence supporting the notion of organizational learning in schools is "embarrassingly slim" (Leithwood & Louis, 1998, p. 7) and there is a need for increased research on organizational learning in schools. In particular, more quantitative studies would provide data-based examples of the impact of organizational learning in schools.

Organizational Learning and Learning Organizations

Understanding the distinction and relationship between organizational learning and learning organizations is central to this review. As noted in the introduction and definition sections of this study, it is important to note the difference between "organizational learning" and

a “learning organization.” While these terms are often used interchangeably, they are, in fact, distinct terms. When scholars refer to organizational learning, the prevailing definition (and the definition this study will use) is a change in an organization’s knowledge that occurs as a function of experience (Argote & Miron-Spektor, 2011). In order for organizations, such as schools, to demonstrate organizational learning, they must be deliberate with their planning, processes, and evaluation (Collinson & Cook, 2007; Kucharczyk, 2011). When schools take the necessary steps to deliberately organize themselves to support organizational learning, they can become learning organizations (Darling-Hammond, 1996). Scholars define a learning organization as an organization that encourages and facilitates continual learning at all levels of the organization (Senge, 1990). Learning organizations purposefully construct structures and strategies to enhance organizational learning (Dodgson, 1993; Mauchet, 2011). A learning organization “does not settle for the status quo; it looks for ways to bring about improvement in its functioning” (Thompson, 2004, p. 52). Senge notes that a learning organization is one where “people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free and where people are continually learning how to learn together” to “create its future” (Senge, 1990, p. 3 & p. 14).

Senge’s (1990) widely known publication, *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization*, popularized the concept of a learning organization (Brennan, 2013; Wesley & Buysse, 2001). Following the publication of Senge’s book, a growing number of scholars have advocated that schools, which are faced with the challenge of continuously adapting to changes in society, should be reconceptualized as learning organizations (Brennan, 2013; Giles & Hargreaves, 2006; Kools et al., 2020; Leithwood & Louis, 1998; Silins &

Mulford, 2004). As Leithwood and Louis (1998) state “Schools clearly qualify as organizations facing the changing, uncertain, and ambiguous conditions” (p. 3) and would thus benefit from developing themselves as learning organizations. Senge (2012) even responded to the call to develop schools as learning organizations by producing a fieldbook specifically for educators and has since produced multiple editions of the fieldbook. While Senge’s fieldbook remains a seminal resource for the application of organizational learning for educational leaders and schools, more contemporary literature and research is needed for establishing preschools as learning organizations.

Schools as Learning Organizations

This section of the literature review analyzes the literature on schools as learning organizations. As mentioned in the previous section, the literature on schools as learning organizations has been increasing since the 1990s. Yet, despite the increase in literature over the past few decades, the literature on schools as learning organizations is considerably less than other organizations operating as learning organizations, especially those within the private business sector (Kools et al., 2016). Additionally, this study’s search for literature on schools as learning organizations yielded results specific to K-12 settings, but found very limited results for schools as learning organizations within the early childhood setting. This study intends to help close this gap by producing literature on preschools as learning organizations. Furthermore, it is noted that the literature on schools as learning organizations tends to focus on specific elements of organizational learning, such as professional development, rather than looking at the overall outcome measures of schools as learning organizations (Kools et al., 2016). Given this, I will look primarily at the specific elements that the literature presents as necessary for schools to become learning organizations.

Defining Factors for Schools as Learning Organizations

In this section of the literature review, I review the literature on the defining factors for schools as learning organizations. A review of the literature reveals that theorists have identified several characteristics that define schools as learning organizations (Leithwood & Louis, 1998; Silins et al., 2002a).

Researchers Leithwood, Leonard, and Sharratt (1998) conducted a synthesis of three of the predominant studies on schools as learning organizations for the purpose of identifying the prevailing conditions for schools as learning organizations. The three studies used in Leithwood, Leonard, and Sharratt's (1998) synthesis were independent studies of the conditions that foster organizational learning in schools. These three studies used in the synthesis were selected because they were independent from each other and conducted within different contexts, but were all guided by the same theoretical framework. All three studies used extensive literature on organizational learning in non-school organizations to develop a framework for school settings (Leithwood, Leonard, et al., 1998). These similarities in study design and contextual differences provided Leithwood, Leonard, and Sharratt the opportunity to explore the potential similarities in conditions of organizational learning under different contexts. The three studies were designed as multi-case studies to increase the external validity of the results and together represented 14 school sites across Canada (Leithwood, Leonard, et al., 1998). The school conditions varied considerably by school, which allowed the researchers to discriminate between schools and conditions that fostered, inhibited, or had no impact on organizational learning (Leithwood, Leonard, et al., 1998). The studies collected survey and interview data from 111 elementary, middle, and high school teachers. Teachers were selected for the studies by their principals and were considered to be broadly representative of the school staff (Leithwood, Leonard, et al.,

1998). The data for each study was then analyzed and coded for associations by a team of researchers. Leithwood, Leonard, and Sharratt (1998) analyzed the findings from all three studies to determine associations across them.

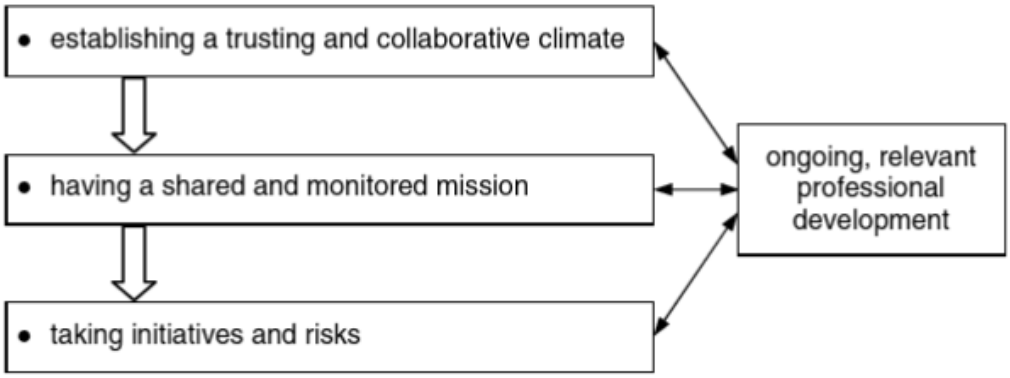
Using this methodology, Leithwood, Leonard, and Sharratt (1998) identified and ranked the variables with the strongest influence for schools as learning organizations across the differing contexts of the three studies. Across all three studies, leadership was ranked as the most statistically significant variable contributing to fostering schools as learning organizations (Leithwood, Leonard, et al., 1998). In synthesizing the data across all three studies. Leithwood, Leonard, and Sharratt (1998) identified several dimensions of leadership that foster organizational learning in schools, including identifying and articulating a vision, fostering the acceptance of group goals, conveying high-performance expectations, providing appropriate models, providing intellectual stimulation, building a productive school culture, and structuring the school to enhance participation in decisions. Given the evidence in the literature supporting the impact of leadership for fostering schools as learning organizations (Leithwood, Leonard, et al., 1998; Mulford et al., 2004), the next section of this literature review will outline the literature on leadership and schools as learning organizations.

In addition to leadership, Leithwood, Leonard, and Sharratt's (1998) synthesis also identified other conditions that strongly influence schools as learning organizations. Leithwood, Leonard, and Sharratt (1998) identified school culture, school structure, and professional development as other conditions that foster organizational learning in schools. Across all three studies, school cultures identified as collaborative and supportive of risk-taking were associated with higher measures of organizational learning (Leithwood, Leonard, et al., 1998). Additionally, this research identified school structure as another important condition for fostering

organizational learning in schools. More specifically, school structures that allowed for greater teacher participation in decision-making were shown to foster organizational learning. Lastly, Leithwood, Leonard, and Sharratt (1998) identified professional development for teachers as a necessary condition for fostering organizational learning in schools. Figure 2 visually represents these defining factors for schools as learning organizations, as presented by Mulford, Silins, and Leithwood (2004). While the work of Leithwood, Leonard, and Sharratt (1998) and Mulford, Silinis, and Leithwood (2004) used multiple efforts to ensure validity and reliability of their studies, such as multiple case studies and sites to draw their conclusions, it is noted that their studies were conducted only in K-12 settings in Australia and may not be representative of the entire PreK-12 global school landscape.

Figure 2

The four factors defining organizational learning offered by Mulford, Silins, & Leithwood (2004)



Building on Leithwood, Leonard, and Sharratt's 1998 study, researchers Mulford and Silins launched the Leadership for Organisational Learning and Student Outcomes (LOLSO) Research Project in 2003. The Australian government established the LOLSO Project in an effort to gain a deeper understanding of educational leadership for organizational learning and student outcomes (Mulford & Silins, 2003). The project collected data from 5,000 students and 3,700

teachers and educational leaders across 96 schools in Tasmania and South Australia (Mulford & Silins, 2003). The research for this project included quantitative data from surveys and qualitative data from case studies of schools. The study used path analysis to investigate the relationships between variables and determine variables that may serve as predictors of organizational learning in schools. Using path analysis, the LOLSO Project results found that establishing schools as learning organizations involves a sequence of conditions, including establishing a trustworthy and collaborative climate, having a shared and monitored mission, and taking initiatives and risks and that all three of these conditions require the support of ongoing, relevant professional development (Mulford & Silins, 2003). Given that the Australian government funded the project, there is potential for political biases in study results. However, given the measures taken to ensure validity and reliability of the study, the LOLSO Project results are still considered the leading research for developing schools as learning organizations (Kucharcyzk, 2011).

While Leithwood, Leonard, and Sharratt's (1998) synthesis on conditions fostering organizational learning in schools and the LOLSO Research Project are considered to be the most extensive studies on the leadership conditions fostering schools as learning organizations to date (Mulford et al., 2004), this researcher notes that Leithwood, Leonard, and Sharratt's (1998) study (and the three studies that they use) and the LOLSO Research Project represent a broad range of schools and teachers across elementary, middle, and high schools, but do not represent early childhood. A growing body of literature addresses organizational learning in K-12 settings (Mulford et al., 2004; Senge, 1990), but there has been limited literature on organizational learning within ECE (Garrity et al., 2016). Additionally, the schools represented are all located in Canada and Australia and are not necessarily representative of schools in the United States or

globally. It is the hope of this researcher to help fill this gap and extend research on conditions fostering schools as learning organizations to early childhood schools within the United States.

Leadership for Schools as Learning Organizations

Given the evidence supporting leadership as the leading factor for fostering conditions of organizational learning in schools (Leithwood, Leonard, et al., 1998; Mulford et al., 2004), this section of the literature review will present some of the leading literature on leadership for schools as learning organizations. As the research findings from Leithwood's aggregate study, the LOLSO Project, and other studies suggest, leadership has been identified as a critical component for developing organizational learning in schools (Brennan, 2013; Leithwood, Leonard, et al., 1998; Mulford et al., 2004). The literature identifies educational leadership as an important factor linked to improved student learning and achievement (Leithwood, Leonard, et al., 1998; Leithwood & Louis, 2012). In recent years, the literature has extended the link of educational leadership to improved student learning and achievement through organizational learning (Mulford & Silins, 2003; Senge, 2015). Thompson (2004) emphasizes the importance of leadership for organizational learning when stating that "leaders can either encourage and nurture organizational learning, or they can squelch and kill it before it even takes root." (p. 64). Many pieces of literature recognize that school success and survival depends upon leadership for organizational learning (DellaNeve, 2007; Senge, 2015).

The literature on educational leadership for organizational learning in schools is primarily based in Australia (Kucharczyk, 2011). As noted earlier in this literature review, the most extensive study on organizational learning in schools to date is the Leadership for Organisational Learning and Student Outcomes (LOLSO) Project, which was conducted across secondary schools in Australia (Mulford & Silins, 2003; Mulford et al., 2004; Silins et al., 2002a). The

LOLSO research was conducted in four phases and included surveys of 3,500 high school students and 2,500 teachers and principals (Mulford et al., 2004). Given the thorough study design and size, the findings from the LOLSO research project can be used to provide insight into the conditions necessary for organizational learning to take place in schools. However, due to the specific location and grade levels included in this extensive study (secondary schools in Australia), due diligence must be applied when generalizing these findings to other locations and grade levels, such as early childhood schools in the United States. Despite this caveat, the conditions that the LOLSO research identified for educational leadership for organizational learning in schools are still considered to be the leading research for the developing schools as learning organizations (Kucharcyzk, 2011). The next section of this literature review will outline the conditions identified by the LOLSO research as the key dimensions of educational leadership for organizational learning, as presented by Mulford, Silins, and Leithwood (2004). The LOLSO Project identified seven key characteristics or dimensions of educational leadership for establishing schools as learning organizations, including visions and goals, culture, structure, intellectual stimulation, individual support, performance expectations, and community focus (Mulford et al., 2004). While the literature identifies these dimensions of educational leadership for developing schools as learning organizations, these dimensions still need to be explored in the preschool setting. More research must be done in order to see if these dimensions remain significant for educational leadership and the development of preschools as learning organizations.

Necessary Conditions for Developing Schools as Learning Organizations

In addition to dimensions of leadership related to developing schools as learning organizations, a complete review of the literature on developing schools as learning

organizations must also include a review of the conditions that define organizational learning in schools. This section of the literature review will address four key factors defining organizational learning in schools.

Research from the LOLSO project and other studies concluded that four key characteristics define organizational learning in schools (Leithwood & Louis, 1998; Mulford et al., 2004). As Mulford, Silins, and Leithwood explain (2004), organizational learning in schools was found to encompass "*sequentially* establishing a trusting and collaborative climate, having a sharing and monitored mission, and taking initiatives and risks [all] within the context of supportive, ongoing, relevant professional development" (p. 5).

Trusting and Collaborative Climate. According to the literature (Leithwood et al., 1998; Louis & Murphy, 2017; Mulford et al., 2004), establishing a trusting and collaborative school climate is the first step in defining schools as learning organizations. As Boell and Senge (2016) describe, school climate is an expression of school culture and a vehicle for continuous learning and improvement. In the LOLSO project, survey results and interviews determined that schools with trusting and collaborative school climates were also classified as learning organizations, while schools that did not have trusting and collaborative climates were not classified as learning organizations (Mulford et al., 2004). The LOLSO research identified the aspects of a trusting and collaborative school climate as having dialogue and open communication, sharing and distributing leadership tasks amongst faculty and staff, and demonstrating respect, value, and care for all community members (Mulford et al., 2004). Global studies such as the LOLSO research (Mulford et al., 2004) and the acknowledgment of the pivotal role of educational leaders in fostering a positive school climate underline the interconnectedness of leadership and organizational culture in educational settings.

Similarly, a 2017 study by Louis and Murphy examined the relationship between educational leaders, organizational learning, and trust by surveying teachers and principals from 116 schools in nine states (Louis & Murphy, 2017). Through their survey results, Louis and Murphy concluded that teachers' perception of principal caring is associated with organizational learning in schools and is an essential predictor of organizational learning and student improvement (Louis & Murphy, 2017). Further, their study concluded that the most critical indicator of the development of organizational learning in schools is whether trust and caring within the adult population (teachers and school leaders) translated into actions that demonstrate care and support for students (Louis & Murphy, 2017). In a study of school climate in Turkish preschools, collegiality and director support were identified as key components for creating positive school climates. (Veziroglu-Celik & Yildiz, 2018). The literature posits that the leader is essential in helping to establish this trust and care within schools (Louis & Murphy, 2017; Garrity et al., 2016; Veziroglu-Celik & Yildiz, 2018). Once a trusting and collaborative school climate is established, educational leaders can begin to focus on developing a shared and monitored mission, taking risks, and other aspects of improving their schools (Mulford et al., 2004).

Shared and Monitored School Vision and Mission. Per the literature, a second necessary condition for schools as learning organizations is having a shared and monitored mission (Kurland et al., 2010; Leithwood & Louis, 1998; Mulford et al., 2004). In the LOLSO research project, having a shared and monitored mission was shown to be correlated with schools that were considered learning organizations (Mulford et al., 2004). A later study conducted in 2010 by Kurland, Peretz, and Hertz-Lazarowitz came to similar conclusions as the LOLSO research project. This study involved collecting data from 1,474 teachers in 104 elementary

schools in Israel and using regression analysis to determine the significance of school vision on organizational learning in schools (Kurland et al., 2010). Using regression analysis, Kurland, Peretz, and Hertz-Lazarowitz (2010) concluded that a shared school vision is a significant predictor of school organizational learning. Researchers Louis and Murphy (2017) also conclude that a shared school vision is a necessary component of organizational learning in schools. Louis and Murphy (2017) then extend the findings on the relationship between school visions and organizational learning in schools to include the role of educational leaders. As Louis and Murphy describe (2017), school leaders are instrumental in establishing a shared school vision for organizational learning and student improvement.

It is important to note that while a school vision and a school mission are often used interchangeably, they are distinct terms. A school vision concisely expresses the school's aspirations, while a school mission statement provides an overview of the steps needed to achieve the school vision (Gabriel & Farmer, 2009). As Leithwood and Louis note, school leaders often have personal visions that are not translated into shared school visions and missions (Leithwood, Leonard, et al., 1998; Voogt et al., 1998). The literature posits that educational leaders can develop their visions into shared school missions by communicating the school's mission, helping clarify the school's mission in terms of practical implications for programs and instruction, and collaboratively involving school staff in establishing priorities for school goals (Louis & Louis, 2017; Mulford et al., 2004). While all schools have missions, schools identified as learning organizations have a shared mission *and* monitor it (Mulford et al., 2004). According to the literature, a monitored mission involves critical examination of current practices, openness to discuss sensitive school issues, and regular monitoring of school practices (Mulford et al., 2004). The LOLSO research identified that educational leaders can help develop their schools

into learning organizations when they have shared and monitored school missions and visions (Mulford et al., 2004).

Taking Initiatives and Risks. A third condition of schools as learning organizations is a school climate that encourages taking initiatives and risks (Mulford et al., 2004). Roth and Senge (1996) reinforce this idea by noting that safe settings, such as a trusting and collaborative environment, allow for new thinking, behaviors, and routines. The literature notes that to develop their schools as learning organizations, educational leaders must encourage professional risk taking and experimentation (Mulford et al., 2004; Silins et al., 2002b). School climates that encourage taking risks and initiatives value diversity of opinion, have school structures to support taking risks and reward staff members who take initiative (Mulford et al., 2004; Silins et al., 2002b). In a 2012 study conducted in a large urban school district in the US, researchers identified organizational learning as an underlying condition for school success (Higgins et al., 2012). In their study, Higgins et al. identified psychological safety and experimentation for teachers as key components that must be present for schools to become learning organizations. The study by Higgins et al. (2012) helps understand how the condition of risk-taking, as identified in global studies, applies within the U.S. context.

While the condition of taking initiatives and risks has been identified as statistically significant for developing schools as learning organizations (Mulford et al., 2004), it is noted that schools cannot create cultures of taking initiatives and risks unless the two previously identified conditions (having a trusting and collaborative environment and having a shared and monitored mission) have been met. Additionally, it may be hard to distinguish between subconditions for these three respective conditions.

Ongoing, Relevant Professional Development. A fourth condition identified in the literature as a necessary condition of schools as learning organizations is having ongoing and relevant professional development (Louis, 2006; Mulford et al., 2004). As noted in the findings from the LOLSO research project, schools require ongoing professional development for their teachers to maximize and improve their professional practices and help their schools develop as learning organizations (Mulford et al., 2004). Developmental psychologist Eleanor Drago-Severson notes that a learning-oriented model of school leadership can help support the growth and development of adults in education (Drago-Severson et al., 2013). The literature notes that when educational leaders implement ongoing, relevant professional development for their teachers, positive changes in teacher practices and improvements in student learning are more likely to occur (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Sheridan et al., 2009), which is characteristic of a school as a learning organization.

In order for schools to provide ongoing and relevant professional development for their faculty and staff, they must provide adequate time for professional development, facilitate time for teacher collaboration and have structures in place to share knowledge, make good use of professional associations, and ensure professional development is closely tied to real school issues (Mulford et al., 2004). In a similar vein to the other conditions for schools as learning organizations, the presence of professional development does not happen in isolation, but rather is closely tied to the other necessary conditions for developing schools as learning organizations - trusting and collaborative climate, shared and monitored mission, taking initiatives and risks (Mulford et al., 2004). For these reasons, it may once again be challenging to distinguish subconditions for each respective condition.

Obstacles to Conditions for Schools as Learning Organizations

While the previous section of this literature review identified the prevailing literature on some of the necessary conditions for developing schools as learning organizations, this section identifies some of the prevailing literature on conditions that serve as obstacles to educational leaders developing schools as learning organizations.

As noted in the previous section of this literature review, several conditions have been identified in the literature as conditions that help educational leaders foster organizational learning in schools - most notably a trusting and collaborative climate, a shared and monitored mission, taking initiatives and risks, and ongoing, relevant professional development (Mulford et al., 2004). According to the literature, when these conditions are present, schools are more likely to develop as learning organizations (Leithwood, Leonard, et al., 1998; Mulford et al., 2004). Similarly, when these conditions are not met, schools are less likely to develop as learning organizations (Leithwood, Leonard, et al., 1998; Mulford et al., 2004). For example, when schools fail to have a climate of trust and collaboration, a shared and monitored mission, do not take initiatives or risks, and do not provide ongoing and relevant professional development, they are less likely to function as learning organizations (Mulford et al., 2004). However, it is more than the lack of these four prevailing conditions that can lead to schools not functioning as learning organizations. Additional conditions can serve as barriers to schools as learning organizations.

While trusting and collaborative climates are shown in the literature to help enhance the development of schools as learning organizations (Mulford et al., 2004), schools with cultures of isolation and autonomy are shown to hamper organizational learning (Leithwood et al., 2006). As Leithwood et al. describe (2006), when schools have cultures of autonomy rather than

collaboration, it is difficult or near-impossible for teachers to collaborate and share their knowledge with one another. Further, the literature notes that without opportunities for collaboration, it is difficult for school members to join in a shared school mission (Leithwood et al., 2006), which inhibits the earlier condition of a shared and monitored mission for developing schools as learning organizations (Mulford et al., 2004). Additionally, cultures of autonomy limit the spread of knowledge and therefore hamper teacher growth and development (Leithwood et al., 2006). Not only do cultures of autonomy inhibit the spread of knowledge (Leithwood et al., 2006; Mulford et al., 2004), but the literature also shows that by not spreading knowledge, cultures of autonomy can reinforce loops of counterproductive learning (Argyris & Schön, 1996), which stands in direct contrast to developing schools as learning organizations. In addition, some schools also have embedded behaviors and structures that serve as barriers to organizational learning (Kucharczyk, 2011; Rusch, 2005). Such defensive behaviors may include silencing professional discussions for fear of change of the status quo or lack of resources, such as time or funds (Rusch, 2005).

To overcome such barriers, schools need active processes and structures in place to develop their schools as learning organizations (Kucharcyzk, 2011). The literature demonstrates that educational leaders can implement organizational routines to help overcome these barriers and foster conditions that will likely enhance the development of schools as learning organizations (Bailey, 2021). The next section of this literature review will present some of the leading research on organizational routines pertaining to developing schools as learning organizations.

Organizational Routines

This section of the literature review presents the leading research on the role of organizational routines in developing schools as learning organizations. As the previous sections of this literature review have presented, transforming schools into learning organizations is not an easy task. Transforming schools into learning organizations can be an arduous task laden with many barriers (Kucharczyk, 2011; Leithwood et al., 2006; Mulford et al., 2004; Rusch, 2005). Thankfully, a growing body of literature has identified organizational routines as a tool to help implement the often complex transformation of schools into learning organizations (Feldman & Pentland, 2003; Levitt & March, 1988; Spillane et al., 2011; Bailey, 2021).

Levitt and March (1988) were some of the first researchers to study the role of organizational routines for organizational learning and remain some of the most cited scholars on organizational routines. Classical observations from behavioral studies of organizations form the basis of organizational learning concepts for Levitt and March (1988). In particular, Levitt and March (1988) note that human behavior is routine and that routines capture organizational beliefs. Given their prevalence amongst the academic community for their work on organizational routines, this study defers to the definition of organizational routines as provided by Levitt and March (1988), which defines organizational routines as "the rules, procedures, conventions, strategies, and technologies around which organizations are constructed and through which they operate" (Levitt & March, 1988).

As Levitt and March (1988) explain, organizational learning is routine-based. Educational leaders are instrumental in the implementation of organizational routines for school success. Levitt and March (1988) note that organizational routines can prevent or support organizational learning. According to Levitt and March (1988), organizations learn when

organizational leaders, such as school leaders, identify desired aspirations and structure organizational routines to help the organization achieve these aspirations. Building on this work, Feldman and Pentland (2003) discuss the importance of organizational learning through routines. They note that organizational routines can stabilize organizations during tumultuous times (Spillane et al., 2011; Feldman & Pentland, 2003; Schechter, 2008), such as a global pandemic. While educational leaders can implement organizational routines, Levitt and March (1988) explain that routines are independent of individuals and are capable of surviving both internal and external environmental changes, such as teacher and administrator turnover. Feldman and Pentland (2003) describe organizational routines as stabilizing forces that can help new members of an organization integrate into the organizational culture. The literature notes that for learning to take place, learning mechanisms must be institutionalized in the form of organizational routines (Lipshitz et al., 2002; Schechter, 2008). Additionally, the literature notes that organizational routines can reduce conflict surrounding job roles and responsibilities, allowing for more effective operations (Feldman & Pentland, 2003). Organizational routines thus contribute to stability and help organizations survive and thrive amidst changing contexts, both externally and internally.

Yet, despite the literature on the relationship between organizational routines and organizational learning, it can also be concluded that the stability of organizational routines may negatively affect the organization. As Levitt and March (1988) note, organizational routines can prevent or support organizational learning depending on the organizational routine. For example, if an organizational routine is not effectively serving the organization and its community and is serving as a barrier to organizational learning and improvement, the stability of such an organizational routine could prove detrimental to the organization. Further research is needed to

determine which organizational routines may support or hinder organizational learning, particularly within the context of ECE. This study hopes to contribute to such research.

In contrast to organizational routines providing organizational stability, the literature also notes that organizational routines can also serve as a vehicle for organizational change (Argote & Mirion-Spektor, 2011; Feldman & Pentland, 2003). While these conclusions may initially appear in opposition, we can begin to make sense of these seemingly oppositional conclusions when applied to our understanding of school systems. As we know, and as the global COVID-19 pandemic has reinforced, schools exist in ever-changing environments. With external changes occurring, schools have the opportunity to both maintain some structures and routines and adjust others. School leaders can support organizational learning by developing organizational structures and routines to support external demands and internal areas of needed improvement (Bailey, 2021). Yet, as Watkins and Marsick explain (1993), such changes must be embedded in organizational structures and routines to lead to organizational learning. The literature posits that schools identified as learning organizations institute specific structures and routines that build greater capacity, therefore enabling them to respond productively to changing external environments (DeRoberto, 2011; Giles & Hargreaves, 2006; Silins et al., 2002b).

The literature notes the instrumental role of educational leaders in implementing organizational routines to help foster organizational learning within their schools (Spillane et al., 2011; Bailey, 2021). The theory of organizational learning guides educational leaders in the development and application of organizational routines as depersonalized mechanisms through which teachers can learn how to behave within the organization to fulfill their roles and responsibilities for their success, the success of their students, and the success of the organization as a whole (Levitt & March, 1988). In a study by Sherer and Spillane (2011) on the role of

organizational routines and leadership, the authors employed a longitudinal case study in a K-8 setting over four years. They concluded that educational leaders can employ organizational routines to both stabilize organizations amidst considerable change and also use organizational routines as a source for change and improvement. In particular, Sherer and Spillane (2011) note that organizational routines build professional culture, instructional coherence, and accountability. As the literature demonstrates, much remains to be understood about organizational learning in schools, and more specifically in preschools.

Importance of Early Childhood Education

The literature review first provided an understanding of organizational learning, acknowledging significant gaps in U.S. literature, and the pivotal influence of leadership in creating and sustaining schools as learning organizations. Conclusions indicated that educational leaders can foster a school environment conducive to organizational learning, which is crucial for adapting and improving schools in response to evolving educational needs and challenges. This study seeks to better understand the application of the literature and research on educational leadership for organizational learning in schools to the context of ECE. Understanding the context of ECE is essential to understanding educational leadership for organizational learning in ECE. In order to understand the context for developing preschools as learning organizations, this section of the literature review will present some of the leading literature on ECE.

The literature posits that the early childhood years, defined as age 0 to 8, are a crucial developmental period during which children experience the most rapid mental, physical, and socioemotional growth (Britto et al., 2012; Gomez, 2016). The first few years of life are critical in shaping a child's overall development and lay the foundation for cognitive, social-emotional, and physical development throughout life (Britto et al., 2012; Gomez, 2016). Existing literature

on early childhood development suggests that early childhood development is positively linked to individual and community success (Britto et al., 2012; Gomez, 2016). According to the literature, children who can achieve full developmental gains during their early childhood years are likely to have more developed cognitive skills, higher life-time earnings, greater productivity, and societal contributions (Britto et al., 2012). Of course, as Britto et al. (2012) explain, the context of this rich developmental period is an essential determinant of developmental gains (Drago-Severson et al., 2013; Kegan, 1982). For most American children, that context includes an early childhood educational program (Britto et al., 2012; Gomez, 2016). An estimated 69% of U.S. children are enrolled in an early childhood educational program during their early childhood years (Gomez, 2016; National Center for Education Statistics, 2024). This number is expected to increase as maternal employment becomes more normative (Zaslow & Martinez-Beck, 2006). Given the high number of U.S. children enrolled in ECE, it is imperative to learn more about the context of the ECE and the role of educational leaders in developing preschools as learning organizations.

Relationship between Early Childhood Education and Learning

In order to better understand the role of educational leaders in developing preschools as learning organizations, it is essential first to understand the learning environments of U.S. ECE. Therefore, in this literature review section, I present the leading literature on the relationship between ECE and learning within U.S. preschools. Given how the literature defines the early childhood years as crucial for overall development (Britto et al., 2012) and the high percentage of young American children enrolled in early childhood educational programs (Gomez, 2016), quality early childhood education is of great value for individuals and our society as a whole (Jones & Pound, 2008; La Paro & King, 2019; Tout et al., 2006). The literature posits that when

early childhood educators and educational leaders have sufficient knowledge and skills in child development and teaching, they can design and execute high-quality learning environments (Tout et al., 2006; Winton et al., 2015). Yet, despite the literature on the importance of quality early childhood education, as Dickinson and Brady (2006, p. 162) outline, "many early childhood teachers lack even the most basic education about child development," which results in low-quality early childhood educational settings.

As the literature asserts, continuous opportunities for both student and teacher learning are necessary for early childhood educators to develop sufficient knowledge and skills in child development and provide quality early childhood educational programs (La Paro & King, 2019; Tout et al., 2006; Winton et al., 2015). The literature defines such learning opportunities as structured professional learning experiences for teachers to gain new knowledge and skill (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; NAEYC, 2011; Sheridan et al., 2009). Early childhood educational leaders can establish and provide such learning opportunities for early childhood educators to improve program quality, which may contribute to developing preschools as learning organizations. Unfortunately, the literature on professional learning in early childhood educational settings does not extend to the application of preschools as learning organizations. Studying preschools as learning organizations may help in these efforts to increase professional learning for early childhood educators and their students.

While the research on developing preschools as learning organizations is limited to nonexistent, we can look to the existing research on teacher learning and student outcomes to better understand the context of learning within preschools. Existing research demonstrates a positive link between teacher learning and student educational experiences and outcomes (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Martinez-Beck & Zaslow, 2006; Sheridan et al., 2009; Winton

et al., 2015; Zepeda, 2019). Through engagement in effective professional learning opportunities, early childhood educators can gain knowledge and skills necessary to create effective learning environments for their young students (Furnari, 2016; Martinez-Beck & Zaslow, 2006; Pianta et al., 2008; Sheridan et al., 2009; Winton et al., 2015). Numerous studies demonstrate an improvement in early childhood learning environments after teacher participation in effective professional learning opportunities (Furnari, 2016; Martinez-Beck & Zaslow, 2006; Pianta et al., 2008; Sheridan et al., 2009; Winton et al., 2015). Early childhood educational leaders can provide teachers with effective professional learning opportunities to increase both teacher and student learning, which may contribute to organizational learning within the school as well.

Additionally, by providing effective professional learning opportunities for early childhood educators, early childhood educational leaders may contribute to developing the conditions necessary for preschools to develop as learning organizations, such as a positive and collaborative school culture. The literature notes that participation in professional learning opportunities allows teachers to better respond to the needs of their students and deliver higher-quality teaching and learning (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009). For example, in one study, early childhood educators who participated in an effective professional learning program were shown to incorporate higher-quality teaching practices in their classrooms, including the incorporation of higher-quality teacher-child interactions (Pianta et al., 2008). The literature therefore demonstrates a positive association between professional learning for teachers and student learning (Furnari, 2016; Martinez-Beck & Zaslow, 2006; Pianta et al., 2008; Sheridan et al., 2009; Winton et al., 2015). Providing effective learning opportunities for early childhood educators may thus contribute to developing preschools as learning organizations.

Early Childhood Education in the United States

Despite existing research on the positive link between professional learning and student achievement (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Martinez-Beck & Zaslow, 2006; Sheridan et al., 2009; Winton et al., 2015; Zepeda, 2019) and the need for professional learning for early childhood educators (Dickinson & Brady, 2006; Sheridan et al., 2009; Winton et al., 2015; Zaslow & Martinez-Beck, 2006), professional learning for early childhood educators in America is "problematic" (Dickinson & Brady, 2006, p. 162). While there is a clear need for professional learning for early childhood educators, the U.S. lacks a coherent and consistent system to provide adult learning and development for early childhood educators and educational leaders (Dickinson & Brady, 2006; U.S. Department of Education, 2010; Zaslow & Martinez-Beck, 2006). Unfortunately, professional learning for early childhood educators in the U.S. is inconsistent and limited to non-existent (Morello-DeSerio, 2017; US Department of Education, 2010; Zaslow & Martinez-Beck, 2006). The few professional learning opportunities for early childhood educators tend to be in the form of one-time workshops with a narrow focus (Dickinson & Brady, 2006; Morello-DeSerio, 2017). These experiences are reported to be largely inadequate for preparing teachers for their roles and responsibilities (Dickinson & Brady, 2006; US Department of Education, 2010). The professional learning opportunities available for early childhood educators in the U.S. are described in the literature as "episodic" and "disconnected from practice" (Winton et al., 2015, p. 54). Despite its aim, most professional learning for early childhood educators is found to be ineffective and does not lead to systematic improvements (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). A 2016 review of professional learning in ECE concludes that early childhood educators are largely unsupported professionally (Roberts, 2016). The lack of effective professional learning opportunities for early childhood educators is especially upsetting

due to the critical nature of development for children during their early childhood years and the essential role of their teachers during these crucial developmental years for children (Ringsmose, 2002). As the literature on developing schools as learning organizations presents (Leithwood & Louis, 1998; Mulford et al., 2004), effective opportunities for professional learning are an essential condition for developing schools as learning organizations, and without them, preschools may not be able to develop into learning organizations.

Educational Leadership for Early Childhood Education

As the literature review presented earlier, given the critical role of educational leaders in developing schools as learning organizations, it is essential to understand the unique context of educational leadership for early childhood education. Therefore, this section of the literature review presents some of the leading literature on educational leadership in early childhood education. As previously noted in this literature review, educational leadership is an essential factor linked to improved student learning and achievement (Leithwood & Louis, 2004; Leithwood & Louis, 2012). School leaders play a key role in improving student achievement through teacher professional development and learning (Leithwood & Louis, 2004; Leithwood & Louis, 2012). Further, educational leaders are an essential component in developing schools as learning organizations (Leithwood & Louis, 1998; Mulford et al., 2004). In a robust study of principal efficacy, Leithwood and Louis (2012) identified key leadership practices linked to student learning. In their study of interviews with 31 principals, professional learning for teachers was identified as one of the key functions of leadership for improved student learning. Effective educational leadership is essential in creating conditions that nurture teacher development and student success (Drago-Severson, 2009; Drago-Severson et al., 2013). In order to provide effective learning and developmental experiences for teachers, educational leaders

must design effective learning environments for the adults in their schools (Drago-Severson, 2009). As researcher Drago-Severson outlines in her framework for a learning-oriented model of school leadership, educational leaders are responsible for providing the adults in their schools with the appropriate supports and challenges to nurture their growth and development (Drago-Severson, 2009). The literature posits that this is especially true in the early childhood years when educational leaders play a vital role in the developing effective learning environments for their teachers and students (Jones & Murphy, 2008). Such pedagogical leadership and educator development is viewed by scholars as one of the primary responsibilities of ECE leaders (Heikka & Hujala, 2013).

Despite the positive link between educational leaders, adult learning and student success in early childhood education (ECE) (Jones & Murphy, 2008, Sheridan et al., 2009), professional development (PD) for early childhood educators is severely lacking and is in need of revision (La Paro & King, 2019). While the literature supports the need for ECE leaders to provide effective learning opportunities for their teachers, early childhood educators report a lack of effective professional development and opportunities for learning (La Paro & King, 2019). PD for early childhood educators is described in the literature as limited to non-existent (Morello-DeSerio, 2017; US Department of Education, 2010; Winton et al., 2015; Zaslow & Martinez-Beck, 2006). In multiple studies, early childhood educators report being unsupported professionally (Roberts, 2016; La Paro & King, 2019). As Darling-Hammond (1996) notes, there is a need to reassess the current state of PD and design more effective opportunities for adult learning. For early childhood educators to provide more effective learning opportunities for their teachers, they must understand the principles of adult learning and development (La Paro & King, 2019). Knowledge of theories of educational leadership and adult learning is an essential

tool for supporting teacher growth and development (Drago-Severson, 1996). Yet, the role of educational leaders in teacher development is only beginning to be explored (Drago-Severson, 1996) and remains focused on K-12 settings (Drago-Severson et al., 2013). There is limited application of educational leadership for organizational learning in ECE, especially in the United States, and discussions of expanding this research to early childhood are only beginning to emerge (Heikka & Hujala, 2013; Jones & Pound, 2008). An international study of leadership in ECE across six continents suggests that further studies are needed to enhance educational leadership in ECE globally and in the U.S. (Fonsén et al., 2019; Strehmel et al., 2019). Given the critical role of educational leaders in the development of schools as learning organizations, enhancing effective educational leadership in ECE and enhancing the research on effective educational leadership in ECE is essential for the development of preschools as learning organizations.

Conclusion of Literature Review

This literature review logically presents the importance of developing early childhood schools as learning organizations. As the literature review of this study presented, early childhood education in the United States is of great importance to both individual students and families, and the collective. With the rich developmental gains that children experience during the critical early childhood years, the data on the link between early childhood education and future success, and the increasing number of children enrolled in early childhood education in the United States, it is crucial to provide quality early childhood education to America's youngest citizens (Britto et al., 2012; Gomez, 2016; Zaslow & Martinez-Beck, 2006).

This literature review also presented some of the leading research on the role of educational leadership and organizational learning in providing quality educational experiences.

As previously noted, the literature on organizational learning posits that organizational learning is essential for organizations to survive and thrive (Senge, 2012). In recent years, the literature on organizational learning has been increasingly applied to schools to help them sustain increasing environmental changes. The literature asserts that when schools have implemented organizational learning systems, they are able to sustain societal changes and serve the needs of their community members (Palanki, 1994). Further, the literature notes that when schools implement organizational learning, student learning is enhanced and student achievement improves (Mulford & Silins, 2003). The role of the educational leader is vital in the implementation of organizational learning and the development of schools as learning organizations (Leithwood & Louis, 1998; Mulford & Silins, 2003). The literature presents certain conditions educational leaders can implement to develop their schools as learning organizations, including developing a trusting and collaborative climate, a shared and monitored missions, taking risks and initiatives, and providing ongoing, relevant professional development (Mulford et al., 2004). Organizational routines are one fundamental element that educational leaders can implement to develop their schools as learning organizations and will serve as a fundamental element under investigation in this study (Feldman & Pentland, 2003).

Yet, despite the existing research on the essential role of educational leadership in developing schools as learning organizations (Leithwood & Louis, 1998; Mulford et al., 2004), there is a clear gap in the application of this literature to the early childhood educational sector. In order to fulfill the urgent need for quality early childhood education in the United States and close this gap in the literature, research must be conducted to provide educational leaders in early childhood education with data and recommendations for developing their schools as learning organizations to better serve their students, teachers, families, and our nation as a whole. This

study intends to provide such data and recommendations by being what is quite possibly the first investigation of the role of U.S. early childhood educational leaders in developing their schools as learning organizations. The next section of this study will present the conceptual framework and intended methodology for conducting such research.

Chapter III - Conceptual Framework and Methodology

This study sought to understand the role of early childhood educational leaders in developing preschools as learning organizations. The conceptual framework underlying this work relied on three central bodies of literature, reviewed in Chapter II: schools as learning organizations, quality early childhood education, and the role of early childhood educational leaders in developing quality early childhood educational institutions that function as learning organizations. The conceptual framework for this study incorporated aspects of each of the aforementioned bodies of literature to visualize the relationship between early childhood schools as learning organizations and the role of the educational leader in developing them.

Conceptual Framework Components

The conceptual framework had three main components: the factors defining schools as learning organizations, the dimensions of educational leadership for developing schools as learning organizations, and the organizational routines upon which the aforementioned components depend. Each respective component is explained in the following section.

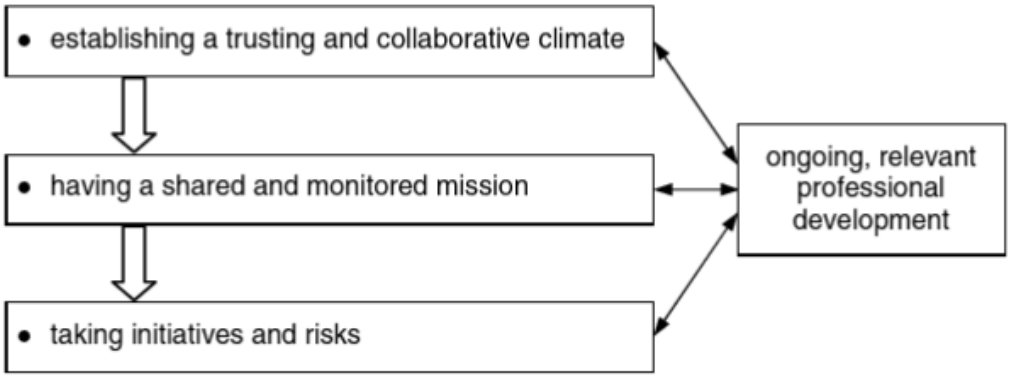
Organizational Learning in Schools

As described in Chapter II of this study, researchers Mulford, Leithwood and Silins identified four major factors that define organizational learning in schools (Mulford et al., 2004). These four factors include establishing a trusting and collaborative climate, having a shared and monitored mission, taking initiatives and risks, and ongoing, relevant professional development

(Mulford et al., 2004). Given the strength of their research in organizational learning for schools, the conceptual framework for this study uses the four factors defined by Mulford, Leithwood, and Silins as outcome measures of organizational learning in schools. Figure 3 represents these defining factors of organizational learning for schools and outlines their sequential relationships (Mulford et al., 2004). Organizational learning in schools was found by Mulford, Leithwood, and Silins to encompass these four defining factors in a sequential order, beginning with establishing a trusting and collaborative climate, then having a shared and monitored mission, and taking initiatives and risks, all within a context of ongoing and relevant professional development (Mulford et al., 2004).

Figure 3

The four factors defining organizational learning offered by Mulford, Silins, & Leithwood (2004)



Dimensions of Educational Leadership for Developing Schools as Learning Organizations

It is worth reiterating the critical role of educational leadership for developing schools as learning organizations. The literature review described leadership as a critical component for developing organizational learning in schools (Brennan, 2013; Leithwood & Louis, 1998; Leithwood, Jantzi, et al., 1998; Mulford et al., 2004). The leading research study on organizational learning in schools, the LOLSO Project, identified seven key characteristics or

dimensions of educational leadership for establishing schools as learning organizations, including visions and goals, culture, structure, intellectual stimulation, individual support, performance expectations, and community focus (Mulford et al., 2004). The conceptual framework for this study incorporates and honors the research on and relationship between the dimensions of educational leadership for developing schools as learning organizations and the defining factors of schools as learning organizations.

Organizational Routines for Educational Leaders to Develop Schools as Learning Organizations

Additionally, the conceptual framework for this study honors the role of organizational routines in developing schools as learning organizations (Pentland & Feldman, 2008). As Spillane et al. note (2011), educational leaders can influence organizational learning within their schools by creating, maintaining, and adapting organizational routines and structures. For this reason, the conceptual framework for this study recognizes the role of organizational routines in providing educational leaders with the structures to facilitate, maintain, and enhance their schools as learning organizations.

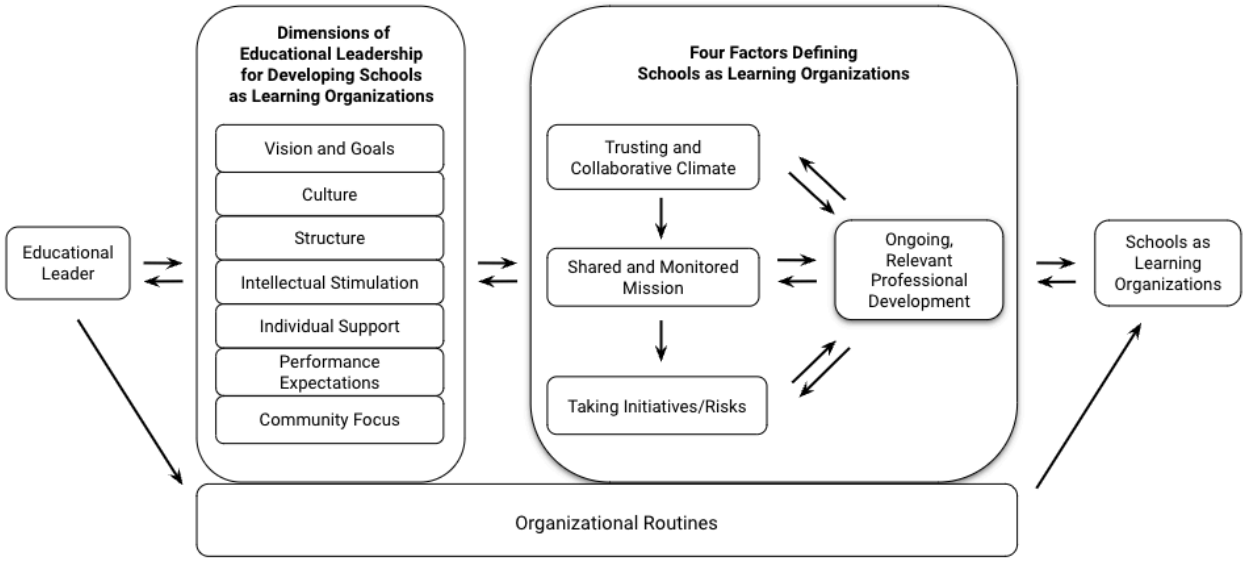
Conceptual Framework

The synthesis of these three concepts of organizational learning — factors defining schools as learning organizations, dimensions of educational leadership for schools as learning organizations, and organizational routines — gave rise to the conceptual framework for this study. Schools are examined as learning organizations through Mulford, Leithwood, and Silins' (2004) four sequential factors defining schools as learning organizations. Using Mulford, Leithwood, and Silins' model, this study looked to identify the extent to which the following four factors are present in schools to determine the level of organizational learning within the

schools. These factors include establishing a trusting and collaborative climate, having a shared and monitored mission, and taking initiatives and risks, all within the context of ongoing and relevant professional development. Leadership practices are also examined following the model of Mulford, Leithwood, and Silins (2004). Using this model, this study sought to identify the extent to which the following leadership practices were present in schools to determine their role in establishing preschools as learning organizations. These leadership practices include visions and goals, culture, structure, intellectual stimulation, individual support, performance expectations, and community focus. Lastly, the conceptual framework for this study also honored the important role of organizational routines in providing educational leaders with the structures to facilitate, maintain, and enhance their schools as learning organizations. By examining the relationships between educational leadership, organizational routines, and schools as learning organizations, this study aimed to better understand the dimensions of educational leadership and the organizational routines that can lead to the development of preschools as learning organizations for the betterment of the schools, students, teachers, parents, and the broader community. A visual representation of this framework is provided in Figure 4.

Figure 4

The conceptual framework for the present study



Research Questions

The following research questions guide this study:

1. How do the characteristics of a learning organization manifest in preschools?
2. What dimensions of educational leadership encourage the development of preschools as learning organizations?
3. How do educational leaders enact processes that facilitate the development of preschools as learning organizations?
4. What leadership practices and associated processes limit the potential for developing preschools as learning organizations?

Each question for this study emerges from the conceptual framework.

Research question one aimed to investigate the extent to which each of the contributing factors for developing schools as learning organizations is present in preschools. Identifying the

extent to which each factor is present serves to help understand the phenomena of organizational learning within the preschool setting. Further, identifying the extent to which each factor was present aimed to help identify ideal conditions for developing preschools as learning organizations and guide educational leaders on the development of preschools as learning organizations. Identifying the extent to which these factors are present (or not) served as both an important baseline for understanding the phenomena of preschools as learning organizations and as a guide for where educational leaders should focus their efforts to develop their preschools as learning organizations. This question was modeled after the LOLSO study by Mulford, Silins, and Leithwood (2004) and, through this study,was applied to the context of early childhood education in the United States for presumably the first time.

Research question two aimed to determine the dimensions of leadership that contribute to the development of preschools as learning organizations and the extent to which they contribute. Determining the dimensions of leadership that contribute to the development of preschools as learning organizations and the extent to which they contribute helped identify the leadership practices that can be implemented to develop preschools as learning organizations and the level of priority with which they should be implemented. As with research question one, this question was modeled after the work from the LOLSO study by Mulford, Silins, and Leithwood (2004), and to my knowledge, this study was the first time that this question was applied to the context of early childhood education in the United States.

Research question three examined the organizational processes that facilitate the development of preschools as learning organizations. By identifying processes that facilitate the development of preschools as learning organizations, this question aimed to identify actionable

practices and structures that educational leaders can implement to help develop their preschools as learning organizations.

Research question four aimed to identify potential barriers to developing preschools as learning organizations. Identifying leadership practices and associated processes that may serve as barriers aimed to guide educational leaders in best practices to implement and those to avoid.

Study Design

This study employed a mixed-methods multisite case study design to investigate the role of educational leaders in developing preschools as learning organizations. The use of both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods provided more varied data and helped strengthen the validity of any research findings related to the phenomena of educational leadership in developing preschools as learning organizations (Creswell, 2009). A multisite case study strengthens the understanding of the phenomena by providing multiple perspectives (Stake, 2006).

This study was conducted at three private preschools in a metropolitan area in the mid-Atlantic. Conducting the study at three different private preschools allowed for the exploration of similarities of OL conditions under different organizational contexts (Leithwood & Louis, 1998). Data collection remained nested by school to study the dimensions of leadership and organizational learning present within each school.

With the purpose of this study being to close the gap on the literature and research on OL in preschools, it was important that the preschools considered for the study only served children in the defined early childhood age (approximately 2-6 years). In addition, an essential selection criteria for this study was school autonomy and independence. In order to study the targeted dimensions of educational leadership, it was important that the preschools included in this study

were independent schools, rather than preschools belonging to national chains and/or tied to the federal government. As independent preschools, the schools and school leaders included in this study were not bound by standardized curriculum, policies, and practices, but rather had the ability to exercise autonomy in these areas, which was necessary for the purpose of this study. The preschools selected for this study were geographically accessible to the researcher and provided ease of access. Once these criteria were applied to the preschools in the area, the researcher then used purposive sampling to select the final preschools for this study. Purposive sampling allowed this researcher to select both suitable and accessible preschools for this study (Hays & Singh, 2012).

In the end, the three preschools selected for this study served students from 2 to 6 years of age, were independent preschools, and were geographically accessible. Despite these similarities, the schools varied in terms of their exact guiding pedagogy and curriculum. By studying schools with these differing characteristics, this study aimed to investigate and identify key leadership characteristics for OL across differing preschool contexts.

Data Collection and Analysis

As previously mentioned, this study employed the use of two primary methods of data collection — a survey and semi-structured interviews. The use of these multiple means of data collection helped ensure the validity of data and a robust account of the phenomena being studied (Patton, 2014).

The data collection process began with a semi-structured interview with the director of each preschool. With educational leadership at the heart of this study, it was necessary for the data collection to include interviews with educational leaders. These interviews aimed to provide

qualitative data on the organizational structure of each respective preschool. Interview data was recorded and transcribed prior to being analyzed and coded.

Following the interview, a survey was distributed to the teachers at each respective preschool. The survey selected for this study is the "short form" of the Leadership for Organisational Learning and Student Outcomes (LOLSO) Project Questionnaire (Mulford et al., 2004). This survey was selected due to its relevance to the themes of this study (organizational learning and educational leadership) and its established and evidence-based nature (Mulford et al, 2004).

The data collected from surveys and interviews were analyzed and coded in accordance with the central themes as outlined in the conceptual framework for this study. A complete code list can be found in Appendix B. Once all of the data was coded, the data was analyzed to determine consistent themes and outliers across the data. This information was then used to help explain the phenomena of developing preschools as learning organizations and the role of the educational leader in doing so. The next section of this chapter provides more detailed information on each method of data collection for this study.

Semi-Structured Interviews

The initial data source for this study was semi-structured interviews with school leaders. Given this study's focus on educational leadership, interviews with school leaders were an essential means of data collection for this study. The use of semi-structured interviews allows for more participant voice in the data collection, which helps provide a richer understanding of the phenomena being studied (Hays & Singh, 2012). To help ensure validity and reliability of the data, these semi-structured interviews were guided by the use of a consistent protocol across schools. These interviews aimed to provide qualitative data in conjunction with the quantitative

data collected via the survey. Given this, the structure and questions for these interviews were designed using the LOLSO survey developed by Mulford, Silins, and Leithwood (2004). The structure and protocol for these interviews can be found in Appendix A. Interviews were administered to educational leaders at each school site in 2024 virtually via Zoom. Interviews were approximately 45 - 60 minutes. They were recorded via Zoom and transcripts were uploaded to MAXQDA, a software program for data analysis. Data was then analyzed using the three steps for thematic coding and analysis as outlined by Lochmiller (2021), which includes setup, analysis and interpretation. Once the transcripts were uploaded to MAXQDA, I read through the transcripts to familiarize myself with the data and began analytic memos on potential themes. The data was then coded in iterative cycles of deductive and inductive coding (Patton, 2014). I started with deductive coding using a priori codes based on the conceptual framework and also noted any emergent themes. Based on the emergent themes, I created inductive codes and added them to the codebook. I then coded the data using the revised codebook that included both the a priori codes and inductive codes representative of the emergent themes. Several rounds of coding were conducted in this manner, expanding and revising the codebook as necessary when themes emerged. Each school was analyzed separately and then cross analyzed to identify consistent themes and patterns across schools. The full codebook can be found in Appendix B.

Survey

In addition to a survey, this study also used a teacher survey to better understand the phenomena of educational leadership for organizational learning at each school and capture multiple perspectives. Surveys are an effective method for describing trends across a large number of units and can help describe phenomena (Rallis & Rossman, 2012). This study used

the “short form” of the Leadership for Organisational Learning and Student Outcomes (LOLSO) Project Questionnaire (Mulford et al., 2004). This survey was selected because it is an established and evidence-based survey that includes questions pertaining to the aims of this study — the dimensions of educational leadership that contribute to developing schools as learning organizations (Mulford et al., 2004). Using an established, evidence-based survey increases the reliability and validity of this study design (Cronbach et al., 1972). Mulford, Silins, and Leithwood directly grant permission and encourage researchers and school leaders to use their survey instrument in schools. To my knowledge, this study was the first time the LOLSO questionnaire was applied to the ECE setting.

Upon receiving permission to conduct research at each respective school, teachers were invited to participate in the survey via email. An online survey streamlined the data collection process and data analysis and allows for the potential of higher survey participation. To incentivize survey participation, school leaders and teachers were notified via email that one survey participant would be randomly selected to receive a $35 Amazon gift certificate. Qualtrics was used to administer the survey and analyze the survey results. The survey used a self-reported 5-point Likert scale for all questions pertaining to educational leadership and developing schools as learning organizations (Mulford et al., 2004). The full survey instrument can be found in Appendix C. The survey results were coded using the code list provided in Appendix B.

Methodological Limitations

While this researcher attempted to mitigate methodological limitations of this study through extensive research and study design, some limitations remained. First, this study was limited by the sample size. While this study included three different schools with different pedagogical perspectives, the sample size is not large enough to represent the full state of ECE

within the U.S. Although this study is a start to the research on the role of the educational leader in developing preschools as learning organizations, there is more work to be done in this area. Given the sample size, the research findings from this study may not be suited for further application to other contexts and generalizability across the larger population.

A second limitation of this study was the means of data collection. While the use of semi-structured interviews and surveys is meant to increase validity and reliability through data triangulation, there are some inherent risks with these means of data collection. The use of semi-structured interviews poses the risk of overrepresenting the voice of a single voice. However, given the critical role of the educational leader in developing schools and developing schools as learning organizations, and given the focus of this study on the role of the educational leader, the use of semi-structured interviews was necessary for this study.

Researcher Bias

As a student, teacher, and school administrator within the field of education, there are a few inherent biases and assumptions that I bring to my research. Given my deep passion for early childhood education, I assume that educational leaders and teachers represent the best interests of their teachers and students. Second, there is an assumption that educational leaders aim to create thriving schools that serve as places of learning for both students and teachers. Third, as a researcher familiar with the reputations of the schools included within this study, I carry inherent biases and assumptions about the organizations. I implemented several mitigation strategies to help minimize these biases and assumptions in my research. To begin, I developed a deep literature base and conceptual framework to serve as the foundation and guiding force. Further, I used only the data collected to inform this study and used multiple means of data collection to help ensure accurate representation of the phenomena.

Conclusion

This study was designed to provide a deeper understanding of the role of educational leaders in developing their preschools as learning organizations. Through the use of a mixed-methods design, this study aimed to collect quantitative data via a verified survey created by some of the leading researchers in the field and apply it to the ECE context for what is perhaps the first time and to use qualitative data collected through interviews to provide rich descriptions to further understand the phenomena. Together, the data collected through this study strived to help better understand the role of the educational leader in developing preschools as learning organizations and provide much-needed actionable recommendations for educational leaders to implement in their schools. Through this study, I hope to be able to improve the state of education for our nation's youngest citizens during their critical early childhood years.

Chapter IV - Findings

This study addressed the critical problem of how preschools can be developed into learning organizations in response to shifting educational demands. The purpose of this study was to identify the characteristics of a learning organization in the context of preschools and to understand the role of educational leadership in fostering or limiting these characteristics. By exploring these aspects, this research aimed to contribute to the broader field of educational leadership and offer practical insights for early childhood educational leaders.

Four research questions guided this study investigating how educational leaders can develop preschools as learning organizations. These research questions aimed to identify what characteristics of a learning organization are present in preschools, what dimensions of educational leadership contribute to the development of preschools as learning organizations, and

how educational leaders facilitate and/or limit the development of preschools as learning organizations. These same research questions guided the analysis of the study findings.

This study employed a mixed-methods approach, including qualitative interviews with educational leaders and quantitative surveys with teachers to gather a comprehensive understanding of organizational learning in preschools. Using the selection criteria outlined in Chapter 3, three schools were selected as case sites for this study. All schools met the selection criteria outlined for this study (including serving students ages 2-6, operating as independent schools, and accessible for research). While the three schools shared similar selection criteria, they differed in pedagogy and structures to allow for a more robust study and applicable of the data. School A ("Riverbend School[1]") is a Montessori school where the founder, Anna Grace Dudley, has served as the director for almost 40 years. School B ("Stoneridge Academy") is a new lab school of a local university with a deep commitment to learning and led by a new director, Molly Callahan. School C ("Citizens School") followed an emergent curriculum and was led by Thomas Ruseell, who was serving in his eighth year as the school's director of the school. Data collection took place over a two-month period, with a response rate of 80% among targeted participants. An analysis of the study findings is presented in a nested model for each school in Appendix H, I, and J. A cross-case analysis of all schools included in the study is presented in this chapter.

To present the findings, this chapter is organized around the four guiding research questions, each of which is addressed individually in relation to data from both individual schools and a cross-case perspective. This structure allowed for a detailed examination of each question, beginning with the presence of learning organization characteristics in each preschool, followed by the dimensions of leadership that support or hinder this development, and

[1] The names of both the schools and the individual leaders have been pseudonymized in order to provide anonymity.

concluding with an analysis of processes that either facilitate or limit the growth of preschools as learning organizations.

In this chapter, the findings address each research question in sequence. I introduce each site of study and then review the findings. First, I explore how learning organization characteristics manifest in preschools, including the presence of collaborative climates, shared missions, risk-taking, and professional development. Next, I discuss the dimensions of leadership identified in each school, such as vision, support, and performance expectations, and how they contribute to or hinder the growth of these schools as learning organizations. I then examine the processes enacted by educational leaders to foster these characteristics and, finally, analyze practices that may unintentionally limit the development of learning organizations.

The first research question asked: How do the characteristics of a learning organization manifest in preschools? Through interviews with school leaders and teacher surveys, I related how organizational learning is present within each respective school included in this study. As discussed, the following four factors represent schools as learning organizations: trusting and collaborative climate, shared and monitored mission, taking initiatives and risks, and ongoing, relevant professional development (Mulford et al., 2004). These factors are a context for understanding and analyzing the dimensions of educational leadership that encourage the development of preschools as learning organizations and the findings for the second research question.

The second research question asked: What dimensions of educational leadership encourage the development of preschools as learning organizations? As discussed, the literature identifies seven dimensions of educational leadership that contribute to the development of schools as learning organizations: vision and goals, culture, structure, intellectual stimulation,

individual support, performance expectations, and community focus (Mulford et al., 2004). For each school, I analyzed the data from interviews with educational leaders and the teacher survey and discussed the dimensions of educational leadership identified in the data as dimensions that encourage the development of each preschool as a learning organization.

The third research question asked: How do educational leaders enact processes that facilitate the development of preschools as learning organizations? For each school, I identify the processes that emerged that encourage the development of each preschool as a learning organization. I also share additional insights from interviews with each educational leader and the school survey related to these processes. The dimensions of educational leadership previously identified by Mulford et al. (2004) and literature on organizational routines were used for this analysis.

The fourth and final research question asked: What leadership practices and associated processes limit the potential for developing preschools as learning organizations? As with question three, this question was analyzed through the lens of the dimensions of educational leadership and literature on organizational routines. For each school, I identify the processes that emerged that limit the development of a preschool as a learning organization. I also share additional insights gained from interviews with each educational leader and the school survey related to these processes.

Together, these four research questions served to address the primary research question of the study, which asks how educational leaders can develop preschools as learning organizations. The progression through each of the findings reveals what preschools that operate as learning organizations look like and how preschool educational leaders can develop their own preschools as learning organizations. The findings for this study are presented in a nested model, with the

findings presented for each school or case site in relational order of the study's guiding research questions. These findings were identified through interviews with educational leaders and teacher surveys. Findings were guided by the conceptual framework for this study and were analyzed using the literature on the factors defining schools as learning organizations and the dimensions of educational leadership for developing schools as learning organizations (Mulford et al., 2004). After addressing the findings specific to the three cases, I engage in a cross-case analysis to compare, contrast, and synthesize the findings between sites.

Cross-Case Analysis

This cross-case analysis addresses the similarities and differences between the three schools studied and the leadership practices related to this study's research questions and conceptual framework. This analysis mirrors the structure of the individual case analyses (Appendix H: J), first examining factors defining schools as learning organizations, then exploring educational leadership dimensions that foster them, and finally discussing routines, processes, and structures that may support or hinder this development.

Faculty at each school completed a survey on educational leadership and organizational learning (Table 1), with the highest mean response for each question highlighted in yellow. Stoneridge Academy had the highest mean response, suggesting that Mary and her team were the most effective at developing a learning organization. Riverbend School followed closely, demonstrating a similarly robust level of organizational learning at the school. Although Citizens School reported relatively high scores, it had the lowest mean response among the three schools.

Table 1

Educational Leadership & Organizational Learning Survey Results for All Schools

Survey Section	Riverbend (n = 11)	Stoneridge (n = 9)	Citizens (n = 7)
Educational Leadership			
1. Vision and Goals	4.75	4.75	4.07
2. Culture	4.63	4.44	4.05
3. Structure	4.50	4.65	3.53
4. Intellectual Stimulation	4.58	4.73	4.33
5. Individual Support	4.22	4.67	4.61
6. Performance Expectations	4.81	4.75	4.71
7. Community Focus	4.63	4.79	4.75
Distributed Leadership			
1. Influence	4.28	4.39	4.42
Organizational Learning			
1. Trusting and Collaborative Climate	4.83	4.83	4.42
2. Shared and Monitored Mission	4.33	4.82	3.97
3. Taking Initiatives/Risks	4.36	4.74	4.16
4. Ongoing, Relevant Professional Development	4.57	4.55	3.99

Note. This table provides the mean score of each survey question from each site and the mean composite score for each of the survey components. Respondents were asked to answer each question on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Across all schools, performance expectations received the highest mean, with teachers strongly agreeing that their heads of schools upheld high expectations for both teachers and

students. Expectations are linked to teaching quality, and contribute to the overall quality of the program (Mulford et al., 2004). Similarly, the highest-scoring individual survey item fell under school climate, where teachers strongly agreed that colleagues serve as valuable professional resources (mean score 4.94). This finding reinforces the role of collaborative school environments in fostering learning, as strong peer support is a defining characteristic of learning organizations.

In contrast, the lowest mean response was the section on school structures related to teacher participation in decision making. Similarly, the question with the lowest mean response was related to teacher participation in decision making, which yielded a mean score of 3.61 or a neutral response. Structures that allow for teacher participation in school-level policy decisions are associated with the facilitation of schools as learning organizations (Mulford et al., 2004). While this was the lowest scoring section and question for the survey, the mean response is within the neutral range, indicating that despite this limitation, the schools in this study demonstrate organizational learning.

Characteristics of a Learning Organization

The data collected in this study indicates that all three preschools operate as high-level learning organizations. Survey and interview responses strongly align with the four key characteristics of a learning organization — a trusting and collaborative environment, a shared and monitored mission, an openness to taking initiatives and risks, and ongoing, relevant professional development. The following sections explore these characteristics across the three schools, highlighting similarities and differences.

Trusting and Collaborative Climate

A trusting and collaborative school climate emerged as the strongest factor of organizational learning across all three schools. Each school had a mean above 4.5 (strongly agree) for this section, indicating that teachers widely perceived their school environments as trusting and collaborative. Paramount to school cultures of trust and collaboration is mutual support and collegiality among teachers (Mulford et al., 2004). Teachers in this study reported that there was mutual support among colleagues, and that this mutual support fosters candid and honest discussions, allowing them to seek and share ideas to improve their work. As one teacher at Stoneridge Academy explained:

> This is the first environment that I have worked in that feels this way among the teaching team. I meet with my team daily over lunch and while we all teach differently and see things differently, we have full respect for each other's opinions and insights. They seek to actively support me and help me grow as I do them.

This teacher quote iterates the strong culture of collegiality at Stoneridge Academy. Similar sentiments were noted at Riverbend and Citizens Schools. These findings align with the literature on organizational learning in schools, which posits the importance of collaborative and collegial school cultures for promoting knowledge-sharing and continuous improvement (Leithwood et al., 1998).

School leaders at each of the three schools actively fostered collaboration through the establishment of systems and structures, both informal and formal structures. Informal approaches included Dutch doors connecting classrooms, shared lunch coverage, and hosting meetings in a rotation of different classrooms, all of which facilitate collaboration among teachers. Formal structures included whole-school meetings, professional development activities,

and mentorship programs for new teachers. These varied approaches reflect the school leaders' intentional efforts to embed collaboration into the daily practices of each school, and develop their schools as learning organizations.

Shared and Monitored Mission

A shared and monitored school mission is an essential component for developing schools as learning organizations (Mulford et al., 2004). All three schools in this study had well-articulated mission statements that were actively shared with teachers, parents and the broader community. Additionally, all three schools and school leaders actively monitored their school missions and the application of their school missions in terms of programs and practices. Actively monitoring the school's mission helps facilitate continuous improvement and the development of schools as learning organizations (Mulford et al., 2004).

While all three schools had strongly articulated and monitored missions, Riverbend School and Stoneridge Academy demonstrated a more coherent and shared sense of direction. As founding directors, the leaders of Riverbend School and Stoneridge Academy had greater influence in shaping their school's mission. At Riverbend School, Anna Grace, founded the school decades ago and is heavily invested in the program. The creation of the school has been a long-time personal endeavor for Anna Grace, reinforcing her dedication to its success and to putting the school's mission into practice. As a lab school of a local university, Stoneridge Academy was founded with a deep commitment to continued learning and is well-resourced to apply its mission into practice. Additionally, given her role as a founding director of the school, Molly is also committed to the school and its mission. In contrast, the mission of Citizens School is not applied with the same level of fidelity. While the school has been under the leadership of

Thomas for several years, it lacks the same longevity or oversight that the other two schools and school founders have.

A vital element of a shared mission is strong collaboration between teachers and school leaders. At all three schools, it was identified that teachers and administrators at each respective school work in partnership to learn and solve problems together, though the degree of collaboration varied. Stoneridge Academy had the highest survey means for this section, with teachers unanimously agreeing (mean score of 5) that they collaborate effectively with leaders. In conjunction with teachers and administrators working together to learn and solve problems, another aspect of a shared mission for developing schools as learning organizations is teacher participation in significant school-level policy decisions (Mulford et al., 2004). Teacher participation in decision making varied at all three schools. Under Molly's leadership at Stoneridge Academy, teachers play a significant role in school decision making. Given the large amount of work needed to launch a school, Molly delegated significant school-wide decisions to teachers, including curriculum decisions and school environmental decisions, like furniture orders. This high-level of involvement has fostered a strong sense of purpose and investment. At Riverbend, teachers had some participation in school-level policy decisions, but feel excluded from "significant" decision-making. As both founder and director, Anna Grace, handled the more significant school-wide decisions on her own. At Citizens School, teacher participation in school-wide decision-making was limited. Thomas prioritized mission and vision, and explained that some decisions, like an anti-bias workshop for teachers that aligns with the school's mission is non-negotiable, even if it is not well-received by teachers. At times, school leaders must serve as the final decision-makers to ensure the school's overall direction and priorities are maintained. However, the findings suggest that increased teacher participation in the decision-making

process has the potential to enhance organizational learning at Citizens School by fostering a more collaborative and inclusive environment. This highlights how leadership practices may not be reflective of the principles of organizational learning.

Taking Initiatives/Risks

Across all three schools, there were strong indications of a culture that supports taking initiatives and risks. Teachers reported that risk taking was both encouraged and supported. Stoneridge received the highest rating for this section, with two survey questions in this section yielding mean scores of 5. When teachers feel encouraged and supported to take risks, they can develop their teaching practices and help develop schools as learning organizations (Mulford et al., 2004). The school leaders encouraged risk taking, and actively modeled it. Teachers described their school leaders as open to change and shared that as a result, "people feel free to experiment." At Riverbend, Anna Grace modeled taking initiative as she led the school in reopening during the COVID-19 pandemic by pioneering an outdoor learning environment. Similarly, at Stoneridge, Molly modeled taking risks as she launched a brand new school. Such demonstration of risk-taking helped contribute to school cultures that encourage risk-taking and the development of the schools as learning organizations.

A key element of taking initiatives and risks is support (Leithwood et al., 1998). When teachers feel supported and valued, they are more comfortable taking initiatives and risks. Teachers at all three schools reported feeling supported and valued within their school communities, which helps facilitate risk-taking. One teacher at Stoneridge Academy emphasized the culture of risk-taking by stating, "I feel comfortable to fail. I feel supported and know that I am protected when I try something new." This statement illustrates that teachers feel supported and valued for their contributions, and therefore feel more comfortable taking risks. The school

leaders implemented structures to help support teachers in their risk-taking. As Molly of Stoneridge shared, she works "really hard on making them [teachers] feel comfortable and confident that I'm not judging them…I think they know I have their backs. They know I'm going to support them." This highlights the importance of support for risk-taking and the critical role of school leaders in developing such cultures of support and risk-taking. Specific structures that facilitate this support will be discussed in the following section.

Ongoing, Relevant Professional Development

Professional development is an integral component of developing schools as learning organizations. As the literature notes, for schools to develop as learning organizations, professional development must be both ongoing and relevant (Mulford et al., 2004). All three schools and school leaders included in this study prioritized ongoing relevant PD, through structures and resources that vary. Each school incorporated similar professional development strategies and structures, including establishing and reviewing individual professional development plans for teachers and providing scheduled whole-school trainings at an annual orientation and routinely throughout the school year. Professional development was provided in the content area and in team building, which served to strengthen teacher capacities and collaboration. School leaders made ample use of professional resources, including professional readings and associations. Additionally, all school leaders provided an additional layer of support for professional development and collaboration through a mentorship program for teachers. In addition to directly providing professional development opportunities, the school leaders also provided support structures for professional development. These structures included funding and coverage for individual professional development opportunities, shared spaces and break times

for teachers' collaboration and learning, and the identification of professional resources for individuals.

While all three schools demonstrated high levels of professional development, Stoneridge Academy demonstrated the highest strengths in this area. As a university lab school, the school has integrated learning and research-based practices in its framework. Its mission is aligned with high-quality learning and provides access to university partnerships and professional learning resources. Teachers describe that “we are completely encouraged to seek professional development and our admin shares opportunities with us.”

One area of concern for schools in terms of professional development is the ability to provide adequate time for professional development. At Citizens School, teachers reported that their professional development is “often pushed to the wayside” for “the necessary prep for conferences and other important school events.” Thomas explained that it is a balancing act between the “necessary “have to”s” and other elements of a school, like professional development. Schools have a lot to do, so it is understandable that professional development cannot always be the focus, however, adequate time for professional development is a necessary component for developing schools as learning organizations (Mulford et al., 2004). Despite this identified area of growth for Citizens School, all three schools and school leaders have worked to develop cultures that support professional development for their teachers, which contributes to the development of their schools as learning organizations.

Dimensions of Educational Leadership

The school leaders in this study exhibited high levels of proficiency in the seven dimensions of educational leadership needed for developing schools as learning organizations - vision and goals, culture, structure, individual support, intellectual stimulation, performance

expectations, and community focus. Among the leadership dimensions, setting high-performance expectations was the strongest (mean score of 4.76, ‘strongly agree’), indicating a consistent emphasis on clear expectations across schools. Conversely, structural support scored the lowest (mean score of 4.23, ‘agree’), which may reflect variations in the implementation of decision-making frameworks and teacher participation in governance structures. These leadership dimensions will be explained in further detail in the following sections.

Vision and Goals

In alignment with the literature on developing schools as learning organizations (Mulford et al., 2004), all three school leaders effectively communicated and clarified their school’s vision and goals. While all three schools demonstrated a strong vision, Riverbend and Stoneridge scored slightly above Citizens in this section. In congruence with the section on a shared and monitored mission, Riverbend and Stoneridge are both currently led by their founding directors, which contributes to their school leaders’ commitment to the school’s vision.

An essential element of effectively communicating the school’s vision and goals includes the educational leader clarifying the specific meaning of the school’s purpose in terms of its practical implications for programs and instruction (Mulford et al., 2004). The educational leaders at all three schools demonstrated strength in their ability to clearly communicate the school’s vision, including the practical implications for practice. Teachers’ survey results reinforced this as a strength of the school leaders. This demonstrates the strength of the schools’ visions and the educational leaders’ abilities to articulate the vision, which are both key elements for developing schools as learning organizations.

Additionally, teachers across all three schools reported a clear sense of purpose in alignment with goals. This extends to the involvement of teachers in establishing school

priorities. Stoneridge scored the highest in this section, followed by Riverbend, and then Citizens. At Stoneridge, Molly intentionally involved teachers in establishing school priorities and implementing the school's vision. This partly evolved from a need, as Molly knew she needed help and expertise from the teachers as they launched the school. Involving the teachers in this establishment of school goals helped teachers feel a sense of purpose and alignment with the school's vision. As Molly explained,

> I think being able to relinquish some responsibilities to everybody in different ways, and even the assistants feel that way, like they were all in charge of something. And then they feel like they're a part of our team and they're important. Like a cog in a wheel. I don't know what that saying is, but yeah, everybody plays their own part.

This reinforces that Molly has a distributed approach to leadership and involves teachers in decision-making, which aligns with best practices for developing schools as learning organizations. Conversely, Thomas of Citizens School does not demonstrate the same level of teacher involvement in establishing school goals. He explained that at times he needs to make executive decisions to align practices with the school's vision, such as the need for anti-bias workshops, which were well-intentioned and aligned with the school's vision, but were not well-received by the teachers. Increasing teacher involvement in establishing school goals is essential for developing schools as learning organizations, and is therefore an area of identified growth for Citizens School to develop as a learning organization.

Despite this identified growth area for Citizens School, overall, all three school leaders exhibited strong leadership skills in terms of vision and goals. By clearly communicating their school's vision and clarifying the school's goals in terms of practical implications for programs and instruction, these school leaders helped align their school practices with their school visions

and helped develop a sense of purpose for teachers, which the literature posits as essential elements for educational leaders to implement for continuous improvement and the development of schools as learning organizations (Mulford et al., 2004).

Culture

Establishing a school culture that fosters organizational learning is another essential dimension of school leadership for developing schools as learning organizations (Mulford et al., 2004). School leaders can facilitate the development of their schools as learning organizations by creating a positive and productive culture of mutual respect and collaboration (Leithwood et al., 1998). All three school leaders implemented cultural forces within their schools that cultivate cultures of respect and collaboration. In particular, a foundation of respect was evident in all three schools and was demonstrated through setting respectful tones in interactions with teachers, students, and parents. The level of respect was particularly strong at Riverbend. As a Montessori school, respect is a key tenet of the curriculum and approach to learning that extends to teachers and students. Additionally, all three school leaders showed respect for their teachers by treating them as professionals. One teacher at Stoneridge Academy stated that Molly "values me as a person, professional, and as a part of the team." This example demonstrates the high level of respect that Molly has for her teachers, which contributes to the overall culture.

Paramount to a collaborative and productive culture for organizational learning is the school leader's facilitation of open dialogue (Mulford et al., 2004). The school leaders in this study fostered open dialogue and demonstrated an openness to different perspectives. School leaders were described by teachers as flexible and willing to change practices in light of new understandings. As one teacher at Stoneridge shared, teachers are actively sought out for their opinions and listened to, even when they disagree. The school leaders also valued accessibility

and approachability, and exercised practices to increase their approachability and accessibility for teachers and also parents and students. This was a particular strength for Thomas and Citizens School. Thomas explained that:

> Being present is such a value add to any school…it's like a 'have to.' So whether that is being at the front door to shake hands with everybody in the morning. That matters. I want that to be a part of the culture that the teachers have when their students walk in the door. They are greeting and welcoming them, their name is said, their parents' names are said, their caregiver's names are said. Being present. And then, you know, if there's a problem, I'm there, and I can address it or at least hear and listen to what the concern is. And I may not have an answer, but at least I'm here and I'm listening and we can digest it and continue the dialogue.

This example illustrates Thomas's commitment to presence and visibility, which he has embedded into the culture of Citizens. He notes that "we need to make ourselves available." By making himself available, he is able to cultivate relationships with school constituents and develop a culture of respect. Anna Grace of Riverbend and Molly of Stoneridge also modeled similar behaviors to increase visibility and foster open dialogue with and among teachers. This demonstrates the school leaders' abilities to create a culture of respect and collaboration.

School leaders also valued relationships and actively worked to develop relationships and encourage collaboration. Relationships were built through a multitude of structures, including formal structures like mentorship programs and whole-school team-building, and informal structures, like shared breaks for teachers. Beyond fostering respect and collaboration, each of the school leaders also prioritized teacher well-being by embedding elements of positivity into their school cultures. While these approaches differed across schools, they collectively reinforce

a supportive learning environment. All three school leaders also implemented a cultural element related to positivity and well-being into their school cultures. At Riverbend School, there was an emphasis on mindfulness, while Stoneridge emphasized a fun culture full of opportunities for laughter and Citizen's emphasized celebrations. While these elements (mindfulness, fun and laughter, celebrations) differ, they all contribute to a positive and productive school climate that helps facilitate the development of schools as learning organizations.

Structure

Educational leaders can help develop their schools as learning organizations through the use of structures (Mulford et al., 2004). All three educational leaders in this study implemented structures to facilitate organizational learning, though the extent varies across schools. Molly at Stoneridge Academy demonstrated the strongest level of structures for organizational learning, followed by Anna Grace at Riverbend School, and then Thomas at Citizens School. The studied schools and school leaders demonstrated the implementation of some similar structures to support organizational learning. These included routine structures for professional development, such as an Orientation at the beginning of the year, individual professional development goal setting with faculty, and regularly scheduled meetings and professional development days. Additionally, each school and school leader had structures within their meetings and professional development opportunities, such as beginning each meeting with a mindfulness moment or a "fun" activity. Finally, each had structures for mentorship and collaboration, including formal mentorship programs and meetings. This dimension of educational leadership for developing schools as learning organizations also includes structures that support teacher participation in decision-making and a distributed leadership approach (Mulford et al., 2004). The level of distributed leadership and teacher participation in decision-making varied across the three

schools. Stoneridge Academy demonstrated high participation as teachers were involved in curricular planning and environmental decisions from the school's launch, fostering investment and engagement. Moderate participation was recognized at Riverbend, where although teachers served on committees, they did not play a significant role in administrative decisions. Although Thomas, the leader of Citizens School, acknowledged the value of teacher input, he reserves key decisions for leadership, demonstrating low teacher participation in school-wide decision making. The implementation of structures that distribute leadership and involve teachers in school decision-making is crucial for the development of schools as learning organizations (Mulford et al., 2004), so this is an identified area of growth for Citizens School. However, despite this noted area of growth for Citizens, overall, all three school leaders have implemented structures to facilitate organizational learning and the development of their schools as learning organizations, though the degree of implementation varied.

Intellectual Stimulation

Intellectual stimulation is identified in the literature as an essential dimension of leadership for the facilitation of organizational learning within schools (Mulford et al., 2004). This includes challenging teachers to examine their current practices and stimulating new ideas for teaching and learning. All three schools demonstrated high levels of intellectual stimulation, both with teacher survey scores above average ($\geq$4.00) and supporting interview data. In this section of the survey, Stoneridge scored the highest, followed by Riverbend and Citizens.

Common approaches for providing intellectual stimulation across all three schools included encouraging learning and meeting individually with their teachers to establish individual professional development plans. Meeting individually with teachers and establishing individual professional development plans provides support and structures for teachers, while

also encouraging them to engage in continuous learning. Molly at Stoneridge presented as particularly strong in this area, and was described as being a resource and model for intellectual stimulation. She encourages teachers to question their own practices and readjust if needed, and also models this herself. Teachers describe that Molly actively works to find professional development opportunities to stimulate thinking, and that she also provides resources to support teacher professional development, such as funding for professional development endeavors and coverage for classes. Molly's strength in this area could be partly due to the school's connection with the university and the associated resources. Anna Grace also received high scores for her ability to provide and model intellectual stimulation, including the example of thinking critically about how to adjust and improve their programs in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Thomas at Citizens School demonstrated supporting intellectual stimulation and support for teachers, but received neutral scores for "being a source of new ideas."

In summary, all three schools and school leaders demonstrated evidence of intellectual stimulation for their teachers. The three school leaders have implemented some similar elements to support intellectual stimulation, such as encouraging questions about teaching and learning practices and developing individual professional development plans to stimulate continuous learning. Molly was particularly adept at navigating resources and supporting teachers in their learning. Both Molly and Anna Grace modeled intellectual stimulation by evaluating their own practices. Thomas provided support for teacher intellectual stimulation, but did not serve as a direct resource for new ideas for the teachers of Citizens. These differences in educational leadership translate to differences in the overall culture of learning at each school.

Individual Support

Providing individual support for teachers is a crucial dimension of educational leadership for developing schools as learning organizations (Mulford et al., 2004). When teachers feel supported professionally and personally, they are better able to engage in learning (Leithwood et al., 1998). All three educational leaders provided high levels of individual support for their faculty, with survey responses reflecting strong agreement ($\geq$4.00).

Educational leaders at each school implemented structures to provide individual support for teachers. These included both formal and informal support. Formal support structures included individual professional development plans for teachers, weekly faculty meetings, and dedicated whole-school professional development opportunities for teachers. More informal support structures included shared lunch breaks for teachers and visibility of and accessibility to school leaders. Additionally, all three school leaders implemented support systems between teachers as well, such as mentorship models and opportunities for collaboration and support across classrooms. This approach allows teachers to support one another and adds an additional layer of support for teachers. These structures, both formal and informal, helped teachers feel known and supported in their schools, which facilitated both individual and organizational learning.

To ensure teachers received support based on individual needs and expertise, all three educational leaders emphasized relationship building with teachers. As Thomas of Citizens describes, “relationship building is so impactful” for individual and organizational success. Taking the time to build relationships with teachers helps identify individual expertise and growth areas, which then allows educational leaders to then identify the necessary areas of support needed for individuals as well as their potential leadership opportunities within the

school. In an example from Riverbend School, Anna Grace explained that she knows her teachers so well that she can identify when they need additional support. She observed that one of her teachers was "off" and followed up with an individual check-in. Anna Grace shared that:

> And we just kind of had a heart-to-heart, like you know, I saw your, your, your engagement with others to be not quite yourself last week. So was that school-based or personal-based? If it's personal-based based you don't need to share it with me. School-based, and you think you can fix it, go ahead. But if it's school-based, and you want to talk about it, I'd like to know. And so we, we just really try to stay on top of those things. Because if somebody starts to go down in their energy, that's going to affect the group. And so then the people that are engaging with [them] are like, well is she upset with me? Did I do something? What's up? You know what I mean. Just human interaction right? When in fact it could be something that happened at home that they're just not happy about. Right. So those discussions are very, very, very valuable.

Anna Grace's check-in demonstrated her ability to provide individual support for teachers and reinforced a culture of support and trust. Similar examples were noted at Stoneridge and Citizens. This reinforces that the educational leaders of these preschools know their faculty and therefore can provide the necessary individual support for their teachers - a necessary component of developing schools as learning organizations.

Performance Expectations

Holding and communicating high performance expectations is a crucial element of educational leadership for developing schools as learning organizations (Mulford et al., 2004). High performance expectations was the strongest dimension of educational leadership across all three schools and school leaders in this study. In the survey, all three schools scored above a 4.5

or “very strongly agree” for having high performance expectations. Having and communicating performance expectations extends to delivery of a high-quality program and developing schools as learning organizations (Mulford et al., 2004). High and clearly communicated performance expectations allow teachers to understand their roles and responsibilities, and focus their efforts on meeting their respective roles and responsibilities with fidelity. Anna Grace of Riverbend explained, “whether you were the janitor or head of school, everybody’s place is equally valuable and very necessary. And until you understand that, you can’t function.” She cites the example of teachers mopping floors rather than completing student observations, which suggests a misalignment between professional expertise and workload distribution. The school leaders in this study all held their teachers, students, and themselves to high standards for performance and communicated these standards, which translates to the high quality of the programs offered.

In addition to having high performance expectations, the educational leaders at all three schools also ensured that they conveyed these high performance expectations to faculty. Expectations were conveyed at scheduled times throughout the year, including at an annual orientation and during contract offers and renewals. Additionally, each has met a high level of external accreditation, which verifies the strength of their programs and the high level of performance expectations. Two of the schools in this study (Riverbend School and Citizens School) are accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), and the third school is a lab school of a local university in the process of earning its accreditation from NAEYC.

An essential element of high performance expectations is the expectation that teachers are “innovators” who critically examine their teaching and learning practices to ensure best practices (Mulford et al., 2004; Senge, 2012). When educational leaders encourage their faculty to

evaluate their practices and refine them as needed, it facilitates a culture of learning and helps develop schools as learning organizations. The school leaders in this study both encouraged and modeled critical examination of current practices and effective innovation of new practices. Doing so helped inspire such actions in teachers and helped contribute to the development of their schools as learning organizations. In summary, all three school leaders held and communicated high performance expectations, including those for professionalism and innovation, which helped facilitate organizational learning and the development of their schools as learning organizations.

Community Focus

A focus on community is identified in the literature as a key element of educational leadership for the development of schools as learning organizations (Mulford et al., 2004). This extends to both the school community and the broader community. Across all three schools, community focus was identified as a strength, with survey scores consistently above 4.50 and interview data supporting this finding. They each exhibited a strong ability to build community within their schools. The school leaders valued relationships and actively worked to build relationships individually with teachers and as a team. School leaders built relationships and developed community through both formal and informal structures. However, each school leader's approach and structures differed based on their unique school design and external affiliations. Structures for building relationships and community included routinely scheduled team-building opportunities, individual meetings, and informal opportunities for collaboration. The school leaders also emphasized presence and visibility, which allowed them to build and maintain relationships with teachers, students, and parents. For example, Thomas of Citizens made an effort to greet every teacher, student, and parent every morning, which allowed him to

build relationships and provide support as needed. Molly of Stoneridge built community and relationships by ensuring transparent and timely conversations with teachers and parents. Anna Grace of Riverbend was acutely aware of the needs of her faculty and built community by providing individual check-ins. The implementation of these seemingly small structures had a large impact on relationships and contributed to the strength of a school community.

In addition to building relationships with internal school constituents (teachers, parents, and students), the school leaders also worked to build community relationships beyond the school. Each scored above a 4.75, or "very strongly agree," for this subsection of the survey. Stonerdige, as a lab school, had an institutional advantage through its partnership with the university, which helped foster broader community engagement, research, and access. Citizens were able to integrate neighborhood resources, leveraging their environmental resources, such as a local park and playground. Riverbend School shared resources with the broader community, such as using a shared space with a local church and offering mindfulness workshops for parents.

As the mindfulness work at Riverbend demonstrates, all school leaders also incorporated additional elements of well-being into their communities, which helped to strengthen the community. Anna Grace of Riverbend integrated mindfulness practices, Molly of Stoneridge leveraged opportunities for "fun" and laughter, and Thomas found reasons to celebrate. Examples of these elements of well-being in practice included mindfulness workshops, school dances, and birthday celebrations. These elements of well-being impact the overall sense of community within the school and extend beyond the school community as well. This sense of well-being enhanced teachers' abilities to collaborate and increased engagement in the school community, which contributes to the overall sense of community and culture of learning.

An additional aspect of community focus was the school's ability to secure autonomy for the school. As private preschools, Riverbend and Citizens were structurally designed to have high levels of autonomy. As a lab school, Stoneridge falls under the jurisdiction of the larger university, and Molly works with university leadership to meet certain goals, such as financial targets. She described the relationship with the university as collaborative and, while they provide oversight for the school, she has managed to secure a high degree of autonomy for the school and exercises independent leadership in the practical elements of the school, such as setting the curriculum. Overall, despite their differing designs, all three school leaders have successfully established productive working relationships with the community, which contributes to the development of the schools as learning organizations.

Facilitation of Preschools as Learning Organizations

Research Question 3 explored the structures and routines that educational leaders implement to facilitate organizational learning and develop their schools as learning organizations. Organizational routines and structures play a critical role in facilitating organizational learning and developing schools as learning organizations (Feldman & Pentland, 2003). For this question, I explored the processes, routines, and structures put into place by each respective school leader and their impact on organizational learning at each school. I then looked to identify similarities and differences across all three schools. As Feldman and Pentland (2003) explained, organizational routines are not static procedures, but rather structural systems that promote continuous change. It is thus important to note that the structures identified in this study are representative of organizational routines and that the terms are used interchangeably.

While the three schools have inherent differences in their overall structures — a Montessori-model (Riverbend), a university-affiliated lab school (Stoneridge) and metropolitan

neighborhood school (Citizens) — leadership strategies converge and the school leaders all implemented similar structures to promote organizational learning and develop their schools as learning organizations, specifically in relation to professional development, collaboration, and well-being.

A central finding across the schools was structured professional development. Each school implemented similar professional development plans for teachers, both individually and for the whole school. Individual professional development plans at all three schools involved meeting with teachers individually to establish individual professional development plans and reviewing them routinely throughout the school year. Whole school professional development plans included scheduled whole school professional development opportunities for content-related areas and team building. Professional development in the content area aimed to build teacher capacity in early childhood education, and intentional team-building workshops aimed to strengthen collaboration and build community. These professional development opportunities occurred routinely, including at an annual orientation, on designated days throughout the year, and at routine meetings on a weekly, bi-weekly, or monthly schedule. These routine structures for professional development align with the literature on developing schools as learning organizations through ongoing and relevant professional development (Mulford et al., 2004). As noted in the earlier section on professional development, while Thomas of Citizens provided scheduled professional development opportunities, teachers expressed a need for additional time for professional development. However, the survey results for Citizens under the section on professional development were still high (4.00) and indicate a strong level of professional development at the school.

In addition to directly providing direct professional development opportunities, the school leaders also provided support structures. All three school leaders provided teachers with access to professional resources, such as readings and professional associations. This was highest at Stoneridge, likely due to the school's affiliation with the university and mission centered around learning. Mentorship programs were also implemented by all three school leaders and served to foster collaboration and learning. The microstructures within each school's mentorship programs varied, but all paired new teachers with veteran teachers and allowed opportunities for collaboration. Molly of Stoneridge also provided additional support, including funding and coverage for teachers to pursue individual professional development opportunities. All three school leaders also offered shared spaces for collaboration and learning, such as rotational meeting schedules in different classrooms to allow teachers to learn from different teachers and learning environments.

While all three school leaders implemented structures to support professional development, Molly of Stoneridge demonstrated the greatest strength in this area as she offered numerous intentional formal and informal professional development opportunities for teachers. In addition to the formal structures outlined, Molly also intentionally offered shared spaces and break times for teachers to collaborate and learn. Molly described that she thought intentionally about the physical space and was able to implement specific structures to encourage collaboration and learning, such as Dutch doors between classrooms. She also scheduled coverage for teachers to have shared lunch periods. These efforts led to open dialogue and informal opportunities for collaboration and learning. As one teacher at Stoneridge shared:

> I meet with my team daily over lunch, and while we all teach differently and see things differently, we have full respect for each other's opinions and insights. They seek to actively support me and help me grow as I do them.

These structures demonstrate Molly's commitment to learning and alignment with the school's mission for continuous learning.

Another similarity in structures across schools was the implementation of structures related to cultural well-being. While their exact structures differed, all three school leaders implemented structures related to well-being, including mindfulness, opportunities for "fun" and laughter, and celebrations. These structures align with the literature for developing schools as learning organizations, which posits that celebrations among staff can help facilitate a collaborative and positive learning environment that supports organizational learning (Leithwood et al., 1998). Anna Grace of Riverbend integrated mindfulness practices, Molly of Stoneridge leveraged opportunities for "fun" and laughter, and Thomas found reasons to celebrate. Examples of these elements of well-being in practice included mindfulness workshops, school dances, and birthday celebrations. This sense of well-being enhanced teachers' abilities to collaborate and increased engagement in the school community, which contributed to the overall sense of community and culture of learning. These elements of well-being extend beyond the school community as well. All three school leaders extended these elements of well-being to include parents as well. Parents are a vital constituent for all schools, but especially for early childhood education and our youngest students, so it is noteworthy that these practices were extended to parents as well.

The school leaders' implementation of structures for cultural well-being not only aligns with the literature on developing schools for organizational learning, but also with the state of the

times. This study was conducted following the global COVID-19 pandemic, which resulted in health and safety implications and led to the need for health and wellness efforts. Additionally, this study was also conducted during a tumultuous political period in the U.S., including a heated presidential election. The combination of these events and their aftermath may have encouraged the school leaders in this study to prioritize elements of cultural well-being. As Senge (2012) notes, when educational leaders understand their current surrounding environment and implement practices to support their schools in the current environment, they can set their schools up to survive and thrive. In this study, the school leaders' implementation of structural elements for well-being contributed to positive and productive school cultures and the facilitation of organizational learning.

The implementation of these structures by all three school leaders demonstrates their commitment to organizational learning and the development of their schools as learning organizations. Additionally, the similarities of these structures and the high levels of organizational learning observed at each of these schools indicate that these structures may be beneficial for other school leaders to implement to develop their schools as learning organizations.

Limits to the Facilitation of Preschools as Learning Organizations

While all three schools demonstrated ways in which they facilitate organizational learning, they all also encounter obstacles to developing their schools as learning organizations. One major theme across this research question was the need for transparency and clear expectations. For Riverbend and Stoneridge, leaders identified a lack of clear expectations and job responsibilities as a barrier to organizational learning and teacher retention. Anna Grace of Riverbend explained that a lack of clear expectations and job responsibilities leads to an

ineffective work structure and skill use, which can contribute to a negative work environment and high teacher turnover. She provided the example of teachers mopping floors suggests a misalignment between professional expertise and workload distribution. Similarly, Molly of Stoneridge iterated that there is a need for structured collaboration and planning time. Without it, teachers risk burnout, which research suggests can reduce instructional quality and hinder school-wide learning (Mulford et al., 2004). While both leaders recognized this issue, the extent to which it was actively addressed varied. Another obstacle to organizational learning and developing preschools as learning organizations is a lack of teacher involvement in decision-making. While Riverbend and Stoneridge provide opportunities for teacher participation in school decision making, teachers at Citizens are not involved in decision making for most significant school-level decisions. Thomas explained that while he aimed to involve teachers in decision-making when possible, certain decision-making must be left to the school leader to ensure alignment with the school's mission and vision. As an example, Thomas needed to provide an anti-bias workshop for teachers in alignment with the school's mission, and it was not well-received by teachers. While educational leaders are the ultimate decision makers for schools, teacher involvement in school decision making helps facilitate organizational learning, and a lack of teacher involvement can be seen as an obstacle to the facilitation of organizational learning in schools (Mulford et al., 2004). However, it is noted that in this example, Thomas's emphasis on the anti-bias workshop may be a result of the political climate of the time.

Schools that operate as learning organizations have dedicated ample time for ongoing and relevant professional development (Mulford et al., 2004). While Riverbend and Stoneridge dedicated ample time to ongoing and relevant professional development, Citizens did not. Thomas did provide professional development for teachers (including individual professional

development plans for all teachers, weekly meetings centered around curricular planning and understanding, a mentorship program, and scheduled professional development days) teachers at Citizens School reported feeling that professional development was deprioritized in favor of other school needs. Teachers described that "professional development is often pushed to the wayside" to make time for the "necessary prep for conferences and other important school events" and that they lacked the "active facilitation or the support of time built into work days." In a similar vein to teacher involvement in decision making at Citizens, Thomas shared that there can be tension between the "necessary have tos" in a school, which may have contributed to the teacher sentiment of professional development "getting pushed to the wayside." This demonstrates that time for ongoing and relevant professional development may be an obstacle to facilitating organizational learning at Citizens. By contrast, Riverbend and Stoneridge embedded professional development into their schedules. The lab affiliation for Stoneridge provided additional support, and the long-term founding leadership of Riverbend has it ingrained in practices.

Summary

This study found that, despite their differences in design, the three preschools in this study all exhibited the four factors that define schools as learning organizations — a trusting and collaborative climate, a shared and monitored mission, taking initiatives and risks, and ongoing, relevant professional development. Each school fostered trust, respect, and collaboration, maintains a strong and clearly communicated mission, and encourages risk-taking. Professional development was an established practice at each school and was supported through individual teacher plans and routine training.

In conjunction with the four factors defining learning organizations, all three school leaders demonstrated dimensions of educational leadership that facilitate organizational learning. They set strong visions and goals, held high performance expectations, and cultivated school cultures that are positive and productive. Performance expectations emerged as the strongest leadership dimension, aligning with program quality. Intellectual stimulation was encouraged across all schools, and teachers were provided with support to encourage risk-taking. Riverbend and Stoneridge fostered shared decision-making, while Citizens exhibited more centralized leadership. All three school leaders value relationships and built and maintained strong internal and external relationships within and beyond their school communities.

Each school had formal and informal structures to support the school's development as a learning organization. Common structures across all three schools included structures to promote collaboration, professional development, and well-being. These encompassed shared planning, mentorship, and well-being initiatives. However, teacher burnout and turnover emerged as barriers. Despite the identified obstacles, all three schools emerged as learning organizations led by an effective school leader who aimed to foster organizational learning and develop their preschool as a learning organization. Stoneridge Academy and Molly demonstrated the highest level of organizational learning and elements of school leadership associated with developing schools as learning organizations, while Citizens School and Thomas demonstrated some identified growth areas. Overall, all three schools demonstrated the defining characteristics of a learning organization, and all school leaders demonstrated dimensions of educational leadership for developing their preschools as learning organizations.

Chapter V - Discussion and Recommendations

This study examined how educational leadership fosters learning organizations in early childhood education, addressing a critical gap in the literature. Specifically, it examined the organizational routines and leadership practices that cultivate learning organizations in preschools. Using a mixed-methods multisite case study, this research integrated teacher surveys and leader interviews across three preschools. The approach combined quantitative and qualitative data to examine the role of educational leaders in fostering learning organizations. By implementing a mixed methods approach, this study captured diverse perspectives, leading to a more comprehensive understanding of leadership in early childhood organizations(Stake, 2006).

Guided by the conceptual framework, this study examined how four factors of learning organizations (a trusting and collaborative environment, a shared and monitored mission, taking initiatives and risks, and ongoing, relevant professional development) are shaped by the seven dimensions of educational leadership (vision and goals, culture, structure, intellectual stimulation, individual support, performance expectations, and community focus) (Mulford et al., 2004). Additionally, these elements are further influenced by organizational routines and structures and were analyzed across multiple sites to generate findings and recommendations for developing preschools as learning organizations.

This chapter contextualizes the study's findings within its conceptual framework and existing literature, highlighting key insights into early childhood leadership. It then offers recommendations for practitioners and researchers to address key challenges in developing preschools as learning organizations. The chapter concludes with actionable strategies for implementing these recommendations in early childhood settings.

Discussion of Themes

This section provides a deeper interpretation of findings in relation to existing research, theories, and real-world implications. The following discussion explores three key themes that highlight the conditions early childhood leaders establish to develop preschools as learning organizations.

Theme I

A key theme that emerged from this study was the strong alignment between the educational leader's ability to enact a school's vision and the development of the school as a learning organization. As the literature posits, when K-12 leaders effectively communicate the school's mission to teachers, parents, and students, it is more likely to develop as learning organizations (Mulford et al., 2004). This study extends those findings to preschools, showing that early childhood leaders who define, communicate, and monitor their vision help to facilitate organizational learning and develop their preschool as a learning organization.

Research also indicates that monitoring a school's vision supports its development as a learning organization (Mulford et al., 2004). This study confirms that this relationship holds true in preschool settings as well. Paramount to monitoring the school's mission is the relationship between a school's vision and high performance expectations (Mulford et al., 2004; Senge, 2012). Schools with strong leadership and high performance expectations not only prioritize delivery of quality teaching and learning, but also enhance organizational learning and the development of preschools as learning organizations.

An essential element of high performance expectations is the expectation that teachers are "innovators" who critically examine their teaching and learning practices to ensure best practices (Mulford et al., 2004; Senge, 2012). As identified in the literature and within this study, when

educational leaders encourage their faculty to evaluate their practices and refine them as needed, it facilitates a culture of learning and helps develop schools as learning organizations. Within this study, it was noted that there is a relationship between educational leaders providing intellectual stimulation and effective learning organizations. Specifically, preschool leaders who foster teacher learning and actively support professional development contribute to developing preschools as learning organizations. Findings align with research noting the connection between teacher involvement in decision making and developing schools as learning organizations. Mulford, Silins, and Leithwood (2004) note the relationship between a shared and monitored mission, organizational learning, and teacher involvement in decision making. They posit that when educational leaders and schools take a distributed leadership approach and involve teachers in decision making, it helps facilitate organizational learning. This study found that this relationship is evident in the early childhood educational setting as well, such that when educational leaders of preschools involve teachers in decision making, it helps develop preschools as learning organizations. Examples of teacher decision making at the preschool level included involvement in curriculum design and planning. Such opportunities and structures create opportunities for teacher involvement in decision making, which helps contribute to a shared and monitored mission, and facilitates the development of preschools as learning organizations. These structures are representative of a distributed leadership model and align with the literature on the relationship between distributed leadership and developing schools as learning organizations (Mulford et al., 2004). As evident in this study, this relationship between distributed leadership and developing schools as learning organizations can also be extended to preschools as well.

Theme II

The second major theme of this study is the strength of the relationship between professional development and developing preschools as learning organizations, as well as the role of the educational leader in leading these efforts. The results of this study reflect that all participating school leaders provided structured professional development opportunities, which contributed to organizational learning within the school. This echoes the findings in the literature (Leithwood et al., 1998; Mulford et al., 2004; Senge, 1990, 2012) which note the relationship between professional development and learning organizations in the K-12 setting. As the literature suggests, a key factor in developing a school as a learning organization is ongoing and relevant professional development. The findings confirm the presence of these elements in preschools and mirror K-12 schools, reinforcing that structured professional development helps foster collaborative and innovative practices.

Further supporting this relationship, the literature (Leithwood et al., 1998; Mulford et al., 2004; Senge, 1990, 2012) also notes the relationship between a school's educational leader, the level of organizational learning at a school, and the professional development offerings. Despite structural differences (Montessori, lab school, private school), all three school leaders implemented many similar structures for professional development, including an annual orientation and scheduled professional development days, individualized professional development plans, ongoing faculty meetings, and mentorship programs. The individual professional development plans demonstrate that the educational leaders in this study support individual teachers, which is another finding that aligns with the literature on educational leadership for effective organizational learning in K-12 schools (Leithwood et al., 1998; Mulford et al., 2004). The similarities in these offerings and the high levels of organizational learning

within these preschools suggest that, as is the case in K-12 schools, these offerings are also best practices for professional development in preschools.

Another similarity within the professional development offerings among the preschools included in this study was the ample use of professional and community resources to leverage professional development opportunities. Consistent with prior literature, educational leaders leverage resources such as professional associations, academic readings, consultants, and partnerships with local organizations and neighborhood spaces. While the use of professional resources was present at all three preschools in this study, Stoneridge maximized the use of available resources, likely due to its affiliation with the university, which both encourages leveraging the use of available resources and provides access to them.

In summary, findings from this study reinforce ongoing and relevant professional development opportunities, which aligns with the literature on effective educational leadership for developing schools as learning organizations, and suggests that, as is the case in K-12 schools, when educational leaders provide ongoing and relevant professional development for faculty, they help develop their preschools as learning organizations (Leithwood et al., 1998; Mulford et al., 2004). Further similarities for professional development among the preschools and educational leaders included similar professional development structures, such as routinely scheduled professional development days throughout the school year and individual professional development plans for all teachers. Additionally, all schools and educational leaders leveraged community resources to further develop their schools as learning organizations, which aligns with the practices identified in literature for developing K-12 schools as learning organizations (Mulford et al., 2004; Senge, 2012).

Theme III

The third major theme in this study was the importance of community and school culture for developing preschools as learning organizations. The literature notes that collaborative cultures in K-12 schools foster organizational learning (Leithwood et al., 1998; Mulford et al., 2004; Senge, 1990, 2012), a pattern this study extends to preschools. The data from this study found that this finding holds true for preschool school settings as well, such that when preschools have collaborative cultures, it facilitates organizational learning and helps develop preschools as learning organizations. Similarly, this study confirms that educational leaders shape preschool cultures, mirroring their role in K-12 settings (Leithwood et al., 1998; Mulford et al., 2004; Senge, 1990, 2012). All three preschools included in this study demonstrated cultural elements through a variety of strategies, including formal structures such as whole school meetings to share curricular ideas, mentorship programs, and team building workshops and informal structures, like shared lunch times and Dutch doors to facilitate collaborative learning.

As noted in the literature, paramount to a culture of collaboration is respect. Mulford, Silins, and Leithwood (2004) present that in K-12 schools that were classified as learning organizations, there was a certain level of respect embedded in the school culture. Respect is a fundamental aspect of a collaborative school culture. Mulford, Silins, and Leithwood (2004) found that in K-12 schools classified as learning organizations, respect was deeply embedded within the school culture, fostering collaboration and trust. This study found that, like K-12 schools, preschools classified as learning organizations also cultivate a culture of respect. All three schools in this study identified respect as an element of their school cultures. The educational leaders of all three preschools show respect by treating teachers as professionals. Teachers described that they feel respected and valued as integral members of the school

community. They feel their contributions are valued, and their opinions are actively sought out. As one teacher shared, the director of her school "really values" her "as a person, professional, and as part of the team." When teachers feel valued for their contributions, they are more likely to contribute to the school and help create productive cultures of learning. Additionally, as presented in the findings for this study, the educational leaders also show respect to students and parents as well. They demonstrate this through welcoming students and parents, being visible and approachable, providing open communications, and involving parents in school community events.

As research on K-12 schools suggests, respect within a school culture is largely shaped by educational leaders (Leithwood et al., 1998; Mulford et al., 2004). This study confirms that preschool leaders also play a pivotal role in fostering a respectful and collaborative learning environment. In this study, the educational leaders of each preschool were also identified as influencing their school cultures, and their implementation of cultural aspects of respect contributed to the overall cultures of learning at their respective schools, thereby extending the findings on the relationship between school leaders and culture of respect and learning beyond the K-12 setting and to the early childhood education setting as well.

A school culture of collaboration also includes collegiality among faculty members. The literature posits that collegiality is an essential component of a collaborative school culture that fosters organizational learning in K-12 settings (Leithwood et al., 1998). The findings from this study support the extension of this to the early childhood setting as well. In all three schools included in this study, relationships were identified as an essential component of the school culture and contribute to cultures of learning. Components of collegiality among faculty at schools included opportunities for faculty to collaborate and develop collegial relationships, such

as through mentorship programs, team-building workshops, and shared lunch times. The educational leaders facilitated effective communication among staff and encouraged professional dialogue. Teachers in these preschools consider each other to be resources for professional development and support one another. They were tolerant of differing opinions and had honest and candid discussions with colleagues - all elements identified in the literature as indicative of a learning organization (Leithwood et al., 1998; Mulford et al., 2004). As one teacher expressed, "while we all teach differently and see things differently, we have full respect for each other's opinions and insights. They seek to actively support me and help me grow as I do them." This statement is a testament to the collegial and collaborative cultures created by the educational leaders in this study.

In that vein, support is another element of school culture that is considered an essential element of a culture of learning (Leithwood et al., 1998; Mulford et al., 2004; Senge, 1990, 2012). The literature identified that when teachers in K-12 schools feel supported, they feel more comfortable taking risks, which contributes to the development of the school as a learning organization. In this study, the same was found to be true in the early childhood educational setting − when teachers received both professional and personal support, it created an environment where they felt valued and empowered to take risks to improve their teaching practices, which contributed to the development of preschools as learning organizations. As one teacher stated "I feel comfortable to fail. I feel supported and know that I am protected when I try something new." This duality of support and risk-taking encourages teachers to try new things and improve their practices, which is representative of a learning organization (Leithwood et al., 1998; Mulford et al., 2004; Senge, 1990, 2012). As discussed in the section on professional development, similar supports were implemented by the educational leaders in all three

preschools. In terms of formal support, all three educational leaders provide whole school professional development, both in content area (early childhood education) and team building, and meet individually with teachers to establish individual professional development plans. Additional formal support included a mentorship program. Informal supports included shared lunch and Dutch doors for collaboration. As is demonstrated by the individual support plans that all three educational leaders work to establish, the educational leaders value relationships and spend time getting to know their teachers. Doing so allows them to know their individual teachers, including their strengths and growth areas. It also helps the educational leaders identify when teachers need additional support. For example, Anna Grace at Riverbend School provided an example of knowing her teachers so well that she was able to notice when one teacher's energy was "off" and to check-in with her. Actions such as this were demonstrated across all three preschools. These actions indicate that the educational leaders provide supports for their teachers, which is a dimension of leadership identified in developing schools as learning organizations (Leithwood et al., 1998; Mulford et al., 2004), and through this study, can be extended to developing preschools as learning organizations as well.

A final theme identified across the cultures of the preschools included in this study was the incorporation of elements of well-being into the school culture. The literature on developing schools as learning organizations identifies that cultural elements of collaboration and congeniality are essential elements for facilitating organizational learning (Leithwood et al., 1998; Senge, 2012). Leithwood, Leonard, and Sharratt posit that cultural norms such as celebrations can contribute to cultures of collaboration and congeniality and the facilitation of schools as learning organizations. While only one educational leader and school in this study directly stated the use of celebrations for building school culture, all three educational leaders

and schools incorporate some elements of well-being into their school cultures. These included celebrations, opportunities to have fun and laugh, and routine mindfulness practices. Examples included celebrating smaller events like birthdays and larger elements like passing an accreditation, pausing to find small moments to laugh throughout the day and encouraging parents to do the same, and incorporating moments of mindfulness into staff meetings and the school curriculum. Although these practices vary by school, they all fall under the larger umbrella of incorporating elements of well-being into the school culture. These elements help with teacher well-being and the reduction of teacher burnout and teacher turnover. This sense of well-being enhances teachers' abilities to fully engage in learning and collaborate effectively, ultimately benefiting their students and the broader school community. Additionally, these elements of well-being also contribute to the cultivation of a school culture that is positive and productive, which helps facilitate organizational learning and develop schools as learning organizations.

In summary, the literature identified cultural elements that help facilitate organizational learning and develop K-12 schools as learning organizations and the crucial role of the educational leader in establishing such cultural elements (Leithwood et al., 1998; Mulford et al., 2004; Senge, 1990, 2012). These cultural elements include a culture of collaboration and collegiality, respectful cultures where staff feel valued, and supportive cultures that encourage risk taking. This study found that the cultural elements fostering learning organizations in K-12 schools are equally relevant in preschool settings. Additionally, this study also identified cultural elements of well-being as necessary cultural elements for developing productive and positive school cultures that help develop schools as learning organizations.

This study's findings lead to several recommendations for early childhood education researchers and practitioners. These recommendations, informed by both the study's data and existing literature, aim to support the development of preschools as learning organizations and improve early childhood education practices.

Recommendations for Practice

Based on the findings from this study, a number of suggested recommendations for leadership practice emerged. These recommendations aim to offer practices, structures, and mechanisms by which early childhood educational leaders can develop preschools into learning organizations.

Establish and Monitor a Shared School Mission

A shared and monitored school mission is fundamental for schools as learning organizations. Schools with shared and monitored missions clearly articulate their missions and ensure that all stakeholders understand their purpose and practical implications for programs. School leaders must clearly articulate and communicate their mission and translate it into concrete programmatic goals. A monitored mission includes critical examination of current practices and involving teachers in decision-making. I recommend that school leaders critically examine the practices at their schools, and encourage their teachers to do the same. Additionally, I recommend that administrators work in partnership with teachers and involve teachers in school-decision-making through the use of distributed leadership and committee structures.

Develop Clear and Clearly Communicated Performance Expectations

Both having clear performance expectations and clearly communicating them are essential elements of schools as learning organizations. Clear and high performance expectations, when well-communicated and reinforced, enhance instructional quality and foster professional

growth. I recommend that school leaders establish clear and high performance expectations for their faculty, and that they clearly communicate these expectations to their faculty through a multitude of mediums and routinely throughout the school year through meetings, written guidelines, and ongoing feedback sessions. Doing so will help ensure that performance expectations are clear to all.

Implement Comprehensive Teacher Support Systems

Findings from this study highlighted the need for supports for teachers in order to facilitate cultures of learning. A supportive and collaborative culture is inseparable from effective professional development. Such supports help teachers feel valued as community members and allows teachers to feel comfortable taking risks to further develop their teaching and learning practices. Teachers learn best in a community-driven model, not just through formal professional development sessions. This theme highlights how trust, mentorship, and open dialogue fuel professional learning. Similar structures for support on both an individual and whole school level emerged across schools. It is therefore recommended that school leaders provide supports for teachers on both an individual and whole-school level. Recommendations for individual supports include working with teachers to establish and review an individual professional development plan, checking in on teachers as needed, and establishing a mentorship program for new teachers. Recommendations for whole school supports include team building opportunities, whole school professional development opportunities, and a community focus on well-being. The implementation of these supports by school leaders is recommended in order to create a culture where people feel supported enough to take risks to improve their practices and the school.

Develop a Culture of Collaboration

In congruence with providing the aforementioned supports for teachers, the findings from this study also suggest that early childhood educational leaders should work to develop cultures of collaboration for their preschools. As noted in the literature and throughout this study, collaborative school cultures result in both formal and informal sharing of ideas, which fosters organizational learning (Leithwood et al., 1998). It is therefore recommended that early childhood educational leaders incorporate both formal and informal opportunities for collaboration. Examples of formal structures include creating mentorship programs for teachers and leading whole school faculty meetings, such as team building workshops and the weekly curricular meetings that Thomas implemented at Citizens School. Examples of informal collaboration include opportunities for collaboration across classrooms, such as the shared lunch time for teachers and the reduction of physical barriers between classes, which was seen when Molly at Stoneridge installed Dutch doors between classrooms. As one teacher described, meeting with her team informally over lunch each day has helped foster relationships among colleagues and allowed for the sharing of ideas and insights. It is recommended that educational leaders implement structures such as these to help foster collaboration among teachers and encourage the sharing of ideas to help develop preschools as learning organizations.

Strengthen Parent Engagement and Communication

Another recommendation that emerged from the findings of this study is the importance of including parents in the school community. While parents are important school constituents for all students and schools, parental involvement in their children's education is especially important during their children's youngest school years. The literature on developing K-12 schools as learning organizations posits the importance of having open communication with

parents and sharing information (Leithwood et al., 1998; Mulford et al., 2004; Senge, 1990, 2012). The findings from this study suggest that, as with K-12 schools, parental involvement is important in ECE as well. It is therefore recommended that early childhood educational leaders actively engage parents through regular communication, transparent information-sharing, and open-door policies. One way for educational leaders to achieve this is to be visible and present to the extent possible. For example, Thomas at Citizens school made it a point to be standing in the entryway of the school every morning to greet parents, students, and teachers by name, which allowed him to get to know everyone and build relationships with them.

Prioritize and Protect Professional Development

The findings from this study also recommended that educational leaders intentionally structure time for professional development. The literature posits that ongoing and relevant professional development is a key factor for developing schools as a learning organization (Leithwood et al., 1998; Mulford et al., 2004; Senge, 1990, 2012), and this study finds that this is true in early childhood educational settings as well. In order for preschools to develop as learning organizations, their educational leaders must facilitate cultures of learning by integrating professional development into the school culture. As this study found, an effective way to do this is to schedule routine professional development opportunities throughout the school year, including at an orientation at the beginning of the school year and on a routine basis throughout the school year. In one school included within this study, the professional development days were often repurposed to serve the other competing needs of the school, such as preparation for parent-teacher conferences and/or writing reports, which took away opportunities for professional development for teachers and posed an obstacle to developing as a learning organization. To develop their schools as a learning organization, it is crucial that school leaders

reserve pre-scheduled days/times for professional development, and do not let the many other competing needs of schools take away from this. This will help ensure that the school leaders are offering ongoing and relevant professional development opportunities for their faculty and facilitating organizational learning.

Incorporate Cultural Elements of Well-being into School Culture

The findings from this study also lead to a recommendation for school leaders to incorporate elements of well-being into the school culture. As noted in the literature, (Mulford et al., 2004; Senge, 2012) educational leaders are crucial in establishing cultural norms for schools, and cultural norms such as celebrations can contribute to cultures of collaboration and the facilitation of schools as learning organization (Leithwood et al., 1998; Senge, 2012). The school leaders in this study all made a conscious effort to incorporate elements of well-being into their school cultures, which resulted in school cultures that were both productive and positive. These cultural elements of well-being included mindfulness practices, opportunities for fun, and celebrations. Therefore, it is recommended that preschool leaders make a conscious effort to incorporate cultural elements of well-being into their school cultures.

Recommendations for Research

This study highlights the limited research on developing preschools as learning organizations compared to the well-established literature on K-12 schools. While the findings suggest that many principles of organizational learning in K-12 schools extend to early childhood education (ECE), further research is needed to confirm and deepen these insights. I recommend expanding the research across a larger population of preschools to solidify the findings for early childhood education. This larger population would include metropolitan, suburban, and rural populations and a variety of preschool designs, like preschools that are part of a national chain,

religiously affiliated preschools, and public preschools. Additionally, research on the specific structures and routines that preschool educational leaders enact to develop their schools as learning organizations. Investigating the structures and routines that support organizational learning in early childhood would provide more concrete actions for early childhood leaders and educators to implement to develop their preschools as learning organizations.

Summary

This section contextualized the research findings with existing research and the conceptual framework. By addressing these research gaps, future studies can strengthen the theoretical foundation for preschools as learning organizations and provide practical insights for early childhood educational leaders.

Action Communication Products

In this section, I present products designed for use in communicating findings, themes, and recommendations with participating schools and the broader early childhood education community. To effectively disseminate the research and recommendations of this study, I employed multiple communication strategies targeted at individual school leaders, teachers, and the broader early childhood education community. First, I offer individualized briefings identifying specific growth areas and identifying recommendations for each of the educational leaders included in this study. Second, I developed a conference presentation to summarize the research findings and recommendations for early childhood leaders and teachers, beyond the study's participants. These communications serve as actionable roadmaps to help educational leaders, teachers, and early childhood advocates implement changes to support the development of preschools as learning organizations.

Individual School Leader Briefing

Dear (Preschool Leader),

I am writing to report my findings and recommendations from my research study, "Developing Preschools As Learning Organizations." This study was conducted between August and September 2024, and explored how preschools cultivate organizational learning and the critical role of school leaders in this process.. As part of this research, I collected data from teacher surveys and interviews with preschool educational leaders to gain deeper insight into the factors that support learning organizations in early childhood education. This study focused on the factors of organizational learning present in preschools, and the dimensions of educational leadership that contribute to organizational learning in preschools.

The major fingers of this study aim to serve as points of emphasis and discussion as you and your leadership team work to develop your preschools as learning organizations. The findings of this study are:

- ***There is a strong alignment between the educational leader's ability to enact a school's vision and the development of the school as a learning organization.*** Early childhood leaders who define, communicate, and monitor their school's vision help facilitate organizational learning and develop their preschool as a learning organization. This includes communicating the practical implications of the school's mission and holding high performance expectations.
- ***There is a strong relationship between professional development and developing preschools as learning organizations, as well as the role of the educational leader in leading these efforts.*** A key factor for early childhood educational leaders to develop

their preschools as learning organizations includes providing ongoing and relevant professional development for teachers.

- ***Community and school culture is important for developing preschools as learning organizations.*** When preschools have collaborative cultures of respect and support, organizational learning is facilitated and preschools can develop as learning organizations.

Based on these findings, I offer the following actionable steps, to further develop your preschool as a learning organization:

- ***Establish and monitor a shared school mission.*** Establish and clearly communicate the school's mission to all constituents. This should include translating the mission into practical implications for programs and critically examining teaching practices to ensure alignment with the school's mission.
- ***Develop clear and clearly communicated performance expectations*** Set high performance expectations for teachers and clearly communicate these expectations through a multitude of mediums and routinely throughout the school year through meetings, written guidelines, and ongoing feedback sessions.
- ***Implement comprehensive teacher support systems*** Provide both individual and whole school supports for teachers. Recommendations for individual supports include working with teachers to establish and review an individual professional development plan, checking-in on teachers as needed, and establishing a mentorship program for new teachers. Recommendations for whole school supports include team building opportunities, whole school professional development opportunities, and a community focus on well-being.

- ***Develop a culture of collaboration*** Incorporate both formal and informal opportunities for collaboration. Examples of formal structures include mentorship programs for teachers, whole school faculty meetings, such as team building workshops and weekly curricular meetings. Examples of informal collaboration include opportunities for collaboration across classrooms, such as shared lunch time for teachers and the reduction of physical barriers between classes through the installation of Dutch doors.
- ***Strengthen parent engagement and communication*** Actively engage parents through regular communication, transparent information-sharing, and open-door policies.
- ***Prioritize and protect professional development*** Schedule routine professional development opportunities throughout the school year, including at an orientation at the beginning of the school year and on a routine basis throughout the school year. reserve pre-scheduled days/times for professional development, and do not let the many other competing needs of schools take away from this.
- ***Incorporate cultural elements of well-being into school culture*** Make a conscious effort to incorporate elements of well-being into the school culture. These cultural elements of well-being may include mindfulness practices, opportunities for fun, and celebrations.

I hope you find these findings and recommendations provide valuable reflections and actions to consider as you continue strengthening organizational learning at your school. If you would like to discuss these findings further or need any additional information, please do not hesitate to reach out. I welcome further discussions to support your ongoing efforts.

With Thanks,

Faye Leier

Presentation

The Role of Early Childhood Educational Leaders in Developing Preschools as Learning Organizations

A Capstone Research Project

Conducted by Faye Turini Leier

UNIVERSITY of VIRGINIA | SCHOOL of EDUCATION and HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Problem of Practice / Purpose of this Study

The purpose of this study is to better understand
the dimensions of **educational leadership**
that create conditions to support
the development of **preschools** as **learning organizations**.

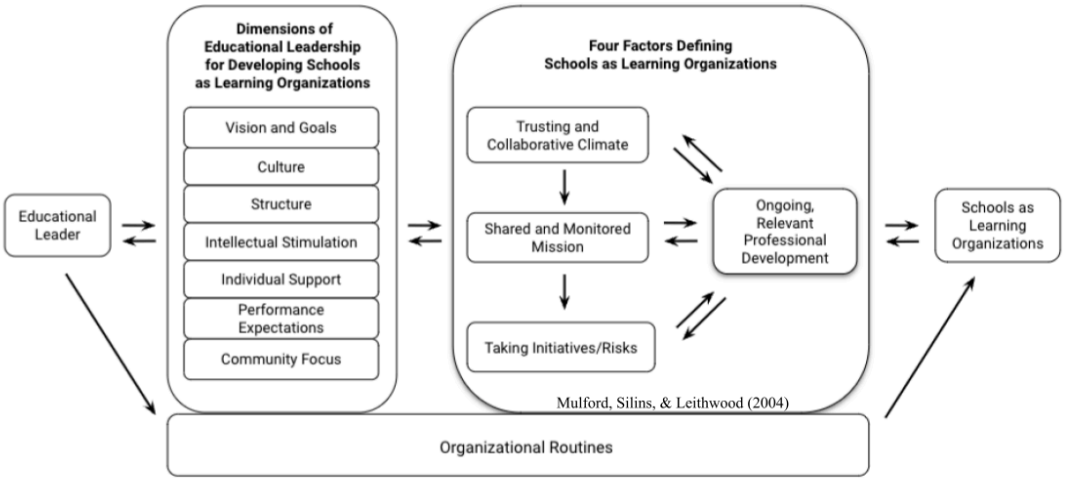
UNIVERSITY of VIRGINIA | SCHOOL of EDUCATION and HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Research Questions

1	How do the characteristics of a learning organization manifest in preschools?
2	What dimensions of educational leadership encourage the development of preschools as learning organizations?
3	How do educational leaders enact processes that facilitate the development of preschools as learning organizations?
4	What leadership practices and associated processes limit the potential for developing preschools as learning organizations?

UNIVERSITY of VIRGINIA | SCHOOL of EDUCATION and HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Conceptual Framework



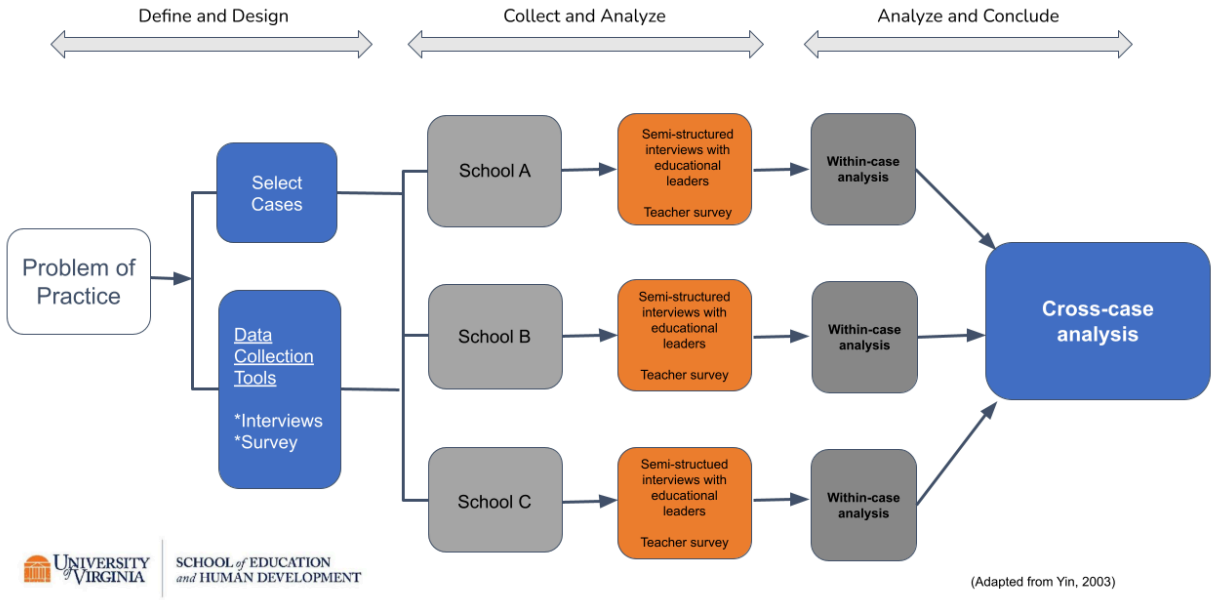
UNIVERSITY of VIRGINIA | SCHOOL of EDUCATION and HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Methodology

- **A mixed-methods study**
- **Qualitative Data**
  - Interviews with three private preschool directors
- **Quantitative Data**
  - Leadership for Organisational Learning and Student Outcomes (LOLSO) Project Questionnaire (Mulford et al., 2004) administered to preschool teachers

UNIVERSITY of VIRGINIA | SCHOOL of EDUCATION and HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Methodology



UNIVERSITY of VIRGINIA | SCHOOL of EDUCATION and HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

(Adapted from Yin, 2003)

Major Finding #1

There is a strong alignment between the educational leader's ability to enact a school's vision and the development of the school as a learning organization.

Early childhood leaders who defined, communicated, and monitored their school's vision helped facilitate organizational learning and develop their preschool as a learning organization. This included communicating the practical implications of the school's mission and holding high performance expectations.

UNIVERSITY of VIRGINIA | SCHOOL of EDUCATION and HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Major Finding #2

There is a strong relationship between professional development and developing preschools as learning organizations, as well as the role of the educational leader in leading these efforts.

A key factor for early childhood educational leaders to develop their preschools as learning organizations included providing ongoing and relevant professional development for teachers.

UNIVERSITY of VIRGINIA | SCHOOL of EDUCATION and HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Major Finding #3

Community and school culture is important for developing preschools as learning organizations.

When preschools had collaborative cultures of respect and support, organizational learning was facilitated and preschools developed as learning organizations.

UNIVERSITY of VIRGINIA | SCHOOL of EDUCATION and HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Recommendations for Your School

- **Establish and monitor a shared school mission.** Establish and clearly communicate the school's mission to all constituents. This should include translating the mission into practical implications for programs and critically examining teaching practices to ensure alignment with the school's mission.

- **Develop clear and clearly communicated performance expectations.** Set high performance expectations for teachers clearly communicate these expectations through a multitude of mediums and routinely throughout the school year through meetings, written guidelines, and ongoing feedback sessions.

UNIVERSITY of VIRGINIA | SCHOOL of EDUCATION and HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Recommendations for Your School

- **Implement comprehensive teacher support systems.** Provide both individual and whole school supports for teachers.

  Recommendations for individual supports include working with teachers to establish and review an individual professional development plan, checking-in on teachers as needed, and establishing a mentorship program for new teachers.

  Recommendations for whole school supports include team building opportunities, whole school professional development opportunities, and a community focus on well-being.

UNIVERSITY of VIRGINIA | SCHOOL of EDUCATION and HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Recommendations for Your School

- **Develop a culture of collaboration.** Incorporate both formal and informal opportunities for collaboration.

  Examples of formal structures include mentorship programs for teachers, whole school faculty meetings, such as team building workshops and weekly curricular meetings.

  Examples of informal collaboration include opportunities for collaboration across classrooms, such as shared lunch time for teachers and the reduction of physical barriers between classes through the installation of Dutch doors.

UNIVERSITY of VIRGINIA | SCHOOL of EDUCATION and HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Recommendations for Your School

- **Strengthen parent engagement and communication.** Actively engage parents through regular communication, transparent information-sharing, and open-door policies.

UNIVERSITY of VIRGINIA | SCHOOL of EDUCATION and HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Recommendations for Your School

- **Incorporate cultural elements of well-being into school culture.** Make a conscious effort to incorporate elements of well-being into the school culture. These cultural elements of well-being may include mindfulness practices, opportunities for fun, and celebrations.

UNIVERSITY of VIRGINIA | SCHOOL of EDUCATION and HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Closing

Questions?

UNIVERSITY of VIRGINIA | SCHOOL of EDUCATION and HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

References

Argote, L., & Miron-Spektor, E. (2011). Organizational learning: From experience to knowledge. *Organization Science, 22*(5), 1123–1137. https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.1100.0621

Argyris, C. & Schön, D.A. (1978). *Organizational learning: A theory of action perspective*. Addison-Wesley.

Britto, P., R., Engle, P. L., & Super, C. M. (2012). *Handbook of early childhood development research and its impact on global policy*. Oxford University Press.

Drago-Severson, E., Blum-DeStefano, J., & Asghar, A. (2013). *Learning for leadership: Developmental strategies for building capacity in our schools*.

Feldman, M. S., & Pentland, B. T. (2003). Reconceptualizing organizational routines as a source of flexibility and change. *Administrative Science Quarterly, 48* (1), 94-118.

Fonsén, E., Varpanen, J., Strehmel, P., Kawakita, M., Inoue, C., Marchant, S., Modise, M., Szecsi, T., & Halpern, C. (2019). International review of ECE leadership research – Finland, Germany, Japan, Singapore, South Africa and the United States under review. In Strehmel P., Heikka J., Hujala E., Rodd J., & Waniganayake M. (Eds.), *Leadership in early education in times of change: Research from five continents* (pp. 253–276). Verlag Barbara Budrich.

Jones, C., & Pound, L. (2008). *Leadership and management in the early years*. McGraw Hill.

Leithwood, K., Leonard, L., & Sharratt, L. (1998). Conditions fostering organizational learning in schools. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 34*(2), 243-276.

Leithwood, K., & Louis, K. S. (1998). *Organizational learning in schools.* Swets & Zeitlinger.

Leithwood, K., & Louis, K. S. (2012). *Linking leadership to student learning.* John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Levitt, B., & March, J. G. (1988). Organizational learning. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 14, 319-340.

Mulford, W., Silins, H., & Leithwood, K. A. (2004). *Educational leadership for organisational learning and improved student outcomes*.

National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). (2011). *Early childhood education professional development: Training and technical assistance glossary*. NAEYC.

Senge, P. M. (1990). *The fifth discipline: The art and practice of the learning organization.* Doubleday.

Senge, P. M. (2012). *Schools that learn: A fifth discipline fieldbook for educators, parents, and everyone who cares about education* (2nd ed.). Crown Business.

Sheridan, S. M., Edwards, C. P., Marvin, C. A., & Knoche, L. L. (2009). Professional development in early childhood programs: Process issues and research needs. *Early Education & Development*, *20*(3), 377–401. https://doi.org/10.1080/10409280802582795

Spillane, J. P., Parise, L. M., & Sherer, J. Z. (2011). Organizational routines as coupling mechanisms: Policy, school administration, and the technical core. *American Educational Research Journal*, *48*(3), 586–619.

Zaslow, M. J., & Martinez-Beck, I. (2006). *Critical issues in early childhood professional development*. Paul H Brookes Publishing.

UNIVERSITY of VIRGINIA | SCHOOL of EDUCATION and HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

References

Allaire, Y., & Firsituotu, M. E. (1984). Theories of organizational culture. *Organization Studies, 5*(3), 193-226.

Argote, L., & Miron-Spektor, E. (2011). Organizational learning: From experience to knowledge. *Organization Science, 22*(5), 1123–1137. https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.1100.0621

Argyris, C. & Schön, D.A. (1978). *Organizational learning: A theory of action perspective*. Addison-Wesley.

Argyris, C. & Schön, D.A. (1996). *Organizational learning II: Theory, method, and practice*. Addison-Wesley.

Bailey, J. A. (2021). *Building learning capacity in an age of uncertainty: Leading an agile and adaptive school* (1st ed.). Routledge. https://doi-org.proxy01.its.virginia.edu/10.4324/9781003144847

Baum, J. A. C., & Ingram, P. (1998). Survival-enhancing learning in the Manhattan hotel industry, 1898-1980. *Management Science, 44*(7), 996-1016.

Boell, M. M. & Senge, P. (2016) School climate and social fields. *Garrison Institute.*

Brennan, W. V. (2013). *School principals and virtual learning: A catalyst to personal and organizational learning.* [Doctoral dissertation, Fordham University].

Bridges, W. (2003). Managing transitions: Making the most of change (2nd ed.). Perseus Publishing.

Britto, P., R., Engle, P. L., & Super, C. M. (2012). *Handbook of early childhood development research and its impact on global policy*. Oxford University Press.

Bunderson, J. S., & Sutcliffe, K. M. (2003). Management team learning orientation and business unit performance. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 88*(3), 552–560.

Collinson, V., & Cook, T. F. (2007). *Organizational learning: improving learning, teaching, and leading in school systems.* Sage.

Creswell, J. W. (2009). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (3rd ed.). Sage Publications, Inc.

Cronbach, L. J., Gleser, G. C., Nanda, H., & Rajaratnam, N. (1972). The dependability of behavioral measurements: Theory of generalizability of scores and profiles. Wiley.

Darling-Hammond, L. (1996). What matters most: A competent teacher for every child. *Phi Delta Kappan, 78*(3), 193-200.

Darling-Hammond, L., Hyler, M. E., & Gardner, M. (2017). *Effective teacher professional development.* Learning Policy Institute.

Darling-Hammond, L., Wei, R. C., Andree, A., Richardson, N., & Orphanos, S. (2009). State of the profession: Study measures status of professional development. *Journal of Staff Development*, *30*(2), 42–49.

DeRoberto, T. (2011). *The relationship between principal emotional intelligence and the school as a learning organization.* [Doctoral dissertation, University of Virginia].

DellaNeve, J. R. (2007). *The relationship between organizational learning and organizational change: Analyzing adult learning and organizational learning factors.* [Doctoral dissertation, Pepperdine University].

Dillman, D. A., Smyth, J. D., & Christian, L. M. (2009). *Internet, mail, and mixed-mode surveys: The tailored design method* (3rd ed.). Wiley.

Dickinson, D. K., & Brady, J. P. (2006). Toward effective support for language and literacy through professional development. In M. Zaslow & I. Martinez-Beck (Eds.), *Critical*

issues in early childhood professional development (pp. 141–170). Paul H Brookes Publishing.

Dodgson, M. (1993). Organizational learning: A review of some literature. *Organization Studies, 14*(3), 375-394.

Drago-Severson, E. (2009). *Leading adult learning: Supporting adult development in our schools*. Corwin Press.

Drago-Severson, E., Blum-DeStefano, J., & Asghar, A. (2013). *Learning for leadership: Developmental strategies for building capacity in our schools*.

Durkheim, É. (1982). *The rules of sociological method and selected texts on sociology and its method*. Macmillan.

Feldman, M. S., & Pentland, B. T. (2003). Reconceptualizing organizational routines as a source of flexibility and change. *Administrative Science Quarterly, 48* (1), 94-118.

Fiol, C. M., & Lyles, M. A. (1985). Organizational Learning. *The Academy of Management Review, 10*(4), 803-813. https://doi.org/10.2307/258048

Fink, A. (2017). *How to conduct surveys: A step-by-step guide*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Finnigan, K.S., Daly, A.J., & Stewart, T.J. (2012). Organizational Learning in Schools under Sanction. *Education Research International, 2012*, 1-10.

Fonsén, E., Varpanen, J., Strehmel, P., Kawakita, M., Inoue, C., Marchant, S., Modise, M., Szecsi, T., & Halpern, C. (2019). International review of ECE leadership research – Finland, Germany, Japan, Singapore, South Africa and the United States under review. In Strehmel P., Heikka J., Hujala E., Rodd J., & Waniganayake M. (Eds.), *Leadership in*

early education in times of change: Research from five continents (pp. 253–276). Verlag Barbara Budrich.

Furnari, E. (2016). *Linking early childhood teachers' characteristics to their perceptions of students' abilities and responsiveness to online professional development.* [Doctoral dissertation, University of Virginia].

Gabriel, J. G. & Farmer, P. C. (2009). *How to help your school thrive without breaking the bank*. Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Garcia, L. A. (2016). *A Presentation on Organizational Theory*. Pontifical Catholic University of Peru. https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.1.2384.4727

Garrity, S., Longstreth, S., & Alwashmi, M. (2016). A qualitative examination of the implementation of continuity of care: An organizational learning perspective. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 36,* 64–78. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecresq.2015.12.014.

Garvin, D. A. (1993). Building a Learning Organization. *Harvard Business Review*, 78– 91.

Giles, C., & Hargreaves, A. (2006). The sustainability of innovative schools as learning organizations and professional learning communities during standardized reform. *Education Administration Quarterly, 42,* 124–156. https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161X05278189

Gomez, R. (2016). Sustaining the benefits of early childhood education experiences: A research overview. *Voices in urban education* (43), 5–14.

Harris, A., & Jones, M. (2018). Leading schools as learning organizations. *Educational Leadership & Management*, 38:4, 351-354, doi: 10.1080/13632434.2018.1483553

Hays, D. G., & Singh, A. A. (2012). *Qualitative Inquiry in Clinical and Educational Settings*. Guilford Press.

Hedberg, B. (1981). How organizations learn and unlearn. In P. Nystrom & W. Starbuck (Eds.), *Handbook of Organizational Design, 1*, 3-27. Oxford University Press.

Heikka, J., & Hujala, E. (2013). Early childhood leadership through the lens of distributed leadership. *European early childhood education research journal, 2*1(4), 568–580.

Higgins, M.C., Ishimaru, A.M., Holcombe, R.W., & Fowler, A.M. (2012). Examining organizational learning in schools: The role of psychological safety, experimentation, and leadership that reinforces learning. *Journal of Educational Change, 13*, 67-94.

Jack Lam, Y. L. (2004). Reconceptualizing a dynamic model of organizational learning for schools. *Journal of Educational Administration*, *42*(3), 297–311. https://doi.org/10.1108/09578230410534649

Jones, C., & Pound, L. (2008). *Leadership and management in the early years*. McGraw Hill.

Kegan, R. (1982). *The evolving self: Problems and process in human development*. Harvard University Press.

Kools, M., Stoll, L., George, B., Steijn, B., Bekkers, V., & Gouëdard, P. (2020). The school as a learning organisation: The concept and its measurement. *European Journal of Education*, 55(1), 24 - 42.

Kools, M., Stoll, L., & Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (France) (2016). What makes a school a learning organisation? OECD Education Working Papers, No. 137. *OECD Publishing,* 88.

Kucharczyk, S. (2011). *Implementation of an educational model for children with autism: Organizational learning and knowledge sharing within schools, across schools and between schools and the support network.* [Doctoral dissertation, Columbia University Teachers College].

Kurland, H., Peretz, H., & Hertz-Lazarowitz, R. (2010). Leadership style and organizational learning: The mediate effect of school vision. *Journal of Educational Administration, 48*(1), 7-30.

La Paro, K., & King, E. (2019). Professional development in early childhood education. In C. Brown, M. Benson & N. File (Eds.), *The Wiley Handbook of Early Childhood Care and Education* (pp. 427–448). John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated.

Leithwood, K., Aitken, R., & Jantzi, D. (2006). *Making schools smarter: Leading with evidence* (3rd ed.). Corwin Press.

Leithwood, K., Jantzi, D., & Steinbach, R. (1998). Leadership and other conditions which foster organizational learning in schools. In Leithwood, K., & Louis, K. S. (Eds.), *Organizational learning in schools* (pp. 67-89). Swets & Zeitlinger.

Leithwood, K., Leonard, L., & Sharratt, L. (1998). Conditions fostering organizational learning in schools. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 34*(2), 243-276.

Leithwood, K., & Louis, K. S. (1998). *Organizational learning in schools.* Swets & Zeitlinger.

Leithwood, K., & Louis, K. S. (2012). *Linking leadership to student learning.* John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Levitt, B., & March, J. G. (1988). Organizational learning. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 14, 319-340.

Lipshitz, R., Popper, M., & Friedman, V. A. (2002). Multi-facet model of organizational learning. *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science, 38,* 78-98.

Lochmiller, C. (2021). Conducting thematic analysis with qualitative data. *The Qualitative Report*, *26*(6), 2029–2044. https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2021.5008

Louis, K. S. (2006). Changing the culture of schools: Professional community, organizational

learning, and trust. *Journal of School Leadership, 16*(5), pp. 477-489. https://doi.org/10.1177/105268460601600502open_in_new

Louis, K. S. & Kruse, S. D. (1998). Creating Community in Reform: Images of Organizational Learning in Inner-City Schools. In *Organizational learning in schools* (pp. 17-45). Taylor & Francis.

Louis, K. S. & Murphy, J. (2017). Trust, caring and organizational learning: the leader's role. *Journal of Educational Administration*. 55. 103-126. 10.1108/JEA-07-2016-0077.

Martinez-Beck, I. & Zaslow, M. (2006). Introduction: The context for critical issues in early childhood professional development. In M. Zaslow & I. Martinez-Beck. (Eds.), C*ritical issues in early childhood professional development* (pp. 1–16). Paul H Brookes Publishing.

Mauchet, M. (2011). *Managers' perceptions of organizational learning and organizational innovativeness in a global healthcare organization.* [Doctoral dissertation, The George Washington University].

McLeod, S., & Dulsky, S. (2021). Resilience, reorientation, and reinvention: educational leadership during the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic. *Frontiers in Education.* Doi: 10.3389/feduc.2021.637075.

Miller, C. C. (2021). *Return to work? Not with child care still in limbo, some parents say.* New York Times.

Morello-DeSerio, D. (2017). *Improving the practice and culture of early learning in Ohio.* [Doctoral dissertation, Duquesne University].

Mulford, W., & Silins, H. (2003). Leadership for organisational learning and improved student outcomes -What do we know?*Cambridge Journal of Education, 33,* 175-195.

Mulford, W., Silins, H., & Leithwood, K. A. (2004). *Educational leadership for organisational learning and improved student outcomes*.

National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). (2011). *Early childhood education professional development: Training and technical assistance glossary*. NAEYC.

National Association of the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). (2021). *Professional development*. Author.

National Center for Education Statistics. (2024). School Enrollment Rates of Young Children. *Condition of Education.* U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences. https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator/cfa.

Palanki, A. (1994). *Building a whole learning system: A study of organizational learning in school reform in Chicago and Kentucky.* [Doctoral dissertation, Brandeis University].

Patton, M. Q. (2014). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods: Integrating theory and practice* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications, Inc.

Pentland, B., & Feldman, M. (2008). Designing routines: On the folly of designing artifacts, while hoping for patterns of action. *Inf. Organ., 18*, 235-250.

Phillips, B. T. (2003). A four-level learning organisation benchmark implementation model. *The Learning Organization, 10(2/3),* 98.

Pianta, R. C., Mashburn, A. J., Downer, J. T., Hamre, B. K., & Justice, L. (2008). Effects of web-mediated professional development resources on teacher–child interactions in pre-kindergarten classrooms. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 23*(4), 431–451. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecresq.2008.02.001

Rallis, S. F., & Rossman, G. B. (2012). The research journey: Introduction to inquiry. The Guilford Press.

Ringsmose, C. (2002). Implementing improvements in early childhood education and care - From individual capacity to organizational learning. In *Quality in Early Childhood Education and Care through Leadership, Organizational and Professional Learning* Springer.

Roberts, A. (2016). *Understanding early childhood educators' well-being: links to professional development, teacher-child interactions and child outcomes.* [Doctoral dissertation, University of Virginia].

Roth, G. L., & Senge, P. M. (1996). From theory to practice: Research territory, processes and structure at an organizational learning centre. *Journal of Organizational Change Management, 9*(1), 92.

Rusch, E. A. (2005). Institutional barriers to organizational learning in school systems: The power of silence. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 41(1),* 83.

Saadat, V., & Saadat, Z. (2016). Organizational learning as a key role of organizational success. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences, 230*, 219–225. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2016.09.028

Schechter, C. (2008). Organizational learning mechanisms: The meaning, measure, and implications for school improvement. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 44,* 155-186.

Schwandt, D. R. (1997). Integrating strategy and organizational learning: A theory of action perspective. In J. Walsh & A. Huff (Eds.), *Advances in Strategic Management* (Volume 14, pp. 337-359). JAI Press.

Schwandt, D. R., & Marquardt, M. J. (2000). *Organizational learning: From world-class theories to global best practices*. St. Lucie Press.

Senge, P. M. (1990). *The fifth discipline: The art and practice of the learning organization.* Doubleday.

Senge, P. M. (2012). *Schools that learn: A fifth discipline fieldbook for educators, parents, and everyone who cares about education* (2nd ed.). Crown Business.

Senge, P. M. (2015). The solutions in our midst. *Oxford Leadership Transforming Business for Good.* Summer Institute of Authentic Leadership in Action (ALIA), Halifax, Nova Scotia. https://www.oxfordleadership.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/oxford-leadership-the-solutions-in-our-midst.pdf

Senge, P. & von Ameln, F. (2019). We are not in control– embrace uncertainty and trust in what emerges. Peter Senge on the legacy and future of Change Management. *Gr Interakt Org* 50, 123-127. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11612-019-00460-6

Sherer, J. Z., & Spillane, J. P. (2011). Constancy and change in work practice in schools: The role of organizational routines. *Teachers College Record, 113*(3), 611–657.

Sheridan, S. M., Edwards, C. P., Marvin, C. A., & Knoche, L. L. (2009). Professional development in early childhood programs: Process issues and research needs. *Early Education & Development*, *20*(3), 377–401. https://doi.org/10.1080/10409280802582795

Shrivastava, P. (1983). A typology of organizational learning system. *Journal of Management Studies, 20*(1), 7-28.

Silins, H., & Mulford, W. (2002). Schools as learning organisations: The case for system, teacher and student learning. *Journal of Educational Administration, 40*(5), 425-466.

Silins, H., & Mulford, B. (2004). Schools as learning organizations: Effects on teacher leadership

and student outcomes. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement, 15,* 443–466.

Silins, H., Mulford, W., & Zarins, S. (1999). *Leadership for organisational learning and student outcomes. The LOLSO project: The first report of an Australian three year study of international significance* [Paper presentation]. Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Montreal, Quebec, Canada.

Silins, H., Zarins, S., & Mulford, W. (2002a). What characteristics and processes define a school as a learning organisation? Is this a useful concept to apply to schools? *International Education Journal, 3*, 24-32.

Silins, H.C., Mulford, W. R., & Zarins, S. (2002b). Organizational learning and school change. *Educational Administration Quarterly,* 38 (5), 613-642.

Spillane, J. P., Parise, L. M., & Sherer, J. Z. (2011). Organizational routines as coupling mechanisms: Policy, school administration, and the technical core. *American Educational Research Journal*, *48*(3), 586–619.

Stake, R. E. (2006). *Multiple case study analysis*. Guilford Press.

Strehmel, P., Heikka, J., Hujala, E., Rodd, J., & Waniganayake, M. (2019). *Leadership in early education in times of change: Research from five continents*. Verlag Barbara Budrich. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvmd84fc

Thompson, D. R. (2004). Organizational Learning in Action: Becoming an Inviting School. *The Journal of Invitational Theory and Practice, 10*, 52-72.

Tout, K., Zaslow, M., & Berry, D. (2006). Quality and qualifications: Links between professional development and quality in early care and education settings. In M. Zaslow & I. Martinez-Beck. (Eds.), C*ritical issues in early childhood professional development* (pp. 1–16) Paul H Brookes Publishing.

U.S. Department of Education Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development (2010). *Toward the identification of features of effective professional development of early childhood educators.* National Academy Press.

U.S. Department of Education. (2021). *Education in a pandemic: The disparate impacts of COVID-19 on America's students*. Office for Civil Rights.

Veziroglu-Celik, M., & Yildiz, T. (2018). Organizational Climate in Early Childhood Education. *Journal of Education and Training Studies.*

Virginia Department of Education. (2021). *VDOE: About the Virginia department of education.* Virginia Department of Education. https://www.doe.virginia.gov/about/index.shtml.

Voogt, J. C., Lagerweij, N. A., & Louis, K. S. (1998). School development and organizational learning: Toward an integrative theory. In *Organizational learning in schools* (pp. 237-258). Taylor & Francis.

Wallace, R. B. (2010). *The relationship of organizational learning to knowledge management and its impact on innovation.* (Publication No. 3440053) [Doctoral dissertation, George Washington University]. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global.

Watkins, K. E., & Marsick, V. J. (1993). *Sculpting the learning organization: Lessons in the art and science of system change.* Jossey-Bass.

Weick, K. (1979). The social psychology of organizing (2nd ed.). McGraw-Hill, Inc.

Wesley, P. W., & Buysse, V. (2001). Communities of practice: Expanding professional roles to promote reflection and shared inquiry. *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education, 21*(2), 114-123.

Winton, P. J., Snyder, P. A., & Goffin, S. G. (2015). *Beyond the status quo*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315818245.ch4

Zaslow, M. J., & Martinez-Beck, I. (2006). *Critical issues in early childhood professional development*. Paul H Brookes Publishing.

Zepeda, S. (2019). *Professional development: What works (3rd ed.)*. Routledge.

Appendix A: School Leader Interview Protocol

This appendix offers the interview protocol employed in the semi-structured interviews with school leaders.

Date of Interview:
Interviewee:
Position, School:
Location of Interview:
Duration of Interview:
Audio filename:
Transcript filename:

The primary research question this study will set out to answer is:

> What dimensions of educational leadership contribute to the development of preschools as learning organizations?

Purpose of Interview: The purpose of today's interview is to learn more about how you, as an early childhood educational leader, guide the development of organizational learning within your preschool. I also hope to identify structures and routines that you implement to guide organizational learning within your school.

Logistics: To ensure the accuracy of the data collected in this interview today, I would like to ask your permission to record the interview. This will allow me to ensure that the information is true to its source. If at any point you feel uncomfortable, please know that you can ask me to stop the recording and/or note-taking.
Approval to Record – (Y/N)
Approval to Note-Taking – (Y/N)

[Consent Reminder.] I want to remind you that participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that you have agreed to participate in this research with generosity and of your own free will. I'll use pseudonyms for you and the school in my project. You may choose not to answer a question, stop the interview, and/or ask for the recording to be destroyed. Thank you for your help and participation.

Turn on the recorder and test.

Interview Questions

Questions	RQ	Notes
1. Can you tell me about your educational background and role in this school?	RQ2 (dimensions of EL for LO)	
2. Can you describe a significant learning experience your school has gone through and how it changed practices or the approach to learning at your school?	RQ3 (processes of LO); RQ4 (barriers to LO)	
3. In what ways does your school facilitate ongoing, collaborative learning among staff? Can you provide an example of how this has been implemented?	RQ1 (factors of OL); RQ2 (dimensions of EL for LO); RQ3 (processes of LO)	
4a. Can you describe an example of the ways in which leaders foster an environment conducive to ongoing learning within schools? 4b. What processes ensure that all staff members are engaged in the learning process?	RQ2 (dimensions of EL for LO); RQ3 (processes of LO)	
5a. As a school leader, how would you say your role impacts learning at your school? 5b. How does your school measure the impact of learning	RQ1 (factors of OL); RQ2 (dimensions of EL for LO); RQ3 (processes of LO)	

on staff performance and student outcomes?		
6. Describe any barriers or challenges, if any, that you have faced in supporting and developing learning opportunities in your school.	RQ4 (barriers to LO)	
7. What advice would you give future school leaders to help cultivate learning within their school?	RQ1 (factors of OL); RQ2 (dimensions of EL for LO); RQ3 (processes of LO); RQ4 (barriers to LO)	

Possible follow-up questions/prompts

• What do you mean by_____?
• Earlier, you said something about _____. Can you say more about that?
• Can you give me a specific example?
• Can you give me more details about _____?
• What else?
• Go on...
• Is there a story or incident you can tell me about that could help me better understand what you mean?
• What else is important to know about this?

Closing

We've come to the end of this interview. Thank you very much for taking the time to speak with me today. I truly appreciated the opportunity to learn from you and your experience about creating the conditions for continuous improvement in education.

Appendix B: Codebook

The following codes were used to analyze the data from the leader interviews and the teacher survey. Each code is named and abbreviated. A short description is provided for each code. The codes are direct reflections of themes, concepts, and ideas contained within the conceptual framework guiding the study.

Code Identification	Code Abbreviation	Code Description
Dimensions of Educational Leadership		
Dimensions of Educational Leadership: Vision & Goals	DEL:V&G	Refers to the development and communication of school goals and purpose
Dimensions of Educational Leadership: Culture	DEL:CULT	Refers to the cultural atmosphere of the school and the level of respect among staff
Dimensions of Educational Leadership: Structure	DEL:STRUCT	Refers to the leadership structure and communication of leadership roles and responsibilities
Dimensions of Educational Leadership: Intellectual Stimulation	DEL:INTSTIM	Refers to the level of encouragement and support for professional learning and development
Dimensions of Educational Leadership: Individual Support	DEL:INDSUP	Refers to the inclusivity and consideration for unique staff needs
Dimensions of Educational Leadership: Performance Expectations	DEL:PRFX	Refers to the height of the level of expectations for staff
Dimensions of Educational Leadership: Community Focus	DEL:COMM	Refers to the establishment of working relationships in the community
Dimensions of Educational Leadership: CULT WB	DEL:CULT	Refers to cultural elements of well-being
Factors of Organizational Learning		

Factors Defining Schools as Learning Organizations: Trusting & Collaborative Climate	FOL:TCC	Refers to the level of trust, collaboration, and respect among staff. Includes presence of professional dialogue among staff, tolerance of differing opinions, and support.
Factors Defining Schools as Learning Organizations: Shared & Monitored Missions	FOL:SMM	Refers to the partnership between teachers and leadership to support the collective vision of the school.
Factors Defining Schools as Learning Organizations: Taking Initiatives/Risks	FOL:TIR	Refers to the school structures that support and value teacher initiatives.
Factors Defining Schools as Learning Organizations: Ongoing, Relevant Professional Development	FOL:ORPD	Refers to the continuous use of appropriate and effective professional development for all staff.
Organizational Routines		
Organizational Routines: Collaboration & Teamwork	OR:C&T	Refers to organizational routines centered around structures that promote collaboration and teamwork among staff.
Organizational Routines: Observations, Evaluations & Feedback	OR:OEF	Refers to organizational routines related to teacher and leader observations, evaluations, and feedback for improvement.
Organizational Routines: Planning	OR:P	Refers to organizational routines as they relate to planning for student and school success.
Organizational Routines: Meetings	OR:M	Refers to organizational routines as they relate to meetings and scheduling.
Organizational Routines:	OR:PD	Refers to organizational

Professional Development		routines related to the school's professional development policies, structures, and supports.
Organizational Routines: Communication	OR:C	Refers to organizational routines and school norms as they relate to school communications.

Appendix C: Survey Instrument

The survey instrument administered to teachers and administrators at each research site in this study is a modified version of the Short form of the Educational Leadership for Organisational Learning and Improved Student Outcomes, or LOLSO, Project Questionnaire by Mulford, Silins, and Leithwood (2004). The LOLSO Survey Instrument is publicly accessible via the 2004 book by Mulford, Silins, and Leithwood titled *Educational Leadership for Organisational Learning and Improved Student Outcomes*. Mulford, Silins, and Leithwood designed the survey instrument as part of the LOLSO Project conducted by the Australian Research Council (2004). The survey was designed with the intent of acquiring data to better understand the relationship between educational leaders and school change for improved student achievement (Mulford et al., 2004). The survey questions created by Mulford, Silins, and Leithwood were intentionally constructed using measures to ensure validity and reliability, including an extensive literature review, pilot survey groups and subsequent revisions, and statistical procedures such as Cronbach's alpha (α), which indicated an adequate range of reliability (2004).

As the LOLSO Project was aimed at secondary schools in Australia (Mulford et al., 2004), this study made minor modifications to the survey questions to fit the context of Early Childhood Education in the United States. The chart below illustrates the modifications. Responses were given on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*).

Directions: ● We are interested in the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements for your school. ● Base your responses on your personal perceptions and impressions. Avoid dwelling on items – we want your first responses or best guess. ● Use the "N/A" (Not Applicable) response as a last resort if the item does not apply or you don't know. ● **Please circle only ONE response for each item.**	
Original Survey Instrument	*Modified Survey Instrument*
PRINCIPAL LEADERSHIP	**EDUCATIONAL** LEADERSHIP
1. Vision and Goals	1. Vision and Goals
a. Give us a sense of overall purpose.	a. Give us a sense of overall purpose.
b. Helps clarify the specific meaning of the school's purpose in terms of its practical implications for programs	b. Helps clarify the specific meaning of the school's purpose in terms of its practical implications for programs and

and instruction.	instruction.
c. Communicates school mission to staff and students.	c. Communicates school mission to staff and students.
d. Works towards whole staff consensus in establishing priorities for school goals.	d. Works towards whole staff consensus in establishing priorities for school goals.
2. Culture	2. Culture
a. Shows respect for staff by treating us as professionals.	a. Shows respect for staff by treating us as professionals.
b. Sets a respectful tone for interaction with students.	b. Sets a respectful tone for interaction with students.
c. Demonstrates a willingness to change his/her own practices in light of new understandings.	c. Demonstrates a willingness to change his/her own practices in light of new understandings.
d. Works towards whole staff consensus in establishing priorities for school goals.	d. Works towards whole staff consensus in establishing priorities for school goals.
3. Structure	3. Structure
a. Delegates leadership for activities critical for achieving goals.	a. Delegates leadership for activities critical for achieving goals.
b. Distributes leadership broadly among the staff representing various viewpoints in leadership positions.	b. Distributes leadership broadly among the staff representing various viewpoints in leadership positions.
c. Ensures that we have adequate involvement in decision making related to programs and instructions.	c. Ensures that we have adequate involvement in decision making related to programs and instructions.
d. Supports an effective committee structure for decision making.	d. Supports an effective committee structure for decision making.
e. Facilitates effective communication among staff.	e. Facilitates effective communication among staff.
4. Intellectual Stimulation	4. Intellectual Stimulation
a. Is a source of new ideas for my professional learning.	a. Is a source of new ideas for my professional learning.

b. Stimulates me to think about what I am doing for my students.	b. Stimulates me to think about what I am doing for my students.
c. Encourages me to pursue my own goals for professional learning.	c. Encourages me to pursue my own goals for professional learning.
d. Encourages us to develop/review individual professional growth goals consistent with school goals and priorities.	d. Encourages us to develop/review individual professional growth goals consistent with school goals and priorities.
e. Encourages us to evaluate our practices and refine them as needed.	e. Encourages us to evaluate our practices and refine them as needed.
5. Individual Support	5. Individual Support
a. Takes my opinion into consideration when initiating actions that affect my work.	a. Takes my opinion into consideration when initiating actions that affect my work.
b. Is aware of my unique needs and expertise.	b. Is aware of my unique needs and expertise.
c. Is inclusive, does not show favouritism towards individuals or groups.	c. Is inclusive, does not show **favoritism** towards individuals or groups.
6. Performance Expectations	6. Performance Expectations
a. Has high expectations for us as professionals.	a. Has high expectations for us as professionals.
b. Holds high expectations for students.	b. Holds high expectations for students.
c. Expects us to be effective innovators.	c. Expects us to be effective innovators.
7. In our school:	7. In our school:
a. The contributions of all staff members are valued equally.	a. The contributions of all staff members are valued equally.
b. Our school administrators have secured a high degree of autonomy for the school.	b. Our school administrators have secured a high degree of autonomy for the school.
c. Our school administrators have established a productive working relationship with the community.	c. Our school administrators have established a productive working relationship with the community.

ORGANISATIONAL LEARNING	**ORGANIZATIONAL** LEARNING
1. Trusting and Collaborative Climate	1. Trusting and Collaborative Climate
a. Discussions among colleagues are honest and candid.	a. Discussions among colleagues are honest and candid.
b. Overall there is mutual support among teachers.	b. Overall there is mutual support among teachers.
c. Most of us actively seek information to improve our work.	c. Most of us actively seek information to improve our work.
d. We are tolerant of each other's opinions.	d. We are tolerant of each other's opinions.
e. Colleagues are used as resources.	e. Colleagues are used as resources.
f. There is ongoing professional dialogue among teachers.	f. There is ongoing professional dialogue among teachers.
2. Shared and Monitored Mission	2. Shared and Monitored Mission
a. Teachers have the opportunity to participate in most significant school-level policy decisions.	a. Teachers have the opportunity to participate in most significant school-level policy decisions.
b. We have a coherent and shared sense of direction.	b. We have a coherent and shared sense of direction.
c. We critically examine current practices.	c. We critically examine current practices.
d. Teachers and administrators work in partnership to learn and solve problems together.	d. Teachers and administrators work in partnership to learn and solve problems together.
e. We actively share information with the parents and community.	e. We actively share information with the parents and community.
f. The effectiveness of the teaching program is regularly monitored.	f. The effectiveness of the teaching program is regularly monitored.
3. Taking Initiatives/Risks	3. Taking Initiatives/Risks
a. The school leaders protect those who take risks.	a. The school leaders protect those who take risks.
b. The administrators are open to change.	b. The administrators are open to change.

c. School structures support teacher initiatives and risk taking.	c. School structures support teacher initiatives and risk taking.
d. The administrators empower staff to make decisions.	d. The administrators empower staff to make decisions.
e. There are rewards for staff who take the initiative.	e. There are rewards for staff who take the initiative.
f. People feel free to experiment and take risks.	f. People feel free to experiment and take risks.
g. Staff are valued.	g. Staff are valued.
4. Ongoing, Relevant Professional Development	4. Ongoing, Relevant Professional Development
a. We monitor what's happening outside of the school to find out about best practice.	a. We monitor what's happening outside of the school to find out about best practice.
b. Good use is made of professional readings.	b. Good use is made of professional readings.
c. Groups of staff receive training in how to work and learn in teams.	c. Groups of staff receive training in how to work and learn in teams.
d. Good use is made of membership of teacher professional associations.	d. Good use is made of membership of teacher professional associations.
e. We make use of external advisors, e.g., subject associations, project officers, consultants.	e. We make use of external advisors, e.g., subject associations, project officers, consultants.
f. Adequate time is provided for professional development.	f. Adequate time is provided for professional development.
g. Staff engage in ongoing professional development.	g. Staff engage in ongoing professional development.

Appendix D: Sample Recruitment Email Correspondence to School Leaders

Subject Line: Opportunity to Participate in Research Study

Dear (Potential Participant Name),

I am a doctoral candidate in the University of Virginia's Educational Leadership Program. I'm writing in hopes that you may be willing to participate in research I am conducting to better understand organizational learning in preschools. This research is for my doctoral capstone project; however, I hope it will be helpful to educational leaders seeking to improve their preschools and the state of early childhood education in the United States.

I am recruiting preschool leaders and teachers to participate in interviews and surveys. Your school's participation and any individual's participation is voluntary. Pseudonyms will be used, and any identifiable information will not be included in any reports. Please review the attached information sheet for more details about the study.

Please let me know if you and your school would be willing to participate in this important study to advance early childhood education. If you have questions or concerns you would like to discuss before making a decision, I would be happy to meet with you to discuss.

Thank you for your consideration. Your participation would be appreciated.

All my best,

Faye Turini Leier
Graduate Student
UVA School of Education and Human Development
PO Box 400277
Charlottesville, VA 22904
fst5dt@virginia.edu

Michelle Beavers, Ph.D.
UVA School of Education and Human Development
PO Box 400277
Charlottesville, VA 22904
(804) 677-8371
MichelleBeavers@virginia.edu

Appendix E: Sample Survey Email Correspondence

Subject Line: Organizational Learning Survey

Dear (School Name) Teachers and Leaders,

I hope you are well. Researchers at the University of Virginia are conducting survey research on organizational learning in preschools. Specifically, researchers want to know what factors of organizational learning are present in preschools and how educational leaders contribute to these factors.

This survey is an opportunity for you to share your experiences with organizational learning in your school. Participation in this study is completely voluntary. Participation involves the completion of an online survey and should take approximately 15 minutes. Individuals who complete the survey will have the option to enter their email addresses to be randomly entered to receive a $35 Amazon.com gift card. Individual responses will be kept confidential and never shared in a way that could determine your identity. Your name and your school's name will not be collected or used in any reports. Please review the attached information sheet for more details about the study.

To access the survey, please click on the following link:

https://surveylink

(Note: If you cannot access the survey by clicking the link, please copy and paste the URL into the navigation bar of your internet browser.)

If you have any questions about the study design, confidentiality, or scope, please contact me at fst5dt@virginia.edu.

Thank you in advance for your participation!

All my best,

Faye Turini Leier
Graduate Student
UVA School of Education and Human Development
PO Box 400277
Charlottesville, VA 22904
fst5dt@virginia.edu

Michelle Beavers, Ph.D.
UVA School of Education and Human Development
PO Box 400277
Charlottesville, VA 22904

(804) 677-8371
MichelleBeavers@virginia.edu

Appendix F: Study Information Sheet: School Leader Interviews

Please read this information sheet carefully before you decide to participate in the study.

Study Title: The Role of Early Childhood Educational Leaders in Developing Preschools as Learning Organizations
Protocol #: 6684

Purpose of the research study: The purpose of this study is to better understand organizational learning in preschools. In particular, this study aims to identify the significant factors of organizational learning present in preschools and the dimensions of educational leadership that contribute to it.

What you will do in the study: You will participate in an individual interview. conducted virtually via Zoom and will be recorded. You may skip any question you do not wish to answer, and you can stop the interview anytime.

Time required: The study will require approximately 45 - 60 minutes of your time.

Risks: There are no anticipated risks.

Benefits: There are no direct benefits to you for participating in this study. The study may help us understand how school leaders can develop and improve levels of organizational learning within their preschools and improve the state of Early Childhood education in the United States.

Confidentiality: The information that you provide in the study will be handled confidentially. To protect your confidentiality, you and your school will be assigned pseudonyms. The list connecting your and your school's names to the pseudonyms will be stored in a secure file. Your name and your school's name will not be used in any report. When the study is completed and the data have been analyzed, this list will be destroyed. Interview recordings will be retained with study data for 5 years and then destroyed.

Voluntary participation: Your participation in the study is completely voluntary. Your decision to participate will have no effect on your employment.

Right to withdraw from the study: You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

How to withdraw from the study: To withdraw from the study, please tell the researcher to stop the interview. If you would like to withdraw after the interview, please contact Faye Turini Leier at fst5dt@virginia.edu or faculty advisor Dr. Michelle Beavers at mmb2sb@virginia.edu.

Payment: There is no payment for participating in this study.

Using data beyond this study: The data you provide in this study will be retained in a secure manner by the researcher for 5 years and then destroyed. The data collected for this study will not be used beyond this study.
Please contact the researchers on the study team listed below to:

- Obtain more information or ask a question about the study.
- Report an illness, injury, or other problem.
- Leave the study before it is finished.

Faye Turini Leier
Graduate Student
UVA School of Education and Human Development
PO Box 400277
Charlottesville, VA 22904
fst5dt@virginia.edu

Michelle Beavers, Ph.D.
UVA School of Education and Human Development
PO Box 400277
Charlottesville, VA 22904
(804) 677-8371
MichelleBeavers@virginia.edu

You may also report a concern about a study or ask questions about your rights as a research subject by contacting the Institutional Review Board listed below.

Tonya R. Moon, Ph.D.
Chair, Institutional Review Board for the Social and Behavioral Sciences
One Morton Dr. Suite 400
University of Virginia, P.O. Box 800392
Charlottesville, VA 22908–0392
Telephone: (434) 924–5999
Email: irbsbshelp@virginia.edu

Website for Research Participants: https://research.virginia.edu/research-participants

UVA IRB-SBS #6684

You may print a copy of this information sheet for your records.

Appendix G: Electronic Study Information Page: Survey

Please read this information sheet carefully before you decide to participate in the study.

Study Title: The Role of Early Childhood Educational Leaders in Developing Preschools as Learning Organizations
Protocol #: 6648

Purpose of the research study: The purpose of this study is to better understand organizational learning in preschools. In particular, this study aims to identify the significant factors of organizational learning present in preschools and the dimensions of educational leadership that contribute to it.

What you will do in the study: You will complete an online survey. You may skip any question you do not wish to answer, and you can stop at any time.

Time required: The study will require approximately 15 minutes of your time.

Risks: There are no anticipated risks in this study.

Benefits: There are no direct benefits to you for participating in this study. The study may help us understand how school leaders can develop and improve levels of organizational learning within their preschools and improve the state of Early Childhood education in the United States.

Confidentiality: The information that you provide in the study will be handled confidentially. You may complete the survey anonymously. However, if you would like to be entered in a raffle to win a $35 Amazon gift card, you will be asked to provide an email address for contact purposes. The list of email addresses will be stored separately from the survey data. One participant per school will randomly be selected to receive a $35 Amazon gift card, which will be delivered via email. At the conclusion of the raffle, all emails will be deleted from study data and will not be retained. Survey data will be retained with study data for 5 years and then destroyed.

Voluntary participation: Your participation in the study is completely voluntary. Your decision to participate will have no effect on your employment.

Right to withdraw from the study: You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

How to withdraw from the study: To withdraw from the study, please close the browser. If you would like to withdraw after your materials have been submitted, please contact Faye Turini Leier at fst5dt@virginia.edu or faculty advisor Dr. Michelle Beavers at mmb2sb@virginia.edu.

Payment: As a thank you for your time, survey participants may enter a raffle for a $35 Amazon gift certificate. One participant per school will randomly be selected to receive a #35 Amazon gift card, which will be delivered via email. If you would like to be entered in the raffle, you will be asked to provide an email address for contact purposes.

Using data beyond this study: The data you provide in this study will be retained in a secure manner by the researcher for 5 years and then destroyed. The data collected for this study will not be used beyond this study.
Please contact the researchers on the study team listed below to:

- Obtain more information or ask a question about the study.
- Report an illness, injury, or other problem.
- Leave the study before it is finished.

Faye Turini Leier
Graduate Student
UVA School of Education and Human Development
PO Box 400277
Charlottesville, VA 22904
fst5dt@virginia.edu

Michelle Beavers, Ph.D.
UVA School of Education and Human Development
PO Box 400277
Charlottesville, VA 22904
(804) 677-8371
MichelleBeavers@virginia.edu

You may also report a concern about a study or ask questions about your rights as a research subject by contacting the Institutional Review Board listed below.

Tonya R. Moon, Ph.D.
Chair, Institutional Review Board for the Social and Behavioral Sciences
One Morton Dr. Suite 400
University of Virginia, P.O. Box 800392
Charlottesville, VA 22908–0392
Telephone: (434) 924–5999

Email: irbsbshelp@virginia.edu
Website for Research Participants: https://research.virginia.edu/research-participants

UVA IRB-SBS #6684

You may print a copy of this information sheet for your records.

Appendix H: Case Study School A: Riverbend School[2]

Riverbend School is a private Montessori preschool in a metropolitan area of a mid-Atlantic state that serves over 100 students ages 2-6. It was founded almost 40 years ago, and remains under the leadership of its founder, Anna Grace Dudley, who has led the school for thirty-eight years. Anna Grace Dudley earned her Bachelor of Arts in Education and a Master's degree in Education and Curriculum Design. She holds certifications in Montessori education and leadership, and mindfulness practices. She taught for several years before founding Riverbend School.

Riverbend School holds several accreditations, which indicate high-quality education for young children. The school is accredited by the American Montessori Society, which suggests the implementation of best practices in Montessori education and provides a framework for curriculum and teaching practices. The school is also accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children, which uses research-based standards to promote high-quality early childhood education. Additionally, the school is certified by an environmental educational association and implements an outdoor educational program.

Riverbend School employs 22 full-time teachers, 8 certified Montessori "head teachers," and 14 assistant teachers pursuing Montessori teaching credentials. Riverbend has six classrooms: two toddler classrooms for students ages 2-3 and four primary classrooms for students ages 3-6.

Context for Teacher Survey Results

Teacher survey results (Appendix K) suggest Riverbend operates as an effective learning organization. Of the 22 teachers at Riverbend, 11 completed the survey, resulting in a participation rate of 50%, which aligns with recommended minimum response rates for

[2] The names of schools and individuals have been pseudonymized in order to provide anonymity.

small-scale educational research (Dillman, Smyth, & Christian, 2014). This strong participation rate, combined with the interview data, enhances reliability and representativeness of the findings.

As shown in Table 2, Riverbend School demonstrates a trusting and collaborative school climate, where the school's vision and goals are shared and performance expectations are high and clear. Riverbend scored high across all domains. Collegial relationships and support received the highest possible score (5), underscoring the positive school climate. Comparatively, Riverbend School fell in the middle range of scores for the schools surveyed.

Table 2

Educational Leadership & Organizational Learning Survey Results for School A: Riverbend School

Survey Section	Riverbend (n = 11)
Educational Leadership	
1. Vision and Goals	4.75
2. Culture	4.63
3. Structure	4.50
4. Intellectual Stimulation	4.58
5. Individual Support	4.22
6. Performance Expectations	4.81
7. Community Focus	4.63
Distributed Leadership	
1. Influence	4.28
Organizational Learning	
1. Trusting and Collaborative Climate	4.83
2. Shared and Monitored Mission	4.33
3. Taking Initiatives/Risks	4.36
4. Ongoing, Relevant Professional Development	4.57

Note. This table provides the mean score of each survey question from each site and the mean composite score for each of the survey components. Respondents were asked to answer each question on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Characteristics of a Learning Organization (RQ 1)

Survey and interview data indicate that Riverbend School is a high-level learning organization displaying a trusting and collaborative environment, shared and monitored mission, taking initiatives and risks, and ongoing, relevant professional development. Teachers reported exceptionally high levels of support and resources. As the school's leader, Anna Grace, explained, her leadership vision stems from her early teaching experience, where teachers were undervalued. Her vision was to create a school where teachers are respected, and the environment would be positive for students and teachers.

Trusting and Collaborative Climate

Riverbend School received high scores for trust and collaboration in the teacher survey. As Mulford, Silins, and Leithwood (2004) explain, a trusting and collaborative environment is necessary for schools to operate as learning organizations. This section was the highest scoring section for Riverbend, with an average score of 4.83 or "strongly agree" and two subsections - mutual support among teachers and colleagues used as resources - receiving the highest score possible (5 or "strongly agree").

Anna Grace founded Riverbend with a clear vision of fostering trust and collaboration. She models this culture, stating, "whether you were the janitor or head of school, everybody's place is equally valuable and very necessary. And until you understand that, you can't function." To support this, she provides ongoing and continuous professional development, including

team-building opportunities, from formal activities to formal assessments led by outside providers. She explains that the "school is in a process of each of us trying to understand more deeply so that we can bring our strengths, but also work with each other, with our challenges, to have a stronger team."

The data confirms high levels of trust and support. As the research from Mulford, Silins, and Leithwood (2004) indicates, relationships that promote trust and collaboration are essential factors evident in schools that effectively operate as learning organizations. The teacher survey results showed high levels of mutual support (5/5). Further, they reported that discussions among colleagues are honest and that colleagues are tolerant of each other's opinions. These high scores indicate teachers feel supported by one another and that the overall climate is one of trust and collaboration. Similarly, Anna Grace shared that she works to develop relationships with her faculty and staff and tries to get to know them so that she can support them appropriately. Knowing her faculty and staff allows Anna Grace to identify when they might need additional supports. For example, when she observed a teacher who was not quite herself, Anna Grace scheduled a check-in. She stated that she "really tries to stay on top of those things, because if somebody starts to go down in their energy, that's going to affect the group." She elaborates that these observations and human interactions are extremely valuable for the overall impact on school climate and culture, which aligns with the literature on relationships as a necessary factor for schools to operate as a learning organization.

Shared and Monitored Mission

Riverbend's strongly embedded vision and mission reinforce organizational learning. The survey results and interview data provide evidence that Riverbend School has a clear mission and vision. Mulford, Silins, and Leithwood (2004) conclude that a clear vision is essential for a

productive learning organization. Anna Grace founded Riverbend with a distinct vision in mind and is able to clearly communicate the vision and mission to others. Her vision of a school with a professional learning community where every member is a valued and integral part of the whole guides the culture of Riverbend.

The survey results for Riverbend demonstrate a clearly articulated, shared, and monitored school mission. Teachers elaborated that they have a "coherent and shared sense of direction" to guide their teaching practices. They report that teachers have the opportunity to participate in school decision-making and that information is actively and appropriately shared with all school constituents, including parents. Survey data also indicates teaching effectiveness is regularly monitored and that they critically examine their practices, with the school mission in mind. These practices contribute to a strongly shared and monitored mission, a key factor of a school operating as a learning organization.

Taking Initiatives/Risks

Taking initiatives and risks are essential for developing schools as a learning organization (Leithwood et al., 1998; Mulford et al., 2004; Senge, 1990, 2012). Interview and survey data confirm that Riverbend School has structures and supports for taking initiatives and risks. Teachers feel supported in taking risks and initiatives and feel protected if they do so. One example includes teachers taking a risk by implementing a more robust outdoor curriculum and mindfulness practices during the COVID-19 pandemic. While this was a new undertaking for the school and its teachers, the risk paid off and allowed the school to stay open during the pandemic, when others were shutting down.

Additionally, the school leaders were described as being open to change. Anna Grace explained that, while the school has various accreditations and certifications to guide their

practices (such as the Montessori certification), as an independent Montessori preschool, Riverbend has the flexibility to adapt and develop as needed. She cites the example of the impact of the COVID-19 global pandemic on early childhood education and how Riverbend was able to pivot and make strategic adjustments to their program that not only provided continuity and increased enrollment but exemplified adaptive leadership. During the pandemic, these changes for Riverbend included the integration of more outdoor learning opportunities and mindfulness practices, both of which school leadership reported as positive changes that resulted in increased demand for enrollment. These changes made by the school during the pandemic are robust examples of a school's ability to adapt, which is indicative of the school operating as a learning organization (Leithwood et al., 1998; Mulford et al., 2004; Senge, 1990, 2012).

Ongoing, Relevant Professional Development

Ongoing and relevant professional development is another essential factor for schools that operate as learning organizations. At Riverbend, professional development emerged as a notable strength, highlighting its alignment with the principles of an effective learning organization. This further indicates the school's operation as an effective learning organization. Survey data for the section on professional development received one of the highest scores, reinforcing its importance in fostering continuous improvement and staff capacity. Teachers reported that they feel they have adequate time for professional development and engage in professional development on an ongoing basis. They noted that the school makes "good use" of professional resources, such as readings and memberships for teacher professional associations. Teachers are encouraged to monitor what's happening outside of the school and find out about best practices.

Anna Grace values and prioritizes professional development in the area of team building and provides professional development opportunities for team building for teachers. Additionally, she models an ongoing approach to learning and developing, and encourages her staff to do the same. She arranges monthly staff workshops led by in-house or external professionals. Although Riverbend is a small preschool, Anna Grace felt it was essential to have an occupational therapist and a marriage and family therapist on staff. These individuals and other administrators and teachers often lead the monthly workshops and share their expertise.

Additionally, Anna Grace emphasizes learning from students as well, citing the example of a child who developed a lengthy (57-step) process for washing the tables and washed the tables repeatedly for weeks on end. Instead of redirecting the behavior, the school administrators and teachers took an observational approach. They used this as an opportunity to delve deeper into child development and student approaches to learning. Through their observations and study, they discovered that the student loved water and math, and specifically engaged in professional development opportunities to better understand how to provide engaging learning opportunities for this child. (Anna Grace shared that the student was a very systematic child who later designed advanced robotics for the military.)

Lastly, Anna Grace also indicated the importance of the environment as a third teacher at Riverbend. She ensures a clean and engaging environment with indoor and outdoor learning spaces. These survey reports, interview statements, and examples all indicate a strong level of ongoing and relevant professional development at Riverbend School, which is indicative of a strong level of organizational learning at the school.

Dimensions of Educational Leadership (RQ 2)

According to the data, Anna Grace demonstrates key dimensions of educational leadership that the literature (Mulford et al., 2004) identifies as necessary for schools to operate as an effective learning organization. In particular, survey data results were among the highest in vision, goals, and performance expectations, with a mean score of 4.75 ('strongly agree'). These results indicate that Anna Grace is able to lead Riverbend School towards developing as a learning organization.

Vision and Goals

Anna Grace leads Riverbend with a strong vision and goals. The teacher survey results for this section had means of 4.8 - 4.9 or "strongly agree." Teachers affirm that Anna Grace effectively communicates the school's purpose and helps clarify its practical implications, clarifying how it translates into instructional practices and school-wide priorities. Anna Grace shared that she founded Riverbend with a clear vision in mind:

> I didn't know about manifesting back then, but every day I would be driving to my job at that time, and I would be seeing a school. I'd be seeing children engaged in activities that they weren't at the school I was at. I would see admin and teachers with attitudes that I wasn't experiencing, and I would just have these visions…visions of the feelings and the tone and the curriculum and all these…wonderful things. And so it just didn't leave me. So, I went on a campaign to see if I could start something. And, it took me five years.

Her goal was to create a "forward thinking, forward moving" school that elevates the roles of teachers through "very respectful lines of responsibility and expectations." She applied the team-building professional development to identify strengths and streamline responsibilities, ensuring teachers at Riverbend understand their role in alignment with the school's mission.

Survey results affirm this leadership approach, where individuals understand their job responsibilities while maintaining a collective purpose. Further, she works towards a consensus among the whole staff in establishing priorities for school goals, reinforcing that each person contributes to overall school goals.

Culture

A positive and productive school culture is a key element of schools as learning organizations (Leithwood et al., 1998; Mulford et al., 2004; Senge, 1990, 2012). The data from this study indicates that the Riverbend has a positive and productive school culture. Paramount to this culture is a culture of respect. In the teacher survey, the 'respect' subsection received a high rating (4.8, 'strongly agree'), indicating strong perceptions of respect among staff and students. Anna Grace demonstrates respect for staff by treating them as professionals and using a respectful tone for interactions with teachers and students. As a Montessori school, Anna Grace explains that "there's such great respect for every individual child…whatever the child is drawn to, they can do that." She elaborates on the culture of respect by stating:

> In Montessori, you honor the child. You honor where they're coming from. And you know that all these gifts are inside this, this beautiful child, and you're just working with them for self-discovery, right? And the beauty of the Montessori, too, is that it's a three-year cycle. So when you have a 3 to 6-year-old span in the room, the six-year-olds become the teachers to the three-year-olds. Right. And that's the mastery level. And that's where you say this kid knows himself or herself. Right. And so they know how to give the lesson. They know it and they know themselves and they're confident and that's what we're always, you know, working for as a team is to make sure that those kids feel really self-confident once they've graduated from our program.

This culture of respect for individual students also contributes to a positive culture of respect for the teachers and leaders. She explains that "it's powerful."

Teachers at Riverbend also reported that Anna Grace includes teachers and staff in establishing priorities for school goals. She has established committees and teams to help guide decision-making. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, Anna Grace enlisted her teachers to brainstorm solutions, ultimately pivoting many aspects of the school outdoors. Teachers agree that she demonstrates a willingness to change practices in light of new understandings, an essential dimension of leadership for developing schools as learning organizations.

Structure

School structure is another essential dimension of educational leadership for developing schools as learning organizations (Mulford et al., 2004). Survey data indicated that the school's structure supports organizational learning, particularly through involvement in decision-making related to programs and instruction. As the COVID-19 example demonstrates, teachers and administrators collaborated to brainstorm creative solutions to navigate the implications of the global pandemic. The result was a robust outdoor learning environment, which included the introduction of an organic vegetable garden, sensory gardens, and mud kitchens. These became permanent elements of the school due to their effectiveness.

Relatedly, teachers reported that Anna Grace distributes leadership among staff representing various viewpoints. Anna Grace can distribute leadership in this way because she has taken the time to get to know her teachers and has done extensive team-building work, which allows her to appropriately identify the strengths each individual brings and align their job responsibilities accordingly. For example, she elevated a teacher with a background in

mindfulness to lead the school in certain mindfulness practices for teachers and students. Teachers report that Anna Grace ensures adequate teacher involvement in decision-making through effective communication. Anna Grace has implemented committee structures and holds weekly staff meetings structured by age level or division, committees, or as full faculty meetings to connect teachers and staff, share any community updates, and provide professional development opportunities. This structural model allows teachers to be involved in decision-making and fosters effective communication across the school.

Intellectual Stimulation

Both survey data and interview data support the presence of intellectual stimulation for teachers at Riverbend. Teachers report that Anna Grace is a source of new ideas for professional learning. She hosts monthly staff workshops and weekly staff meetings, where professional development is often provided to encourage intellectual growth for teachers. Anna Grace also meets with individual teachers "frequently and consistently" to check in on them and encourage their continued development. She encourages teachers to develop and review individual professional development goals that are consistent with school goals and priorities. For example, encouraging and helping assistant teachers complete their Montessori training and certification.

Anna Grace also encourages teachers to critically reflect on and refine their current teaching practices by leveraging their observation and reflection skills - both key tenets of Montessori teaching and learning. Anna Grace cites an example from her own Montessori training, when she was tasked with going to the zoo every week to observe an animal (in her case, an elephant). She elaborates that she would sit for hours and document everything the animal did in an effort to better understand the power of observation. Anna Grace explains that

she aims to bring this level of observation to the classroom as a “powerful tool” for her teachers and students.

Individual Support

Teachers at Riverbend School report that Anna Grace provides individual support for them, addressing both professional needs and emotional well-being. They describe Anna Grace as a leader aware of their unique needs and expertise. Anna Grace explained that she founded Riverbend School with the idea that each community member would be valued for their individual strengths. She shares that identifying individual strengths requires intentionally getting to know teachers. Anna Grace outlined that she provides both team-building exercises and individual meetings to help leaders and teachers identify their strengths and necessary areas of support. She gave the example of observing that a teacher’s energy was “off.” This prompted her to do an “energy check-in” with the teacher to learn more about what was going on and how she could support them. Anna Grace explained that these check-ins are a fundamental element of human interaction and leadership, and are essential within the school community. This approach aligns with leadership practices that prioritize emotional intelligence and teacher well-being. Of their check-in, Anna Grace explains that:

> And we just kind of had a heart-to-heart, like you know, I saw your, your, your engagement with others to be not quite yourself last week. So was that school-based or personal-based? If it's personal-based, you don't need to share it with me. School-based, and you think you can fix it, go ahead. But if it's school-based, and you want to talk about it, I'd like to know. And so we, we just really try to stay on top of those things. Because if somebody starts to go down in their energy, that's going to affect the group. And so then the people that are engaging with [them] are like, well, is she upset with me? Did I do

> something? What's up? You know what I mean. Just human interaction, right? When in fact, it could be something that happened at home that they're just not happy about. Right. So those discussions are very, very, very valuable.

Anna Grace's check-in demonstrates individual support for teachers and respect for their feelings and needs. These interpersonal interactions reinforce a culture of support and trust. Additionally, as outlined earlier, Anna Grace also provides support for individual professional development plans and growth through modeling, training, individual meetings, and goal-setting.

Performance Expectations

Anna Grace and Riverbend School received an overall 4.8 ('very strongly agree') in performance expectations, with nearly all sub-questions reflecting this high rating. Teachers report that Anna Grace sets and conveys high expectations for teachers, reinforcing professionalism and accountability. Anna Grace founded Riverbend School with the vision of a "forward-thinking, forward-moving" school with clear "lines of responsibility and expectations for teachers to really kind of elevate" teaching and learning. Anna Grace stayed true to this vision, and teachers report that their job responsibilities and performance expectations are both clear and high.

Teachers also describe innovation as a core expectation at Riverbend. Anna Grace encourages teachers to be creative and try new strategies, both of which are dimensions of leadership that align with developing schools as learning organizations. She also models innovation and adaptability, as seen during the COVID-19 pivot to outdoor learning. She explains that "we're constantly navigating a new reality," so you need to research and reassess. Anna Grace shared that from her vantage point, she feels many school leaders and educators "get so caught up in the doing, that they don't reassess." Still, she feels reassessing and making

changes accordingly are necessary for schools to evolve with the times, which is very much in alignment with the literature on developing schools as learning organizations (Mulford et al., 2004).

Community Focus

Survey and interview data confirm that Anna Grace fosters a positive school community at Riverbend, built largely on the foundations of team-building and respect as a cornerstone for school culture. Teachers report feeling that their contributions and the contributions of all staff members are valued and respected. Anna Grace reinforces a culture of collaboration and respect by providing ongoing professional development experiences for her staff related to team-building and provides clear expectations of roles and responsibilities. Doing so leads to a sense of community in which all teachers and staff feel valued and that their skills are leveraged appropriately and effectively. During the interview, Anna Grace shared that she enjoys developing a sense of community within schools, both within her school and others. She has extended her leadership roles beyond Riverbend School, and also works as an external consultant, and has created her own LLC for helping other schools develop positive school cultures and communities.

Additionally, the survey data reports that Anna Grace and her leadership team have "secured a high degree of autonomy for the school." As presented in the site description, Riverbend is a private preschool, so the school has a certain degree of autonomy that would not seen in a public school setting. It is important to note that the geographic area in which Riverbend School is located does not have universal public preschool available. Hence, the majority of preschools in the area are private schools. Riverbend is an independent and "standalone" preschool that is not a part of a larger chain of preschools. Being a private and

independent preschool was an important search criterion for inclusion within this study to allow for a deep look at the leadership and organizational structures as a microcosm.

Lastly, teachers also reported that Riverbend School has strong community partnerships. As Anna Grace described, she designed the school and its programmatic offerings to serve the needs of families in the community. She learned that there were many dual-working families in the area surrounding the school and wanted to offer programs accordingly. Hence, Riverbend offers a full day program for all ages and the option of both before and after-school care. Anna Grace and Riverbend provide a high-quality full-day plus program for children, while also providing local families with the comfort and security of a safe learning environment for their children. Anna Grace establishes relationships with families in the community by sharing ample communication with parents through school-wide announcements and updates, class announcements and updates, opportunities for parent involvement like volunteering, and professional development workshops like author talks. Additionally, Anna Grace guides Riverbend in establishing and maintaining relationships with other constituents in the community, like partnering with a local church on a shared outdoor space during the pandemic and providing mindfulness workshops for local residents.

Facilitation of Preschools as Learning Organizations (RQ 3)

The third research question for this study asks: How do educational leaders enact processes that facilitate the development of preschools as learning organizations? Data from Anna Grace and Riverbend teachers reveal key processes, routines, and structures that support organizational learning.

According to the data, Riverbend has several processes and routines implemented by Anna Grace to help facilitate organizational learning. Anna Grace founded Riverbend with the

vision of a school where teachers had clear expectations and job delineations. To help ensure this, Anna Grace provides written job descriptions and an overview of roles and responsibilities when teachers receive their contracts to work at the school. She also provides an annual orientation for teachers to discuss job responsibilities and expectations. These structures clarify roles and responsibilities, enabling teachers at Riverbend to understand and meet expectations. High performance expectations align with the research on developing schools as learning organizations.

Anna Grace also provides professional development for the teachers at Riverbend throughout the year, ensuring continuous teacher learning. Anna Grace has established a routine of monthly professional development days for all teachers. This monthly routine for professional development allows teachers to come together as a team and to learn and grow together - a key tenet of organizational learning. In addition to the monthly professional development opportunities for all teachers, Anna Grace meets individually with teachers regularly, and on an as-needed basis as well. She describes that providing routine team-building and professional development opportunities, and meeting individually with teachers allows her to get to know all of the teachers at Riverbend and provide supports as needed. She also routinely provides staff reviews biannually, including a self-review and a review conducted by Anna Grace. This structure helps measure staff performance and student outcomes to ensure quality teaching and learning, and helps to facilitate a culture of learning.

Another set of structures that Anna Grace has implemented at Riverbend is what she describes as a “system” of team-building exercises. Anna Grace incorporates these into the annual orientation for Riverbend teachers and throughout the school year, most often at the monthly professional development meetings. This approach and the implementation of ongoing

professional development related to team-building is one factor that the literature defines as helping schools develop as learning organizations (Mulford et al., 2004). Providing this structure of consistent team-building exercises allows the teaching team at Riverbend to "understand each other more deeply so that we can bring our strengths, but also work with our challenges. To just have a stronger team."

As the routine professional development meetings indicate, Anna Grace has structured routine meetings for teachers. She meets with the full faculty for the monthly professional development days and holds a weekly staff meeting. She meets with individual teachers routinely at certain checkpoints throughout the year and then as needed as well. Structures for routine meetings are consistent with the literature on facilitating organizational learning (Mulford et al., 2004). In congruence with routine meetings, Anna Grace also provides routine communication. She shares school-wide updates at meetings like the monthly professional development days, weekly teacher meetings, and via school newsletters. Teachers report that Anna Grace actively shares information with them and involves them in the decision-making processes when possible. These actions by Anna Grace help support a collaborative work culture, which is essential for organizational learning within schools.

A distinctive practice that Anna Grace implemented at Riverbend is the incorporation of meditation and mindfulness, which foster self-awareness and reflective learning. Anna Grace shared that she implemented mindfulness practices for her teachers during the pandemic and found them to be very effective in supporting individual and collective learning and reflections. She found them to be so effective that she held onto the practice after the peak of the pandemic, and now begins every meeting with a mindfulness practice. Consistent with her leadership

approach of modeling practices for teachers and students, she has now extended these mindfulness practices to the implementation of a mindfulness program for students as well.

Limits to the Facilitation of Preschools as Learning Organizations (RQ 4)

Research Question 4 asks: What leadership practices and associated processes limit the potential for developing preschools as learning organizations? This section examines leadership challenges that may hinder the development of preschools as learning organizations.

According to Anna Grace and supported by the literature, a lack of clear job responsibilities is an obstacle to developing preschools as learning organizations (Leithwood et al., 1998; Mulford et al., 2004; Senge, 1990, 2012). This aligns with the leading literature, which posits that a clear understanding and communication of performance expectations is an essential dimension of educational leadership for developing schools as learning organizations. Anna Grace recalled working at a school where unclear job responsibilities led to an ineffective work structure. Teachers were expected to complete non-teaching tasks, such as mopping floors, which detracted from essential instructional responsibilities like student observation. The lack of clear expectations can contribute to a negative school culture and climate, increase teacher turnover, and impact the program's quality. To counter this, Anna Grace provides and communicates clear job responsibilities to all faculty and staff.

A lack of clear job responsibilities can also be associated with a lack of respect for individual jobs, which can further hinder developing schools as learning organizations. When individual contributions are not respected, it represents a lack of teamwork and collaboration. When individuals and their jobs are respected, it represents a more effective and collaborative environment, which is essential for developing a school as a learning organization. Anna Grace shared that there was a lack of respect for individual jobs and job responsibilities at her first

school, contributing to a negative school culture. To counter this, Anna Grace structures a routine "system" of team-building exercises for all faculty and staff so that they can "function at a pretty high rate."

Lastly, Anna Grace shared that another barrier to developing schools as learning organizations is a fixed mindset and the inability to be forward-thinking. A "stuck" mindset makes it harder for individuals and organizations to adapt to the world's ever-changing needs. A lack of forward-thinking can serve as a detriment to a school, and can even result in its closure. As seen in the example from the pandemic, Anna Grace models a forward-thinking approach and growth mindset for Riverbend. Teachers report that she encourages them to take initiative and that she is open to change.

Case Summary

Riverbend School is a private preschool that enacts the four factors that define schools as learning organizations - a trusting and collaborative climate, a shared and monitored mission, taking initiatives and risks, and ongoing, relevant professional development. Anna Grace founded Riverbend to create a professional learning community where every member is a valued and integral part of the whole. The school climate fosters trust and collaboration, where individuals are respected and teamwork is an integral part of the school culture. Teachers and staff members have clearly defined responsibilities and are respected for their contributions. Taking initiatives and risks are both modeled and encouraged. Professional development is provided on an ongoing basis, in both individual and group formats.

Anna Grace, the founder and director of Riverbend School, exhibits the seven dimensions of educational leadership necessary to develop schools as learning organizations. She clearly articulates the school's vision and goals and uses this to guide all she does. Teamwork and

collaboration are valued and intentionally woven into the school community, contributing to a collaborative and positive culture. Job responsibilities and performance expectations are clearly defined and communicated, which contributes to the execution of a high-quality program. Professional development and individual support are provided on a differentiated basis for all teachers. The evidence of these seven dimensions of educational leadership suggests that Anna Grace is a strong educational leader who has successfully established Riverbend School as a learning organization.

Processes, routines, and structures are in place to facilitate ongoing learning at Riverbend School. Anna Grace has implemented structures for professional development, meetings, and communication. These work in conjunction to create an effective and positive culture of organizational learning. Additionally, Anna Grace actively works to counter barriers that may hinder the development of preschools as learning organizations, such as unclear expectations and a lack of respect. Through team and culture-building practices, she ensures that teachers at Riverbend feel empowered and valued as members of the school community.

Appendix I: Case Study School B: Stoneridge Academy[3]

Stoneridge Academy is a private "lab school" associated with a nearby university in the metropolitan area of a mid-Atlantic state. It serves approximately 64 students aged 2.5-5.5 years old. Molly Callahan is the founding director and is serving in her third year as the director. Molly has decades of experience in early childhood education. She earned her Bachelor of Arts in teaching and began her career as a Kindergarten teacher in the public school system. After several years of teaching, Molly realized she was drawn to school-wide leadership and pursued a master's degree in educational leadership. From there, she transitioned to an assistant principal at a local public school. When she had young children of her own, she decided to transition to a director role at a part-time preschool. Her decision was influenced by her personal experiences as a parent and the flexibility of a part-time role. Once she landed in early childhood education, she discovered it was a "really good fit" for her and she decided to remain in the field of early childhood educational leadership. She has served as director of a few preschools in the area and eventually landed at Stoneridge Academy.

Stoneridge Academy was established as a lab school through a collaboration between the university's School of Education and its administration. Its founding was a collaborative effort between the university's School of Education and university administration. University administration felt it would be both profitable and support the university's school of education. It was founded with a mission to provide high-quality early childhood education and support the development of best practices and research in early childhood education. Molly was brought on as the preschool's director a year before the preschool opened and was tasked with helping launch the preschool. During that year, Molly worked closely with university administration, builders, and architects to physically build the school. She was responsible for passing state

[3] The names of schools and individuals have been pseudonymized in order to provide anonymity.

licensing, hiring all inaugural staff, and securing enrollment. Stoneridge Academy was also founded with the intent of serving as a preschool for the university's faculty children. Despite this intent, only a small fraction of families with children enrolled in Stoneridge Academy are university employees. Most families with children enrolled in Stoneridge Academy are not associated with the university.

Stoneridge Academy has four classes, each with approximately 16 students and 2-3 teachers, depending on daily staffing needs. Each classroom includes a lead teacher, an assistant teacher, and, when staffing permits, a floating teacher for additional support. The classes are divided by age within 6-14 month age bands, for example, one class of 2.5 year olds, one class of 3 year olds, etc. All lead teachers are certified and hold a bachelor's degree in education or a related field. All teachers and employees continue their education with continuous professional development throughout the year. Given the school's recent founding, Stoneridge does not currently hold any additional credentials, such as an accreditation by the National Association for the Education of Young Children, but is in the multi-year process of acquiring them.

Context for Teacher Survey Results

Teacher survey results (Appendix K) indicate that Stoneridge Academy is a school that operates with many evident factors of an effective learning organization. At Stoneridge, 9 out of 12 teachers completed the survey, yielding a 75% participation rate. This level of response surpasses the typical rate for small-scale educational surveys, enhancing data reliability. This survey completion rate, paired with the interview data, signifies a very high participation rate from the surveyed population and indicates strong data reliability. The data collected is thus likely to be representative of the population and meaningful. As shown in Table 3, the data indicates that Stoneridge Academy has a trusting and collaborative school climate and a strong

sense of community. The school's vision and goals are shared, and performance expectations are high and clear. Of note, Stoneridge Academy had several survey questions that received a unanimous response rate of "strongly agree" or "5." The aggregate survey responses for individual questions and the overall average scores for each section were higher for Stoneridge Academy than for other schools included in this survey. This indicates that Stoneridge Academy not only operates as a strong learning organization, but as the strongest learning organization of the schools included in this study.

Table 3

Educational Leadership & Organizational Learning Survey Results for School B: Stoneridge Academy

Survey Section	Stoneridge (n = 9)
Educational Leadership	
1. Vision and Goals	4.75
2. Culture	4.44
3. Structure	4.65
4. Intellectual Stimulation	4.73
5. Individual Support	4.67
6. Performance Expectations	4.75
7. Community Focus	4.79
Distributed Leadership	
1. Influence	4.39
Organizational Learning	
1. Trusting and Collaborative Climate	4.83
2. Shared and Monitored Mission	4.82
3. Taking Initiatives/Risks	4.74
4. Ongoing, Relevant Professional Development	4.55

Note. This table provides the mean score of each survey question from each site and the mean composite score for each of the survey components. Respondents were asked to answer each question on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Characteristics of a Learning Organization (RQ 1)

The data collected in this study indicates that Stoneridge Academy demonstrates key characteristics of a learning organization, including a trusting and collaborative environment, shared and monitored mission, taking initiatives and risks, and ongoing, relevant professional development. The survey data from Stoneridge Academy yielded the highest numbers collected from all schools in this study, indicating that Stoneridge Academy is the strongest learning organization included.

Trusting and Collaborative Climate

Stoneridge Academy received high scores for the trusting and collaborative climate section of data collection. This was the highest scoring section for Stoneridge Academy in the survey, with an overall mean of 4.83 or "strongly agree" and two subsections - mutual support among teachers and colleagues used as resources - received the highest score possible (5 or "strongly agree"). One teacher describes that:

> This is the first environment that I have worked in that feels this way among the teaching team. I meet with my team daily over lunch, and while we all teach differently and see things differently, we have full respect for each other's opinions and insights. They seek to actively support me and help me grow as I do them.

Given that the school is less than three years old, the rapid establishment of a trusting and collaborative team environment is noteworthy. Molly actively works to put systems and structures in place to facilitate teacher collaboration at Stoneridge. She explains that during her

own teaching experiences, she found it very beneficial to visit other classrooms and learn from other teachers. To foster collaboration at Stoneridge Academy, Molly actively established systems and structures, such as ensuring shared lunch times for teachers. This required additional work on her part—managing ratios and staffing—but she ensured floating teachers, substitutes, and university students supported the shared lunch times. As a result, the shared lunch time has become a natural setting for collaboration and support among teachers. Another initiative Molly led was the installation of Dutch doors between classrooms to promote connection, collaboration, and mentoring. She collaborated with the school's builders and architects to implement this feature, describing it as "one of the seemingly simple but best ideas" for encouraging natural interactions among teachers. Teachers at Stoneridge Academy report that they regularly use their colleagues as resources and engage in professional dialogue, both formally in meetings and informally over lunch.

Shared and Monitored Mission

Stoneridge Academy has a strong and clearly articulated mission. The school was founded with the mission of providing a high-quality early childhood educational setting for both preschoolers and university students. Stoneridge Academy aims to create an innovative learning environment grounded in research and seeks to gain recognition for the program. Teachers and administrators both report that the school's mission is clearly communicated and shared by all stakeholders. They work in partnership towards achieving the school's mission and feel there is a coherent and shared sense of direction. Molly explains that while the genius of Stoneridge Academy was initiated by university administrators, Molly and her team collaborated to establish the mission and vision for the school. She explained that she worked with university administrators and that they "really collaborated" to establish the school's mission and vision.

Once she completed hiring, Molly was also able to involve the teachers and administrators of Stoneridge Academy in setting the direction for the school. Together, they helped design the school environment and establish programmatic structures, such as the curriculum. This collaborative process fostered teacher buy-in for the program and led to a committed staff. Teachers at Stoneridge report that they feel they have a voice in the school's direction and that they are actively sought out for their opinions, even if their opinions differ from the administration.

In addition to striving to create a high-quality early childhood program, Stoneridge also has a fiduciary responsibility to the university and must function as a profitable venture. Given the university's affiliation with Stoneridge Academy and the fiduciary responsibility that Stoneridge is tasked with, the school's mission is monitored by university administrators. This results in a school mission that is clearly communicated and visible. Teachers report that the program's effectiveness is regularly monitored and that they critically examine their practices to ensure alignment with the school's mission and strive for improvement.

Taking Initiatives/Risks

The culture of Stoneridge Academy is described by administrators and teachers as one where taking initiatives and risks is encouraged and supported. Teachers report feeling valued and empowered to take risks. They described that "people feel free to experiment" and that the administrators are open to change. One teacher emphasized the culture of risk-taking by stating, "I feel comfortable to fail. I feel supported and know that I am protected when I try something new." This statement illustrates that teachers feel supported and valued for their contributions, and therefore feel more comfortable taking risks. Molly shared that she works "really hard on making them [teachers] feel comfortable and confident that I'm not judging them…I think they

know I have their backs. They know I'm going to support them." Teachers echoed that sentiment, reporting that they feel supported by Molly. They describe Molly as a "wonderful" director who is "flexible in their thinking and is very helpful in difficult situations." This highlights the sense of safety and support Molly fosters at Stoneridge Academy.

The creation of the school was itself a risk, and Molly modeled this mindset by embracing challenges throughout the launch process. For example, she stepped into the unfamiliar territory of design and architecture while working with builders to design Stoneridge. Although she lacked formal training in these areas, Molly enjoyed learning about school design and contributing her insights. She stated that it was meaningful to spend a year building the school and bringing it to life. While she acknowledged encountering some "minor glitches" (e.g., a paint color that appeared lighter than expected and "scuffs easily"), she described the overall process as "fun" and a valuable learning experience.

In addition to feeling supported in taking initiatives and risks, teachers and administrators describe how the school structures at Stoneridge Academy encourage such behaviors. Molly has established systems that directly and indirectly support teacher initiatives and risk-taking. For example, as described earlier, she has involved teachers in decision-making for the school's direction. This fosters a sense of respect and empowerment, encouraging teachers to contribute ideas and take risks. All teachers and assistant teachers were involved in furnishing their classrooms and sharing responsibilities for launching the school. Molly shares that she could not do it all and had to relinquish some responsibilities to others. She describes that:

> My teachers ordered all the furniture. They worked together and furnished the classrooms. I think being able to relinquish some responsibilities to everyone in different ways, even the assistants, made them feel like they're a part of our team, they're

important. Like a cog in a wheel? I don't know what that saying is, but yeah, everybody plays their own part.

Teachers described Molly as open to change and welcoming of teacher input when opinions differ. As one teacher shared, Molly "listens to us when we disagree with a decision." This statement iterates that Molly leads Stoneridge Academy with an openness for differing opinions and that she values different perspectives. Further, it demonstrates that teachers at Stoneridge feel comfortable sharing their opinions and taking initiatives and risks.

Ongoing, Relevant Professional Development

Ongoing and relevant professional development was evident at Stoneridge Academy. As a lab school of the local university and in alignment with its mission of serving as a learning environment for both preschool students and university students/teachers, Stoneridge Academy strives to provide continuous professional development for teachers and administrators. Teachers reported that they routinely engaged in ongoing professional development and felt that adequate time was provided for professional development.

Similar to her risk-taking approach, Molly actively models lifelong learning and professional development for her teachers. One teacher stated that Molly is "a lifelong learner." Molly has a growth mindset and is flexible and open to change. Molly has a growth mindset and is flexible and open to change. She openly shares that launching Stoneridge Academy was her first school-building experience and that she is learning constantly. Molly's transparency reflects the qualities of a learning leader who willingly admits what they don't know and how others help to support the work. She doesn't have all the answers, nor does she pretend to have them. Molly also shared that she intentionally hired teachers whom she felt had growth mindsets as well. She described that throughout the hiring process, she ensured she was hiring "really savvy teachers"

who demonstrated an openness and flexibility to grow along with the new school. She looked for teachers who “wanted to learn alongside of the kids.” Hiring with these traits in mind and prior to the school’s opening required teachers to be able to see the school’s vision and help bring it to fruition.

While Molly feels she hired teachers with natural growth mindsets, she also encourages teachers at Stoneridge to pursue individualized professional development and provides them with whole school professional development. One teacher shared that “My head of school fully encourages us to continue to learn.” Another teacher stated, "we are completely encouraged to seek professional development and our admin shares opportunities with us.” Stoneridge Academy makes use of available resources for professional development, including external advisors, professional associations, and professional readings. In accordance with the school’s mission, teachers and administrators monitor what is happening outside of school to find out about best practices. As one teacher stated, “My head of school has actively researched with me/reached out to professionals/found coverage for me to attend PD in areas I desire to grow.”

Not only does Molly encourage teachers to pursue their own professional development, but she also provides appropriate structures to support it. This includes both formal and informal opportunities for learning. For example, through the addition of Dutch doors between classrooms and synchronized lunch breaks for teachers, natural collegial mentorship occurs. More formally, Molly ensures that she helps individual teachers develop their professional development plans. Molly explains that “she really tries to support them and provide different opportunities for learning.” She meets individually with teachers to establish their professional development plans and helps them find appropriate professional development opportunities. Many of the assistant teachers at Stoneridge are working towards earning certifications and/or degrees in education. Of

note, teachers report that Molly provides funding and coverage when they attend external professional development opportunities. In addition to individualized professional development, teachers at Stoneridge Academy also receive whole school professional development related to their professional areas (early childhood education) and training in working and learning in teams. Molly schedules monthly whole-school professional development days and an orientation in August to allow for this.

Dimensions of Educational Leadership (RQ 2)

According to the data collected in this study, Molly exhibits the seven dimensions of educational leadership needed for developing schools as learning organizations. Overall, among all the schools and leaders included in this study, Molly received the highest leadership scores on the teacher survey. Teacher survey comments at Stoneridge Academy reinforced Molly's effectiveness as an educational leader, highlighting that she is "wonderful," "supportive," and "guides us [teachers] with kindness and strength. She values our input but is a confident and capable leader. Additionally, the language and information gathered during Molly's interview further supported the strength of her leadership skills. These leadership skills are discussed in detail in the following sections.

Vision and Goals

To further understand how Molly exemplifies strong leadership, this section explores how she demonstrates the seven dimensions of educational leadership, beginning with her ability to articulate and embody the vision and goals of Stoneridge Academy. Stoneridge Academy has a strongly established and articulated vision. As previously mentioned, the mission of Stoneridge Academy is to provide a high-quality educational program for preschoolers and university students. Its vision is to apply and develop research-based best practices in early childhood

education, and to be recognized for such. While the university established the school's mission and vision, Molly was brought in to help develop the preschool from its inception and establish how the vision would look in practice. She has fully embraced the university's vision for the school as her own. Out of all the dimensions of educational leadership included in this study, the section on 'Vision and Goals' was Molly's highest-scoring section on the survey. Teachers report that Molly embodies and models the school's mission in practice. As one teacher shared earlier, Molly is a "lifelong learner," which strongly aligns with the mission and vision of the school. In the survey, Stoneridge teachers expressed that Molly gives teachers a sense of overall purpose. By embodying the school's mission and vision, Molly fosters a shared sense of purpose among staff, which the literature identifies as a foundational element of schools functioning as learning organizations (Mulford et al., 2004).

In addition to embodying and modeling the mission and vision of Stoneridge Academy, Molly also clearly communicates the school's mission and vision to teachers and families. She helps clarify its purpose regarding practical applications for programs and instruction. Molly described that she feels it's important "to be transparent and [have] really good communication with the teachers and parents." She shares and teachers report that this extends to including teachers in setting school-wide goals and determining priorities. One teacher stated, "She [Molly] values our input, but is a confident and capable leader." This statement iterates that Molly leads Stoneridge with a clear vision and goals, while also involving teachers in decision-making. She works towards consensus among the whole staff in determining priorities for the school, but she also demonstrates flexibility and an openness to different opinions and perspectives. As one teacher described, "We are actively seeked out for our opinions. [We are] listened to when we disagree." Teachers reported feeling consistently heard and valued, even

when presenting differing perspectives, highlighting Molly's inclusive and distributed leadership style. These sentiments describe a leader who is inspiring and inclusive. This distributed leadership approach aligns with the literature on educational leadership for developing schools as learning organizations (Mulford et al., 2004).

Culture

School cultures that foster organizational learning are those in which the school leader creates a positive and productive culture of mutual respect and collaboration (Mulford et al., 2004). As is evident from her practices and the teacher feedback, Molly has established a positive and productive school culture at Stoneridge Academy. As one teacher describes, Molly "really values me as a person, professional, and part of the team." Another teacher said, "we have full respect for each other's opinions and insights." These statements demonstrate the culture of respect and collaboration that Molly has established at Stoneridge Academy. Teachers unanimously report that Molly respects staff by treating them as professionals. Teachers also report that Molly sets a respectful tone for interactions with students. This culture of respect aligns with the literature, which identifies mutual respect and collaboration as critical components of schools functioning as learning organizations (Mulford et al., 2004).

Additionally, Molly demonstrates a collaborative culture by actively working to include teachers in decision-making. Teachers report that they feel included in establishing priorities for the school and setting goals. Molly shares that, as a small school with only four classrooms, she knew it would be essential to hire teachers whom she could entrust with decision-making. She prioritized hiring "savvy" teachers who could help in areas outside her strengths. For example, Molly described that curriculum was not her strength, so she specifically hired teachers with strong curricular backgrounds to assist in this area. Molly values and respects all of the teachers

at Stoneridge Academy and stated that “all the teachers I have are just amazing. They provide an academic environment within the structure of a play-based program.” Similarly, teachers share that “Molly is wonderful” and “it is wonderful to work for a director like Molly.” These statements demonstrate the mutual respect that the teachers and administrators of Stoneridge have for one another - a necessary component for a culture of organizational learning and developing preschools as learning organizations.

Another element that describes Stoneridge Academy's culture is its focus on “fun.” Molly explains that while there is “always work to be done,” she strives to create a fun environment for teachers and staff at Stoneridge Academy. Molly fosters this sense of fun by organizing team-building activities during professional development days, encouraging humor and camaraderie during meetings, and modeling an approachable and lighthearted demeanor with both staff and parents. She models this attribute in her own actions, for example, explaining that while building the school kept her busy and had its challenges, “it has also been super fun.” Molly aims for her teachers to have both “freedom” and “fun” alongside the children. Molly describes that “We like to have a lot of fun. We laugh. We joke… It’s community building…” Molly also extends this sense of fun to parents as well. She describes that:

> I’m fun with the parents too. I laugh with them, and I just try to encourage them not to take everything too seriously. I’m kind of trying to help them grow as well, and educate them since I’ve been there. I look back on my parenting and some of the stressful moments of my own, you things, things that I thought were like, super important… and I try to just tell parents, I’m like, you know, it’s okay because you’re going to look back and be like, that was not a big deal.

This example emphasizes that Molly integrates a sense of fun and perspective-taking into the culture of Stoneridge Academy, and extends this to all stakeholders — teachers, students, and parents.

Structure

The data from this study indicates that Molly has established school structures that support organizational learning at Stoneridge Academy. The teacher survey results for the section on structure were high for Molly and Stoneridge Academy and averaged above 4.5 or "strongly agree." Schools with structures that support organizational learning and the development of schools as learning organizations allow for teacher participation in decision making (Mulford et al., 2004). Both teachers and the leadership (Molly) described such structures at Stoneridge Academy. Teachers resoundingly report that Molly ensures that they have adequate involvement in decision-making. Molly's distributed leadership approach is evident in her intentional involvement of teachers in key decisions, such as classroom design and setting school goals. By including teachers in these processes, she fosters a sense of ownership and collaboration that aligns with the principles of organizational learning. Molly intentionally involved her teachers in the classroom design, both because she knew she could not do it all and because she wanted to have their expertise and buy-in. Molly shared:

> There was no way that I could possibly have my hands in all of it. I just had to acquiesce. So I said to my teachers, whatever you need for the classroom, you need to order it. My teachers they ordered all the furniture. They worked together and they furnished the classrooms. I think being able to relinquish some responsibilities to everybody in different ways, and even the assistants feel that way, like they were all in charge of something. And then they feel like they're a part of our team and they're important like a

> cog in a wheel. I don't know what that saying is, but yeah, everybody plays their own part.

This statement reinforces that Molly has a distributed approach to leadership and involves teachers in decision-making, which aligns with the structural characteristics observed in schools that support organizational learning. It also demonstrates that Molly distributes leadership broadly among the staff, representing various viewpoints. This is evident when Molly included all teachers and assistant teachers in classroom design and furnishing. In addition to the classroom design example, Molly shared the example of involving teachers in establishing and setting goals for the school. Teachers at Stoneridge report that they "are actively seeked out for their opinions." Molly describes that this was especially important during their initial launch, as she had her hands full and they had a broad vision to fulfill. By involving teachers in setting priorities for school goals, she once again demonstrated a distributed and inclusive leadership approach. As is common in schools, Molly explained that their goals change over time. For example, while some initial goals during their first year were to furnish the classrooms and secure enrollment, four years later, one of their main goals is to redesign their outdoor learning space.

In addition to involving the teachers of Stoneridge Academy in decision-making and establishing priorities, Molly has also implemented daily structures that help facilitate organizational learning. For example, she hires floaters and substitute teachers to cover teacher breaks, enabling teachers to share the same lunch break. This time is used for both formal and informal learning and development. As one teacher described,

> This is the first environment that I have worked in that feels this collaboration among the teaching team. I meet with my team daily over lunch, and while we all teach differently

and see things differently, we have full respect for each other's opinions and insights. They seek to actively support me and help me grow as I do them.

This structure facilitates effective and frequent communication among teachers, which is essential for schools to operate as learning organizations. Another such structure Molly implemented is the inclusion of Dutch doors between classrooms, which allows for frequent informal conversations, collaboration, and mentoring. Additionally, she established routine structures for professional development, including an orientation at the beginning of the year, bi-weekly meetings, and individual professional development plans. These structures collectively contribute to a culture of learning at Stoneridge Academy.

Intellectual Stimulation

The data for this study supports that Molly provides intellectual stimulation for the teachers at Stoneridge Academy, which facilitates organizational learning. This dimension of educational leadership includes challenging teachers to examine their current practices and stimulating new ideas for teaching and learning. Teachers at Stoneridge report that Molly encourages them to evaluate their practices and refine them as needed. She meets with all teachers individually to develop and review their professional growth goals in accordance with school goals. Molly encourages teachers at Stoneridge to pursue their own goals for professional learning. Molly also extends performance expectations to students. Stoneridge Academy uses a curriculum with student benchmarks and reports them to parents twice a year through conferences and reports. One teacher stated that Molly “fully encourages us to continue to learn.” Another teacher described that “We are completely encouraged to seek professional development and our admin shares opportunities with us.” In the interview, Molly outlined that she intentionally looked to hire teachers with “growth mindsets who just wanted to learn alongside of

the kids." She explains that she has teachers in all stages of their learning journeys - with lead teachers who are very knowledgeable in certain areas of expertise, such as curriculum, assistant teachers "who are working really hard on their degrees," floaters, substitutes, and undergraduate and graduate students from the university. Molly describes that she is "really trying to support them in moving in their direction [of their professional development goals] and providing different opportunities.

Teachers at Stoneridge describe Molly as a "lifelong learner." They note that she serves as a source of inspiration and new ideas for professional learning by actively researching areas for their individual growth and modeling her own individual growth plan. One teacher shared that Molly "actively researched with me and reached out to professionals and found coverage for me to attend PD [Professional Development] in areas I desire to grow." The professional development and modeling that Molly provides are key dimensions of leadership for developing schools as learning organizations.

Individual Support

In alignment with intellectual stimulation, Molly also provides individual support for teachers at Stoneridge Academy. Molly meets individually with teachers to develop and review their professional growth goals in accordance with school goals, actively supporting them at whatever stage they are in their professional growth plans. In addition to developing individualized professional development plans, she also provides individual support as needed. The teachers of Stoneridge Academy report that Molly knows them as individuals and is aware of their unique expertise and needs. Molly frequently visits classrooms and helps with challenging student behaviors as needed. She explained that teachers at Stoneridge "feel comfortable to fail in the setting and they feel protected when they try something new, even if it

doesn't work." She elaborated that "they know that I'm there and I'll be there to help them clean up the mess or support them and figure out a way." Molly described that "this is the only way you grow." These examples and statements illustrate that Molly provides her teachers with the supports necessary to facilitate both individual and organizational learning.

While Molly supports each of her teachers individually, she also explained that she utilizes a team approach to support individual teacher learning at Stoneridge. Molly described that "it's a team approach. We work together." There are a lot of opportunities for team learning at Stoneridge Academy. In addition to the individual growth plans and supports that she provides, Molly also provides both formal and informal opportunities for meetings and mentoring. These range from formal trainings at staff orientations and monthly professional development meetings to informal supports like synchronized team lunches and opportunities to collaborate and communicate across classes through the Dutch doors between classrooms. Molly shares that "a lot of learning and mentoring happens very naturally here."

In the end, the teachers of Stoneridge Academy resoundingly report that they feel supported by Molly. In alignment with the section on taking initiatives and risks, teachers described feeling supported both when they take risks and in their professional development. As one teacher shared, "I feel comfortable to fail. I feel supported and know that I am protected when I try something new." Molly explained that "They know I have their backs. They know I'm going to support them." These statements from teachers and leadership iterate that Molly provides the individual support necessary to support individual and organizational learning at Stoneridge Academy.

Performance Expectations

At Stoneridge Academy, performance expectations for teachers are clearly defined through job descriptions, structured evaluations, and ongoing professional development plans. As a lab school under a university, job postings and responsibilities are communicated via the university, and Molly ensures teachers adhere to those responsibilities. Teachers at Stoneridge Academy report that Molly has high expectations for both teachers and students. In alignment with the school's mission and vision, Molly explains that the university establishes and monitors certain elements of Stoneridge Academy, such as the mission, overall financial standing, and some human-resource-related aspects, including job postings and benefits. She describes the relationship with the university administration as one where they "work together" and "really collaborate." While Molly collaborates with the university administration, she is granted the freedom and responsibility to define specific standards, such as job responsibilities. As described earlier, Molly establishes individualized professional development plans with all of her teachers. Molly decided to make the individualized professional development plans in alignment with those that the rest of the university uses. They include goal setting and an evaluation with a rating scale completed by the individual and the manager. The use of this university-wide system ensures that performance expectations are clear for teachers at Stoneridge Academy.

Community Focus

The data included in this study indicates that Molly has established a strong community at Stoneridge Academy. The section on community was the highest scoring survey section for Molly and Stoneridge Academy, with an average score of 4.8 or "strongly agree." Molly explained that while Stoneridge was initially intended to be a preschool primarily for the children of university faculty members, there were not enough faculty children, so Stoneridge evolved

into a community preschool serving families in the neighborhood. Molly actively works to further develop community with the families of Stoneridge Academy. She shared that she has always enjoyed working with parents and that this is one reason she pursued educational leadership. Molly described several cultural elements she uses to foster positive relationships with parents. As noted earlier, she incorporates laughter and fun into her interactions with parents. She explained that she seeks to educate parents and encourages them not to take everything too seriously. She helps parents understand that issues that may seem significant now often appear minor in hindsight. Molly openly shares her own parenting stories to establish connections with parents. While Molly uses humor and personal stories to connect with parents, she also values timeliness and transparency in her communication. She explains that many families joined Stoneridge Academy after leaving a local preschool they felt lacked transparency. Molly emphasizes that it is "really important to be approachable and have good communication with the parents." She describes how the school strives to quickly address issues and adopt a collaborative approach. Teachers feel that Molly has established strong communication with families, and they unanimously report that Stoneridge Academy actively shares information with parents and the broader community.

In addition to building a community with the parents of Stoneridge Academy, Molly has also built relationships with the broader community. As a lab school affiliated with a local university, Stoneridge Academy collaborates with the university's School of Education by hosting student teachers, facilitating research projects, and providing employment opportunities for graduate and undergraduate students. Given the connection with the university, Stoneridge is able to make "good use" of external advisors and resources, such as teacher professional associations.

Of course, teachers are a vital part of a school community. A community where individuals feel valued and respected is an essential condition for fostering organizational learning within a school (Mulford et al., 2004). Teachers at Stoneridge Academy reported that they feel like valued members of the school community and that the contributions of all staff members are valued. In alignment with the discussion of school culture, Molly has successfully developed a school community of respect. Teachers also reported that she respects staff and students,, treats them like professionals,, and values their input. They feel respected by Molly and each other. One teacher shared that "we have full respect for each other's opinions and insights." These statements describe a school community that fosters organizational learning.

Facilitation of Preschools as Learning Organizations (RQ 3)

The third research question for this study asks: How do educational leaders enact processes that facilitate the development of preschools as learning organizations? To address this research question, data from Molly and the teachers at Stoneridge Academy was analyzed to identify key processes, routines, and structures that support organizational learning.

Stoneridge Academy has implemented several processes and routines that facilitate organizational learning. One of the most notable structures Molly has introduced is the use of both formal and informal meetings. These structures, identified in the literature as fostering organizational learning within schools (Mulford et al., 2004), are integral to Stoneridge Academy's operations. Molly and the teachers report meeting routinely in formal settings, including bi-weekly meetings, individual meetings between teachers and leadership, and an annual whole-school orientation.

Informally, Molly and the teachers connect daily. Molly intentionally implements small but impactful structures to encourage informal interactions among teachers. She explained that

“A lot of mentoring happens, just very naturally here.” This occurs because of the structures she has established to enable collaboration and mentoring. For example, she designed classrooms to connect via Dutch doors, facilitating informal collaboration and mentoring. She said that “I do think that was like one of the best ideas. Because remember how I started this whole thing? I was going into other people’s classrooms. Well, this allows for that. And, for that collaboration.” Another structure Molly works to ensure is daily time for teachers to collaborate and plan, either formally or informally. She explained that “I try really hard to make the teacher's lunch times together.” The teachers at Stoneridge appreciate these efforts. One teacher described:

> This is the first environment that I have worked in that feels this [“a collaborative climate’] among the teaching team. I meet with my team daily over lunch, and while we all teach differently and see things differently, we have full respect for each other's opinions and insights. They seek to actively support me and help me grow as I do them.

As this teacher statement illustrates, the structures implemented by Molly foster a collaborative culture of learning at Stoneridge Academy.

In relation to the formal and informal meetings focused on professional development, Molly has also implemented routine professional development structures to facilitate organizational learning and develop Stoneridge Academy as a learning organization. As Molly and the teachers shared, routine opportunities for individual and whole-school professional development are offered. Teachers meet individually with Molly throughout the year to develop professional development plans, conduct check-ins, and assess progress toward performance expectations. Teachers also meet as a group at the annual school orientation, bi-weekly meetings, and connect daily. These structures allow for ongoing and routine professional development, a key component of developing a school as a learning organization.

Limits to the Facilitation of Preschools as Learning Organizations (RQ 4)

Research Question 4 asks: What leadership practices and associated processes limit the potential for developing preschools as learning organizations? In addition to identifying practices that help facilitate a culture of learning and develop preschools as learning organizations, it is also important to identify processes that may limit organizational learning in preschools.

Molly shared that the most significant obstacle to organizational learning at Stoneridge Academy is "growth." As a new school, the growth experienced at Stoneridge Academy over the past few years has been rapid. As a lab school under the local university administration, Stoneridge Academy falls under the "grander vision of being a for-profit organization that was set from the top down." As a for-profit organization, Stoneridge Academy "needs to bring money in to pay for the building, etc." By design, the university profits when operating at full capacity with maximum enrollment. Molly, therefore, works to ensure full enrollment at the school. She explained that it was initially challenging to meet enrollment targets because she could not show families the school in person. Molly had to work to enroll families in the program "sight unseen." To address this, Molly and the architects created a virtual tour, but she acknowledged that "it wasn't the real thing." Through determination and effort, Molly was able to meet the university's enrollment requirements to open the school, after which Stoneridge Academy continued to grow. As student enrollment increased, the demand for additional teachers grew. Molly noted that managing staffing and student-teacher ratios remained a persistent challenge. Molly explained that as student enrollment numbers grew, the need to hire new teachers emerged. She stated that "growth has been [another] challenge because it's just constantly trying to figure out staffing and ratios with the kids." Molly shared that during the initial years, she

spent significant time and energy on enrollment and hiring, which detracted from other critical areas, such as curriculum development.

Similarly, Molly reported that another obstacle to organizational learning is that "there is too much going on." As a lab school affiliated with the local university, Stoneridge Academy is involved in research projects, resources, and events. With its mission to support the university's School of Education and contribute to early childhood education research, Stoneridge welcomes these opportunities. However, Molly explained that hosting too many research projects can overwhelm teachers and detract from programmatic goals. She described Stoneridge as a "revolving door for research" and shared that "it has been a bit of a challenge" because they're also trying to accomplish their programmatic goals. At the time of this study, Stoneridge was exploring ways to limit research requests and "keep a lid on that pot" to prevent teacher overwhelm and focus on achieving its internal goals.

Molly also highlights teacher burnout as a prevalent issue in early childhood education. While she has not observed burnout among the faculty at Stoneridge, she acknowledges it as a potential challenge. To mitigate this, Molly aims to reduce external research demands to avoid overwhelming teachers. Excessive research demands from the university have the potential to overwhelm teachers, contributing to burnout. This can hinder organizational learning by reducing teachers' ability to engage in collaborative practices and professional development. Molly explains that she "tries really hard to avoid burnout." When teachers experience burnout, they are less likely to engage in additional learning efforts that characterize a learning organization. To avoid teacher burnout, Molly prioritizes onboarding and scheduling substitute teachers and floaters to ensure teachers have adequate time for breaks and planning during the day. This also enables teachers to collaborate and build a sense of community during lunch.

Another potential barrier to organizational learning and developing preschools as learning organizations is transparency, or a lack thereof. Molly noted that many families enrolled at Stoneridge Academy after leaving another preschool where they were dissatisfied with the lack of transparency. As a result, Molly made transparency a priority at Stoneridge. She explained it was important to demonstrate transparency and establish trust with the families at Stoneridge. High levels of trust and strong levels of communication facilitate organizational learning (Mulford et al., 2004). A lack of transparency indicates a lack of communication and trust, creating barriers to organizational learning. To combat the lack of transparency, Molly tried "really, really hard to communicate." She elaborated that it was "really important to me that I was approachable and had really good communication." Molly extends this communication to parents and also teachers. This is evident through many of the structures she has put in place, such as routine meetings.

Case Summary

Stoneridge Academy is a preschool that enacts the four factors that define schools as learning organizations - a trusting and collaborative climate, a shared and monitored mission, taking initiatives and risks, and ongoing, relevant professional development. As a lab school of a local university, the school's vision and mission are set by the university, which aims to deliver a high-quality educational program for the preschoolers who enroll in Stoneridge, and to positively impact the field of early childhood education through research-based best practices.

The school climate at Stoneridge Academy is one of trust and collaboration, where teachers feel respected and supported. Molly Callahan is the first director of Stoneridge Academy, and she leads the school by modeling lifelong learning. Teachers are encouraged to take initiatives and

risks. Professional development is an ongoing and integral part of the culture of Stoneridge Academy, strengthened by the school's partnership with the university.

Molly demonstrates the seven dimensions of educational leadership necessary to develop schools as learning organizations. While the university established the school's vision and mission, Molly plays an integral role in setting goals and establishing priorities. She takes a team approach and distributes leadership among teachers. The culture is one of collaboration and support, with teachers and administrators supporting one another formally and informally. Different perspectives and opinions are welcome. Structures, such as synchronized team planning times and routine meetings, are in place to help facilitate learning. Teachers are encouraged and supported to pursue individual professional development plans. They are held to high performance expectations which are clearly communicated and assessed. There is a strong sense of community, which extends beyond students, teachers, and administrators to include parents.

Molly has established formal and informal professional development systems and meetings to support organizational learning. These structures support organizational learning and help develop Stoneridge Academy as a learning organization. Molly has also implemented structures to reduce barriers to organizational learning at Stoneridge Academy. This entails a focus on communication and transparency for parents. Additionally, Molly also actively works to reduce teacher burnout and turnover by implementing structures such as synchronized and frequent breaks for teachers. Teachers at Stoneridge Academy recognize and appreciate such structures. They report that they feel valued and supported at Stoneridge Academy.

Appendix J: Case Study School C: Citizens School[4]

Citizens School, founded over 50 years ago, is a private, play-based preschool serving 68 students from 18 months to 5.5 years old. The school is located in a metropolitan area in a mid-Atlantic state. Thomas Russell is the current director and is serving in his eighth year at the time of our interview. He began his career in schools through an associate teacher program, where he served as a fellow for two years and was trained by "veteran" teachers. After his fellowship program, Thomas became a lead early childhood teacher and taught for several years before transitioning into school administration. His first role as a school administrator was as a director of auxiliary programs and summer camps, and then he became a preschool director. Thomas has a bachelor's degree in education and a master's degree in educational psychology. His tenure at Citizens School began following the 30-year leadership of his predecessor, who played a pivotal role in shaping the school's foundation and traditions.

Citizens School offers five classes across two programs - an infant/toddler program and a preschool program. The infant/toddler program is a one-year program for students ages 18 months to 2.5 years. The preschool program is a mixed-aged program for students 2.5 to 5.5 years old. The students in the mixed-aged program stay in the same class for the duration of the program (3 years). Class sizes vary from 12 to 18 students depending on the classroom size. Half and full day programs, as well as after-school programs, are offered. The school maintains the necessary state student:teacher ratios and has 2-3 teachers per classroom, depending on the number of students in the class. Citizens School employs 15 teachers. All teachers at Citizens are co-teachers - there is no designation of lead or assistant teachers within a classroom. All teachers have a bachelor's degree in education or a related field, and some hold a master's degree as well. Citizens School uses an emergent and play-based curriculum that focuses on the interests of the

[4] The names of schools and individuals have been pseudonymized in order to provide anonymity.

children and development of the whole child. The school recently earned accreditation from NAEYC - the National Association for the Education of Young Children - which indicates that the school has met a high-quality standard for best practices in early childhood education.

Context for Teacher Survey Results

Teacher survey results (Appendix K) suggest Citizens School operates as a learning organization. Of the 15 teachers at Citizens School, 7 completed the survey, yielding a just under 50% participation rate. This response rate exceeds the average survey completion rate and is considered robust. Combined with the interview data, this high level of survey participation enhances the findings' reliability. Consequently, the data is deemed representative of the population and meaningful for analysis. As shown in Table 3, the data indicates that Citizens School has a strong sense of community. The scho ol climate is one of trust and collaboration. The school holds high performance expectations, while also providing individual support for teachers to meet these high performance expectations.

Table 4

Educational Leadership & Organizational Learning Survey Results for School C: Citizens School

Survey Section	Citizens (n = 7)
Educational Leadership	
1. Vision and Goals	4.07
2. Culture	4.05
3. Structure	3.53
4. Intellectual Stimulation	4.33
5. Individual Support	4.61
6. Performance Expectations	4.71
7. Community Focus	4.75

(Table Continues)

Table 4, Continued

Survey Section	Citizens (n = 7)
Distributed Leadership	
1. Influence	4.42
Organizational Learning	
1. Trusting and Collaborative Climate	4.42
2. Shared and Monitored Mission	3.97
3. Taking Initiatives/Risks	4.16
4. Ongoing, Relevant Professional Development	3.99

Note. This table provides the mean score of each survey question from each site and the mean composite score for each of the survey components. Respondents were asked to answer each question on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Characteristics of a Learning Organization (RQ 1)

The data collected in this study indicates that Citizens School operates as a high-level learning organization. Through both survey and interview data, strong indications of the characteristics of a learning organization - a trusting and collaborative environment, shared and monitored mission, taking initiatives and risks, and ongoing, relevant professional development were evident. There is a strong sense of community at Citizens School, which includes what teachers report as strong levels of individual support from school leadership. Expectations are high, and there is a strong emphasis on professional development. As Thomas Russell, the school's leader, explained, "It is a small and intimate community, with strong relationships."

Trusting and Collaborative Climate

A trusting and collaborative climate is a key component of schools that facilitate organizational learning (Mulford et al., 2004). At Citizens School, this was the highest-rated area in the survey (mean score: 4.42, 'strongly agree'), indicating a well-established culture of trust and cooperation. The director, Thomas Russell, explains that he has worked diligently to build trust and collaboration at the school. Thomas emphasizes that collaboration and relationships are fundamental to a school's culture, stating that prioritizing relationship-building leads to positive outcomes and a more cohesive learning environment. He shared that when he first began working in schools as a teacher fellow, the veteran teacher he was paired with immediately trusted and collaborated with him. He found this trust and collaboration to be profoundly meaningful and impactful, as it fostered a highly effective teaching team. This experience left a lasting impression on him, inspiring his commitment to instilling these conditions at Citizens School.

Thomas explains that collaboration and relationships are “a vital part of a school, of a school’s culture.” He feels “relationship building is so impactful” for a school and that “so many good things happen when that is a goal of yours as a leader.” Thomas states that when working in schools:

> You're building something with others. You're cultivating something with others. You're partnering, you know, with parents, with the same goal in mind with others. So it's like the relationship successes can be had with relationship-driven approaches to whatever you're doing. And I think that with that in mind, a lot of good things happen, especially as the school leader, when those relationships are built, but then also like maintained.

These statements underscore Thomas's value in building relationships and creating a collaborative environment. Given the value he places on relationships, Thomas actively works to develop relationships with and among teachers to create a collaborative and trusting climate. To foster relationships, Thomas established a structured format of weekly teacher meetings. These brief yet consistent gatherings provide a dedicated time for colleagues to check in, share insights, and strengthen collaboration. He encourages teachers to share successes, but also "flops." The meetings are hosted in a different classroom each week on a rotating schedule. This arrangement allows teachers to connect and collaborate by observing other classrooms. Thomas explains that he has "seen a lot of cross-classroom dialogue or partnerships from this cross-classroom collaboration."

The survey results support Thomas's desire to develop relationships and collaboration at Citizens School. Teachers report that they have built relationships with one another and that there is mutual respect and support among teachers. Survey results indicate that discussions among colleagues are honest and that teachers are tolerant of each other's opinions. Teachers shared that colleagues are used as resources and there is ongoing professional dialogue among teachers. As one teacher shared, "We work as a team." These results indicate that Citizens School has established a culture of trust and collaboration, as is seen in schools that facilitate organizational learning.

Shared and Monitored Mission

Survey and interview data indicate that Citizens School has a shared and monitored mission, a fundamental characteristic of schools that facilitate organizational learning. The mission is to foster a community where all are valued. This sense of community is strengthened by the value Thomas places on building relationships. The school's emphasis on community

aligns with the work they have done to create a trusting and collaborative environment. As Thomas shared, they actively work to build and maintain relationships and community. There are structures in place, such as the weekly faculty meetings, to help foster and cultivate this sense of community where all feel valued. Thomas shared that another key element in building community is the incorporation of celebrations, big and small. These range from more formal celebrations, like large school fundraisers, to more informal celebrations, like teacher birthdays. Teachers feel the school actively shares information with the community, including teachers and parents. Parents are also valued members of the community at Citizens. In addition to helping with events like school fundraisers, they have opportunities to engage with the school daily, ranging from stopping in classrooms to drop off their children to helping with art projects.

There is a coherent and shared sense of direction guided by the school leadership. The school's vision is to provide a play-based learning environment that fosters children's growth. This vision is clearly articulated throughout the school, and administrators report they work in partnership to learn and solve problems together. They critically examine their practices and regularly monitor the effectiveness of the teaching program. Thomas Russell explains that they monitor the school's application of its mission. He adds they are "very intentional with planning and preparation. This intentionality helped Citizens School recently earn accreditation from the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), which signifies that Citizens School is achieving its vision of providing a high-quality preschool program.

While teachers feel they work in partnership with administration, they reported that significant school-level policy decisions are typically left to the administration. This section of the survey was the lowest scoring section for Citizens, with the question on whether teachers have the opportunity to participate in most significant school-level policy decisions yielding a

2.5 neutral rating from teachers. Teachers acknowledge the presence of faculty committees, but note that these groups do not participate in major school-level decision-making. Thomas emphasized the difficulty in pleasing all teachers, noting that school administrators must occasionally make final decisions in the school's best interest. For example, some teachers expressed dissatisfaction with a recent professional development workshop. Thomas explains that “there are things that are 'have to’s and then there are things I want to hear from the teachers [on].” Such ‘have to’s” include many things, like necessary trainings for licensing purposes, preparation for parent teacher conferences, and curricular planning. Reflecting on this, Thomas explains, “there are things that are ‘have to’s and then there are things I want to hear from the teachers [on].” This highlights the balance school administrators must maintain between making decisions in the school's best interest and involving teachers in the decision-making process. While certain non-negotiable “have to’s,” such as CPR training, are essential for school operations, the literature on developing schools as learning organizations emphasizes the importance of distributed leadership and shared decision-making.

Taking Initiatives/Risks

At Citizens School, taking initiatives and risks — an essential element of schools that function as learning organizations — is valued. In conjunction with the school’s strong sense of community, faculty and staff feel valued, which fosters comfort in taking risks and experimenting with teaching practices. The survey section on taking initiatives and risks was a high-scoring section for Citizens, with an average response rate of 4.2 or “agree.” Teachers report that the school administrators are open to change and that school structures support teacher initiatives and risk-taking. The emergent curriculum is a key structure that supports and enables risk-taking. An emergent curriculum provides a framework for teachers, but allows

teachers the freedom and autonomy to follow the emerging interests of their students. This curriculum supports risk-taking as teachers design unique lessons to engage students every year.

Another critical aspect of risk-taking is modeling by the school leadership. Thomas shared that risk-taking was a significant element of his own teaching and leadership experiences, so he actively works to model and support risk-taking for the teachers of Citizens. Thomas described his transition from classroom teaching to administration as a personal risk, noting that while he does not naturally gravitate toward risk-taking, embracing new opportunities has been a key part of his professional growth. He had always envisioned staying in the classroom and felt he thrived as a teacher, but when he was approached about a leadership position at his school, he ultimately decided to accept the risk. While risk-taking does not come naturally to Thomas, he expressed that it was a significant part of his journey and that he now appreciates risk-taking and tries to support teachers at Citizens in risk-taking.

Ongoing, Relevant Professional Development

Ongoing and relevant professional development is a necessary condition for the development of schools as learning organizations (Mulford et al., 2004). Both teachers and school leaders at Citizens School report that professional development is both ongoing and relevant within their school community. The staff actively pursue professional development, both with the supports from Citizens School and independently. At Citizens, each teacher has their own professional development goals and plan they set and review with Thomas. A few teachers are focused on earning their master's degree in education or a related field, while others are exploring specific areas of interest or need, such as teaching with an inquiry-based approach through the arts. Thomas works to support the professional development of the teachers at Citizens by providing individual resources, such as related conference opportunities and

professional readings, and professional development opportunities for all staff at Citizens School throughout the year. He begins the year with a full-faculty orientation, which incorporates professional development opportunities. Thomas also structures professional development days throughout the school year, holds meetings twice a week, and makes sure that at least one of the weekly meetings covers professional development subjects, such as curriculum knowledge. Teachers report making "good use" of professional readings, subject associations, external advisors, and professional associations. Thomas makes a point to bring in external voices "to share their expertise." Examples include anti-bias training and literacy workshops. In addition to professional development in educational expertise, these meetings provide professional development in teamwork and teambuilding, which is a necessary component for developing as a learning organization (Mulford et al., 2004). As one teacher described, "we work as a team."

At Citizens School, professional development is also provided through a mentorship model. Thomas explains that a few years ago, he implemented "curriculum mornings" - a weekly meeting where different teachers host all of the teachers from the school and share their experiences, including successes and areas for improvement. He notes:

> It's not really a formal mentorship, but I can't tell you how many times we come away from those meetings having learned great takeaways…and then you see those things beings replicated in some way or form in another classroom because it was such a great takeaway. And so those morning typically begin a dialogue internally in that classroom and then externally in a different classroom. And then you see a lot of cross-classroom dialogue and partnerships starting to take form.

This example illustrates a structure designed to strengthen professional development and foster collaboration—both essential elements in creating a culture of learning.

Unfortunately, time is often a constraint within schools. While Thomas and Citizens School strive to provide ongoing professional development opportunities, teachers reported that they often feel they do not receive adequate time to fully engage in and benefit from these sessions. As one teacher shared, the professional development at Citizens School is sometimes "pushed to the wayside" instead of "the necessary prep for conferences and other important school events." Thomas explains that it is a balancing act between the "necessary "have to"s" and other elements of a school, like professional development. Schools have a lot to do, so it is understandable that professional development cannot always be the focus, but based on the teacher sentiments shared, it would be beneficial for Thomas and the leadership at Citizens School to build more time for professional development into the teacher schedules and establish additional structures to further develop Citizens School as a learning organization. For example, building in time for professional development on teacher work days would help ensure teachers have the necessary time for professional development.

Dimensions of Educational Leadership (RQ 2)

The data in this study indicates that as a school leader, Thomas exhibits the dimensions of educational leadership that align with developing schools as learning organizations. In particular, he holds high performance expectations for teachers, while also providing individual supports and intellectual stimulation. One of his strengths as an educational leader is the strong sense of community that he has cultivated at Citizens School. He shared that he always considers "how am I being a role model for my faculty and staff" and uses that to guide his leadership.

Vision and Goals

In conjunction with a shared and monitored mission, Thomas leads Citizens School with a clear vision. A clearly articulated vision is a dimension of educational leadership that facilitates

organizational learning and can help inspire others (Mulford et al., 2004). The teachers at Citizens School reported that Thomas communicates the school mission and sets the direction for the school, giving teachers a sense of overall purpose. The school's mission is to be a community where all are valued. As noted in Thomas's approach to building a trusting and collaborative climate, he values relationships and relationship building and aims to build relationships both with and between the teachers at Citizens School. This emphasis on relationships aligns with the school's vision of creating a community. Thomas explains, "relationship building is so impactful. The successes that I've had in my whole career are due in large part because you're building something with others. You're cultivating something with others. You're partnering with the same goal in mind." This statement illustrates that, in alignment with the school's mission and goals, he is leading Citizens School in community building. He explains that "you have to remember that big picture." Thomas's actions and statements demonstrate a commitment to the school's vision, which aligns with the literature on effective leadership for developing preschools as learning organizations (Mulford et al., 2004).

Teachers also report that Thomas helps clarify the specific meaning of the school's purpose in terms of practical implications. In addition to the school's mission of creating a community where all are valued, the school's mission aims to develop the whole child. Thomas leads the teachers at Citizens in developing the whole child through the framework of an emergent curriculum, explaining. It is necessary to iterate and remember the school's overall vision, while also breaking it down into tangible practices for teachers. For example, he guides teachers in applying the curriculum and implements supports to help them. Thomas implemented weekly curricular meetings to help foster professional dialogue and generate curricular ideas to help develop the whole child.

Culture

The literature posits that the educational leader is paramount to school culture, and that a "productive" school culture fosters organizational learning (Mulford et al., 2004). The data from this study indicates Thomas effectively cultivates a positive and productive school culture at Citizens School, which contributes to a culture of organizational learning. In the teacher survey, teachers "agree" (mean score of 4) that Thomas has created a positive school culture.

One key element of the culture at Citizens is respect. Respect is an essential cultural element for developing schools as learning organizations (Mulford et al., 2004). Teachers shared that Thomas sets a respectful tone for interactions with teachers, students, and parents. He shows respect for teachers by treating them as professionals. They go on to describe Thomas as someone who "works hard" to create a culture of respect. For Thomas, a culture of respect is built on the power of relationships. In conjunction with the school's mission of creating a community where all are valued, Thomas actively works to develop relationships with and among the teachers at Citizens School - and with the parents and students. One way Thomas develops these relationships is by focusing on visibility and approachability. Thomas explains that one of his strengths is connecting with people - teachers, families, and students - on a personal level. He stated, "the community [at Citizens] is one that I immediately fell in love with. It is super small, and the intimacy kind of played to my strengths - connecting with teachers and families on a very personal level with everyone." He continues to develop these relationships by being present and visible at school. Thomas elaborated:

> Being present is such a value add to any school. And I know that, and you know, that in bigger schools it's much harder to do. But at our school, I think it's doable - that it's like a have to. So whether that is being at the front door to shake hands with everybody in the

> morning. That matters. I want that to be a part of the culture that the teachers have when their students walk in the door. They are greeting and welcoming them, their name is said, their parents' names are said, their caregiver's names are said. Being present. And then, you know, if there's a problem, I'm there, and I can address it or at least hear and listen to what the concern is. And I may not have an answer, but at least I'm here and I'm listening and we can digest it and continue the dialogue.

This sentiment illustrates Thomas's commitment to presence and visibility, which he has embedded into the culture of Citizens. He notes that "we need to make ourselves available." By making himself available, he is able to cultivate relationships with school constituents and develop a culture of respect.

Another element of the culture at Citizens School is celebration. Thomas makes it a point to incorporate celebrations into the culture of the school. Thomas shared that while there are certain things and work that they "need to do throughout the week," he also makes a concerted effort to incorporate "treats" as much as possible. Whether that is "plenty of coffee" or "donuts," Thomas feels those little pick-me-ups add an element of celebration to the school culture. He also supports the school's parent organization in the celebrations and events they organize, like school dances and art shows. Further, Thomas incorporates "energizers," such as mindfulness moments, at the start of all weekly meetings. He believes these energizers help inspire the teachers of Citizens School and contribute to the school culture.

Structure

The data from this study demonstrates that Thomas has implemented structures to support the development of Citizens School as a learning organization. In alignment with the school's culture and professional development goals, Thomas implemented weekly meetings to foster

collaboration and provide opportunities for curriculum planning and professional development. These meetings are structured to include opportunities for teachers to connect and learn from each other. For example, the classroom and teachers host curricular meetings on a rotating basis. This rotation allows all teachers to have the opportunity to lead the meetings and allows all teachers to visit other classroom learning environments. The meeting structures also include energizers to help inspire the teachers of Citizens. These energizers include mindfulness practices and “treats” like coffee.

Thomas places particular focus on the curriculum and the associated curricular structures. He explains that he has worked over the past few years to fortify the curriculum and planning structures for the school. After examining the curriculum and teaching practices, he shifted the curriculum from an arts-based curriculum to an emergent curriculum that follows the students' interests. This curriculum change provided a structure to frame teaching and learning practices for teachers and students. In conjunction with the curriculum, Thomas has also been very intentional with structures for curriculum planning and implementation. He implemented “thoughtful and intentional planning - weekly and monthly curricular planning that is monitored. Monitored in the sense that there is a curricular plan and a plan for how to implement it.” These meeting and planning structures help provide teachers with both the time and guidance to implement the school’s curriculum.

Beyond meeting structures, Thomas has implemented structures to enhance teacher participation in decision-making. Extending and creating opportunities for teacher participation in school decision making is identified in the literature as a dimension of educational leadership that facilitates organizational learning (Mulford et al., 2004). Teachers at Citizens School shared that they are involved in decision-making related to programs and instruction. Using the

emergent curriculum framework, teachers have autonomy and flexibility to exercise their decision-making when designing their lesson plans. They explained that they work as a team and feel valued as community members. However, teachers also shared that they are not always involved in critical school-wide decision-making. As Thomas explained, he values the teachers of Citizens and tries to include and engage them in school-wide decision-making when possible, such as with curriculum. He stated, "there are things that I want to hear from the teachers on - on what the teachers want." While Thomas values teacher input, he acknowledges that not all decisions can be made collaboratively. He expressed that "there are things that are 'have to's." This structure of extending teacher participation in decision-making within their own area of expertise (i.e., curriculum), while reserving the right to make decisions unilaterally as a school leader for efficiency purposes, aligns with the literature on best practices in developing schools as learning organizations. According to the literature, schools that facilitate organizational learning extend teacher participation and decision-making to their areas of expertise, while recognizing the necessity for leadership-level unilateral decisions when appropriate (Mulford et al., 2004), which Thomas has done at Citizens School.

Intellectual Stimulation

Providing intellectual stimulation is a dimension of leadership that aligns with facilitating schools as learning organizations (Mulford et al., 2004). Effective educational leaders challenge staff to critically assess and refine their practices. The data from this study indicates that Thomas provides the teachers at Citizens School with a high level of intellectual stimulation and provides such opportunities to reexamine their current practices. In the survey, teachers reported that Thomas stimulates teachers to think about what they are doing for their students and encourages them to evaluate and refine their practices as needed. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Thomas

guided teachers in reassessing their curriculum and teaching practices. This reflection led them to evaluate whether their approach effectively served students and families. After some reflection, they decided they needed to pivot their curriculum from a solely arts-based curriculum to an emergent curriculum with a guiding framework that follows the interests of the students. This curricular change resulted in a more engaging experience for teachers and students. Thomas explained:

> Defining that [the emergent curriculum] for the school means that we can truly take the interests of our students and create a curriculum that is going to be most optimal for that group in a given year. And that is not going to look the same at all from year to year. But it allows the teachers to have autonomy to plan and prepare for the group that they have…It leaves things open-ended for the teachers.

This change in the curriculum demonstrates that Thomas models flexibility and growth as he implements school-wide changes. The curriculum change itself is a framework that provides more intellectual stimulation for teachers and students.

In addition to stimulating teachers to reexamine their practices and modeling reexamination, Thomas also encourages the teachers of Citizens School to pursue their professional learning goals. Teachers report that Thomas encourages them to develop and review individual professional growth goals consistent with the school's goals. All teachers actively pursue professional development. Every teacher meets with Thomas to establish and check in on individual professional development goals at multiple checkpoints throughout the year. Teachers shared that Thomas serves as a source of new ideas for professional learning and helps teachers identify and access professional development resources. For example, Thomas recently sent all

of the teachers at Citizens School to the National Association for the Education of Young Children's annual conference.

Individual Support

In conjunction with intellectual stimulation, Thomas also provides the teachers of Citizens School with individual support. This dimension of educational leadership includes providing teachers with personal and professional learning support. Teachers at Citizens School report that Thomas demonstrates both types of support, acknowledging their unique needs and expertise.. Every teacher at Citizens School meets with Thomas to establish and review an individual professional development plan. For some teachers, this includes pursuing a master's degree, while for other teachers it includes more concentrated professional development pursuits, such as a certification in a particular area of focus, like positive discipline. In addition to an individual professional development plan, Thomas implemented a mentorship program to provide individual support for new teachers. He shares that:

> We pair new teachers who join us with a partner, you know, a partner that they can lean on, as they navigate the new school, new space, new people. Kind of like a "go to." Not necessarily a mentor, but just a "glue person" to help them, you know, acclimate, and feel love, for questions like, you know, as simple as "Where do I find the tape, you know, yarn?" etc.

This mentorship model provides teachers with the opportunity for support and connection from other faculty members, strengthening the school community.

Along with the individualized professional development plans and the mentorship program, Thomas also provided support by being present and accessible to teachers. He makes it a priority to be visible and available to teachers (and parents) every day. He is out to greet

teachers and students as they arrive every morning, and assist with any issues that might arise. Thomas explained that as school leaders, "we need to make ourselves available." He goes on to say that:

> Being present is such a value add to any school. Whether that is being at the front door to shake hands with everybody in the morning and say "hello." Their first person that they see walking in is me, and I say "hi" to them every single morning. That matters. I want that to be a part of the culture that the teachers have. Their name is said. And the interactions are mostly good. But like, you know, if there's a problem, I'm there and I can address it. Or at least listen to what your concern or complaint is. And I may not have an answer, but at least I'm here and I'm listening to you."

Thomas's presence and availability are important cultural support for teachers and parents. Being present allows him to connect with individuals and also provide support as needed. These examples demonstrate how Thomas provides individual support for teachers at Citizens School both personally and professionally.

Performance Expectations

Establishing and communicating high performance expectations is another dimension of educational leadership associated with developing schools as learning organizations (Mulford et al., 2004). This section was the second highest scoring survey section for Thomas and Citizens School, with teachers "strongly agreeing" (mean score of 4.76) that Thomas both provides and communicates high performance expectations. Teachers at Citizens School report that there are high expectations for them as professionals, and that there are high expectations for students. Thomas also holds high expectations for himself and explains that he reflects on his own

practices and often assesses, “How am I being a role model for my staff right now?” This demonstrates that Thomas has high expectations for himself, his teachers, and his students.

When schools and school leaders have high expectations, it fosters high-quality teaching and learning (Mulford et al., 2004), as is evident at Citizens School. One example of high expectations for quality teaching and learning is the curriculum revamp led by Thomas. As shared earlier, during his time at Citizens, Thomas reexamined the school’s curriculum and implemented a new curriculum and structures to deliver and monitor the curriculum. The new curriculum is an emergent curriculum that follows the interests of the students and creates a more engaging learning experience for students. Additionally, Thomas implemented structures to help teachers implement the curriculum, such as shared planning time, and monitors the implementation.

Thomas’s commitment to high performance expectations is further evidenced by Citizens School’s recent accreditation by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). Earning accreditation through NAEYC requires years of dedicated effort and rigorous review. This prestigious accreditation signifies that the school meets the highest standards in early childhood education. To achieve this recognition, NAEYC-accredited preschools must adhere to stringent criteria, including providing a high-quality learning environment, employing well-trained teachers, ensuring access to quality teaching materials, and implementing a developmentally appropriate and challenging curriculum. Completing the accreditation requires a thorough examination of the school’s existing processes and often requires changing some processes to meet the high accreditation standards. Thomas led Citizens School through its first-ever NAEYC accreditation process and helped Citizens earn the accreditation. This

demonstrates that Thomas leads Citizens with high performance expectations and standards, thereby contributing to a school culture of learning.

Community Focus

The data from this study demonstrates that Thomas has established a strong community at Citizens School. The section of the teacher survey related to community was the highest scoring section for Citizens School, with a mean score of 4.75 and teachers "strongly agreeing" that Citizens School has a strong sense of community. These survey results align with the mission of Citizens School, which is to be a community where all are valued. It is evident that Thomas has worked to embody the school's mission and create and maintain a strong community at the school. Teachers report feeling valued as integral members of the school community, emphasizing that the contributions of all staff members are equally appreciated. They described a strong sense of teamwork and collaboration in their daily practices. These values of respect and collaboration align closely with key elements identified in the literature as essential for fostering organizational learning within schools (Mulford et al., 2004).

Another key element of community is relationships. Thomas expressed that he sees relationships as an integral part of a successful school, and actively works to build and maintain relationships within the community at Citizens. Thomas is a "huge believer" that relationships are a "vital part of a school, a school's culture" and that "so many good things happen when that [relationships] are a goal of yours or of any leader." He shared that "relationship building is so impactful," and explained that:

> The successes that I've had in my whole career are due in large part because you're building something with others, right? You're cultivating something with others. You're partnering, you know, with the same goal in mind with others. So it's like the relationship

> successes can be had with relationship-driven approaches…And I think with that in mind, a lot of good things can happen, when especially as the school leader, when hose relationships are built, but then also like maintained.

The value Thomas places on relationships is evident in his leadership approach at Citizens School. He prioritizes building and maintaining relationships by being consistently present and available. Demonstrating the importance of visibility, Thomas makes it a point to greet teachers and students every morning, fostering a welcoming and connected school environment. He deepens these relationships through individual and team interactions, such as holding one-on-one meetings to develop personalized professional development plans for teachers and leading weekly curriculum planning sessions. Furthermore, Thomas has implemented intentional structures to strengthen faculty connections, including a mentorship program and team-building activities during professional development days. These efforts reflect his commitment to cultivating a collaborative and supportive school culture. Thomas also incorporates celebrations, like school dances and treats, to further build community. In addition to building relationships with teachers and students, Thomas extends this to building relationships with parents. Parents are an integral, but often overlooked, school constituent, and arguably more so given the young age of preschoolers. Thomas shared "You're partnering, you know, with parents with the same goal in mind with others." He believes "it always kind of comes back and you're going to get families because of those relationships." Thomas's statements and actions demonstrate a strong commitment to building relationships and community at Citizens School.

Additionally, Thomas also works to build relationships with the community beyond Citizens School. Citizens is located in a metropolitan area with many community offerings, like local universities, professional development organizations, and local events. Thomas leads the

teachers of Citizens in making use of these offerings in the community. Teachers report that the school has a highly effective productive working relationship with the community. For example, Thomas sent all of the teachers at Citizens School to the annual NAEYC conference when it was local, and has helped teachers continue their studies at local universities. Citizens also makes use of local amenities, such as a neighborhood park and playground. One teacher shared that Thomas does a lot of "outreach and networking for the school." These sentiments and actions demonstrate how Thomas cultivates and maintains a strong sense of community for all constituents (teachers, students, and parents), extending this to the community beyond Citizens. This commitment to community aligns with the literature on facilitating organizational learning in schools (Mulford et al., 2004).

Facilitation of Preschools as Learning Organizations (RQ 3)

The third research question for this study is: How do educational leaders enact processes that facilitate the development of preschools as learning organizations? For this research question, we examine the processes, routines, and structures implemented to support organizational learning at Citizens School. Several processes, routines, and structures at Citizens School contribute to the school's development as a learning organization.

One key structural element of Citizens School is its curriculum. Thomas shared that when he joined Citizens, he evaluated the existing curriculum framework and its application (or lack thereof) and identified this as a growth area for the school. He modeled a commitment to high standards and intellectual curiosity (both essential elements of educational leadership for developing schools as learning organizations) as he researched the existing curriculum and ultimately decided to implement a more robust curriculum. He implemented an emergent curriculum, which provides structural frameworks for teaching and learning. In addition to the

standard curriculum framework, Thomas also implemented meeting structures to support planning and collaboration around the curriculum. For example, weekly meetings in rotating classrooms allow teachers to plan, collaborate, and take on leadership roles as they rotate hosting the meetings. He describes that these meetings help teachers learn and plan, creating opportunities for "cross classroom collaboration." These curricular structures support organizational learning for students and teachers.

In addition to the structures implemented to facilitate collaboration, Thomas also implemented a mentorship program at Citizens School. Drawing from his own positive experience in a mentorship program, Thomas implemented a similar model at Citizens School to support new teachers. The program Thomas implemented is both a mentorship program and a collaborative program. He pairs all new teachers with another teacher who serves as their welcome guide and "a partner that they can lean on, as they navigate a new school, new space, new people…a glue person to help them, you know, acclimate and feel the love." This mentorship program provides structures for support and leadership for the teachers, which are both key elements in cultures of learning. Thomas has also implemented structures for more formal professional development and learning. These structures include establishing and reviewing individual professional development plans and providing opportunities for whole-school professional development, such as guest speakers during Orientation and other routinely scheduled professional development days throughout the year.

Thomas also values being "present" and has implemented structures at Citizens School to align his day with this value. His day is structured so that he can be visible and accessible to teachers, parents, and teachers. He intentionally works to keep his calendar open in the morning so that he can be present at drop-off and greet every teacher and student as they arrive at the

school. He also makes a point to visit all classrooms every day. This allows Thomas to develop relationships with teachers and students, be available to address any concerns, and monitor the program. This creates opportunities for relationships and community, while also ensuring high performance expectations, which are both essential elements for educational leaders to facilitate organizational learning within their schools. While Thomas holds high performance expectations and monitors the fidelity of them, he also values taking time to celebrate. Thomas feels it is important to take the time to celebrate, so he incorporates celebrations into the schedule at Citizens School. Some of these celebrations are larger-scale celebrations, such as a school dance party hosted by the parents association, while other celebrations are smaller, like bringing treats to the weekly faculty meetings. While the structures related to celebrations at Citizens School are not as strongly developed as some of the other structures, such as meeting structures, they contribute to the overall culture of the school and help create a positive and collaborative culture for learning.

Limits to the Facilitation of Preschools as Learning Organizations (RQ 4)

Research Question 4 asks: What leadership practices and associated processes limit the potential for developing preschools as learning organizations? Similar to identifying practices that help facilitate a culture of learning and develop preschools as learning organizations, it is also important to identify processes that can limit the facilitation of organizational learning in preschools. Thomas and Citizens School demonstrate many strengths in facilitating organizational learning, but there are some noted areas for improvement. The first being the need for additional structures for professional development. At Citizens School, professional development is a crucial element of fostering organizational learning. Research highlights that school leaders must intentionally provide opportunities for intellectual stimulation and

professional growth (Mulford et al., 2004). Thomas has implemented multiple professional learning structures, including individual professional development plans, weekly curriculum meetings, a mentorship program, and scheduled professional development days. However, teachers express a need for a more intentional and structured approach to professional development. As one teacher shared, “professional development is often pushed to the wayside” to make time for the “necessary prep for conferences and other important school events.” Although professional development is available, many teachers feel it is not adequately structured into their work schedules. Some report pursuing professional development independently, often without institutional support for time or resources. Thomas admitted that there can be tension between the “necessary have tos” in a school, which may contribute to the teacher sentiment of professional development “getting pushed to the wayside.” To facilitate more professional learning at Citizens, it would be beneficial for Thomas to implement additional structures to allow for more professional development at the school.

The other obstacle to facilitating increased organizational learning at Citizens School is teacher participation in decision-making. The teachers at Citizens School are involved in many areas of the school, such as curriculum development. However, while they are involved in these areas, they are not involved in the decision-making for most significant school-level decisions. This section of the teacher survey received the lowest rating overall, with a mean score of 2.5, or a neutral rating on their involvement in school-level decision making. Thomas describes that “there are things that are 'have to' s and then there are things I want to hear from the teachers [on].” He provided the example of teachers not liking a recent professional development workshop offered on anti-bias, but that, as the school leader, he felt it was a “necessary” workshop for the community. In this example, the mission of Citizens’ is to create a community

where all are valued, and a workshop on anti-bias training demonstrates alignment with that mission. This demonstrates the tension that can lie between teachers and educational leaders in decision-making. The educational leader is tasked to commit to the school's mission and vision and ensure that all teachers embody that mission and vision. As such, educational leaders occasionally make and enact decisions that may not be well-received by teachers, but that are needed for the school. While Thomas prioritizes the school's mission in decision-making, research indicates that effective learning organizations actively involve teachers in shaping school policies and initiatives. Expanding teacher participation in key decisions could further strengthen Citizens School's culture of collaboration.

Case Summary

Citizens School demonstrates the four factors that define schools as learning organizations - a trusting and collaborative climate, a shared and monitored mission, taking initiatives and risks, and ongoing, relevant professional development. The school's mission is to have a community where all are valued, directly contributing to a trusting and collaborative environment. The strong sense of community at Citizens makes teachers feel valued and supported, enabling them to take initiative and risks. Taking risks and initiatives allows teachers at Citizens to improve their teaching and contribute to a culture of learning. There is ongoing and relevant professional development, which helps facilitate organizational learning for the school.

Thomas Russell, the Head of Citizens School, enacts the seven dimensions of educational leadership for developing schools as learning organizations. He embodies the school's mission of creating a community and emphasizes relationship building. There are structures in place to facilitate organizational learning, such as professional development structures. Teachers feel

supported and encouraged to pursue their own goals for professional learning. Performance expectations are high, and Thomas monitors the program to ensure delivery of a quality program.

Thomas has implemented processes, routines, and structures to facilitate organizational learning at Citizens School. These include structures for curriculum facilitation, professional development, collaboration, and cultural values, such as being present and accessible. While there are structures in place to facilitate organizational learning at Citizens School, there are also identified growth areas for Citizens School and Thomas Russell.

Appendix K: Survey Results

Table 5

Educational Leadership & Organizational Learning Survey Results for All Schools

Survey Section	Riverbend (n = 11)	Stoneridge (n = 9)	Citizens (n = 7)
Educational Leadership			
1. Vision and Goals: To what extent do you agree that the Head of School:			
a. Gives us a sense of overall purpose.	4.80	4.88	4.14
b. Helps clarify the specific meaning of the school's purpose in terms of its practical implications for programs and instruction.	4.90	4.75	4.00
c. Communicates school mission to staff and students.	4.80	4.75	4.14
d. Works towards whole staff consensus in establishing priorities for school goals.	4.50	4.63	4.00
2. Culture: To what extent do you agree that the Head of School:			
a. Shows respect for staff by treating us as professionals.	4.80	3.00	4.29
b. Sets a respectful tone for interaction with students.	4.80	5.00	4.43
c. Demonstrates a willingness to change his/her own practices in light of new understandings.	4.30	4.88	3.83
d. Works towards whole staff consensus in establishing priorities for school goals.	4.60	4.88	3.67
3. Structure: To what extent do you agree that the Head of School:			

(Table Continues)

Table 5, Continued

Survey Section	Riverbend (n = 11)	Stoneridge (n = 9)	Citizens (n = 7)
a. Delegates leadership for activities critical for achieving goals.	4.44	4.88	4.00
b. Distributes leadership broadly among the staff representing various viewpoints in leadership positions.	4.33	4.75	3.50
c. Ensures that we have adequate involvement in decision making related to programs and instructions.	4.67	4.50	4.00
d. Supports an effective committee structure for decision making.	4.50	4.63	3.00
e. Facilitates effective communication among staff.	4.56	4.50	3.17
4. Intellectual Stimulation: To what extent do you agree that the Head of School:			
a. Is a source of new ideas for my professional learning.	4.63	4.63	3.83
b. Stimulates me to think about what I am doing for my students.	4.63	5.00	4.00
c. Encourages me to pursue my own goals for professional learning.	4.56	4.88	4.67
d. Encourages us to develop/review individual professional growth goals consistent with school goals and priorities.	4.44	4.50	4.67
e. Encourages us to evaluate our practices and refine them as needed.	4.67	4.63	4.50
5. Individual Support: To what extent do you agree that the Head of School:			

(Table Continues)

Table 5, Continued

Survey Section	Riverbend (n = 11)	Stoneridge (n = 9)	Citizens (n = 7)
a. Takes my opinion into consideration when initiating actions that affect my work.	4.22	4.88	4.67
b. Is aware of my unique needs and expertise.	4.44	4.63	4.83
c. Is inclusive, does not show favoritism towards individuals or groups.	4.00	4.50	4.33
6. Performance Expectations: To what extent do you agree that the Head of School:			
a. Has high expectations for us as professionals.	4.89	4.75	4.43
b. Holds high expectations for students.	4.89	4.75	4.71
c. Expects us to be effective innovators.	4.67	4.75	5.00
7. Community Focus: In our school:			
a. The contributions of all staff members are valued equally.	4.33	4.75	4.57
b. Our school administrators have secured a high degree of autonomy for the school.	4.78	4.88	4.83
c. Our school administrators have established a productive working relationship with the community.	4.78	4.75	4.86
Distributed Leadership			
1. Influence: What is the amount of influence the following have on activities within your school:			
a. Teacher committees and/or teams.	4.22	4.29	3.67
b. The whole staff working together.	4.33	4.50	3.67

(Table Continues)

Table 5, Continued

Survey Section	Riverbend (n = 11)	Stoneridge (n = 9)	Citizens (n = 7)
Organizational Learning			
1. Trusting and Collaborative Climate			
a. Discussions among colleagues are honest and candid.	4.78	4.75	4.17
b. Overall there is mutual support among teachers.	5.00	5.00	4.50
c. Most of us actively seek information to improve our work.	4.67	4.88	4.33
d. We are tolerant of each other's opinions.	4.89	4.63	4.00
e. Colleagues are used as resources.	5.00	5.00	4.83
f. There is ongoing professional dialogue among teachers.	4.67	4.75	4.67
2. Shared and Monitored Mission			
a. Teachers have the opportunity to participate in most significant school-level policy decisions.	4.00	4.33	2.50
b. We have a coherent and shared sense of direction.	4.50	4.71	3.83
c. We critically examine current practices.	4.00	4.86	4.17
d. Teachers and administrators work in partnership to learn and solve problems together.	4.50	5.00	4.33
e. We actively share information with the parents and community.	4.63	5.00	4.67
f. The effectiveness of the teaching program is regularly monitored.	4.38	5.00	4.33

(Table Continues)

Table 5, Continued

Survey Section	Riverbend (n = 11)	Stoneridge (n = 9)	Citizens (n = 7)
3. Taking Initiatives/Risks			
a. The school leaders protect those who take risks.	4.43	4.71	4.40
b. The administrators are open to change.	4.25	4.86	4.17
c. School structures support teacher initiatives and risk taking.	4.13	5.00	4.00
d. The administrators empower staff to make decisions.	4.38	4.86	4.50
e. There are rewards for staff who take the initiative.	4.50	4.17	3.17
f. People feel free to experiment and take risks.	4.25	4.57	4.17
g. Staff are valued.	4.63	5.00	4.71
4. Ongoing, Relevant Professional Development			
a. We monitor what's happening outside of the school to find out about best practice.	4.50	4.43	4.67
b. Good use is made of professional readings.	4.38	4.43	3.83
c. Groups of staff receive training in how to work and learn in teams.	4.50	4.33	4.17
d. Good use is made of membership of teacher professional associations.	4.63	4.20	3.60
e. We make use of external advisors, e.g., subject associations, project officers, consultants.	4.63	4.71	3.67

(Table Continues)

Table 5, Continued

Survey Section	Riverbend (n = 11)	Stoneridge (n = 9)	Citizens (n = 7)
f. Adequate time is provided for professional development.	4.88	4.86	3.67
g. Staff engage in ongoing professional development.	4.50	4.86	4.33

Note. This table provides the mean score of each survey question from each site and the mean composite score for each of the survey components. Respondents were asked to answer each question on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Items and composites with mean scores at or above the threshold of 4.75 and at or below the threshold of 2.50 are highlighted in yellow.