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Early Childhood Educators' Perceptions of How Leadership Relates to their Workplace Well-Being

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EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS' PERCEPTIONS OF HOW LEADERSHIP RELATES

TO THEIR WORKPLACE WELL-BEING

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ABSTRACT

The early childhood workforce faces many unique challenges which have exacerbated educators' already high levels of workplace stress and turnover. Despite such system-wide issues, there are many thriving early childhood programs that cultivate environments that promote positive professional well-being for early childhood educators. This mixed methods sequential explanatory study examined the experiences and elevated the voices of early childhood educators to explore their perceptions of how their administrators relate to their workplace well-being.

Using an online survey and semi-structured interviews, findings indicated that teachers' perceptions of administrators' leadership style, trust level and congruence to ideal relate to educators' workplace stress and commitment levels. Further, this study found that teachers who had higher levels of workplace stress and lower levels of job commitment described their administrators as overlooking their needs whereas teachers who had lower levels of workplace stress and higher levels of job commitment described their administrators as acknowledging their needs. Although administrators could not "solve" every issue teachers faced, educators recognized the efforts that their leaders made to buffer their workplace stress, even amidst the various pressures that leaders themselves faced. This study adds to the limited early childhood leadership literature as it conceptualizes the relationship between early childhood administrators and educators' workplace well-being.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Imagine walking up to a preschool classroom. Before you open the classroom door, you hear the two teachers inside bickering, "It's your turn to do bathroom duty, I did it last time." The other teacher groans "Ughh, fine! Whatever!" A few children wander around the classroom not invested in any particular activity. Ms. Willow, the center director, opens the classroom door and says, "The auditors from the state are coming today; make sure your lesson plan is posted!" Mrs. Rhodes replies, "What? Why didn't anyone tell us they were coming? I haven't had time to finish this week's lesson plan. We haven't had any coverage for me to get out of the classroom to work on it." Ms. Willow replies, "Well, figure out a way to get it done right away!"

As one of the teachers, Ms. Smith, sits down to start a small group with several children, the other teacher, Mrs. Rhodes, calls out, "Time to clean up!" Frustrated, Ms. Smith says, "I didn't even have time to do my small group!" Mrs. Rhodes replies, "Well, I decided we need to take the kids out to the playground now. I need to get back early to work on my lesson plan."

When they return from the playground, Ms. Smith is supposed to take her lunch break; but no one has come into the classroom to cover for her. So, she decides to leave Mrs. Rhodes in the classroom alone with all of the children while she takes her break. This causes Mrs. Rhodes to be out of ratio. One child begins to cry when Ms. Smith leaves. Several students wander around the classroom, unsure of what activity to get involved in. Meanwhile, two students begin fighting over a book in the library area. Mrs. Rhodes ignores the crying and fighting as she works on her computer, trying to complete this week's classroom lesson plan before the auditors arrive. She lets out a loud sigh and says, "I need to find a new job."

In this scenario, teachers seem displeased with each other and their students. The teachers do not work collaboratively and do not give students the guidance and attention they need. The director offers no support to her teachers and instead exacerbates their stress and tension which leads Mrs. Rhodes to want to quit. Now imagine instead, a second classroom where the teachers and center director work together to assist their colleagues and students, despite being short-staffed. The administrator goes out of their way to check in on the teachers regularly and steps in as needed so teachers feel supported and not as stressed. Students seem joyful as they engage in activities while strengthening relationships with peers and teachers. These two examples illus-

trate how an administrator can serve as a critical "fulcrum" to the dramatically different emotional climate and support system in schools (Prastiawan et al., 2020).

In recent decades, there has been an increased interest in the well-being of professionals (Kwon et al., 2020). Viac and Fraser (2020) define educator professional well-being as "teachers' responses to the cognitive, emotional, health and social conditions pertaining to their work and their profession" (p. 18). Despite the increase in attention, research indicates teachers in the United States have the highest stress rates among occupational groups (Greenberg et al., 2016). Professional well-being is particularly salient for the early childhood workforce because they face unique challenges compared to the educators who serve older children (Hu et al., 2019; Phillips et al., 2016). Some of these challenges include low retention rates, low compensation rates, and long working hours (Phillips et al., 2016; Totenhagen et al., 2016; Whitebook, 2009). More recently, the multifaceted effects of the COVID-19 pandemic further underscored the importance of early childhood educators' well-being as educators navigated additional stressors to provide ongoing support for children and families (Eadie, et al., 2021). Such challenges can lead early childhood teachers to experience high levels of workplace stress and burnout and result in higher turnover within the field (Eadie, et al., 2021; Phillips et al., 2016; Totenhagen et al., 2016).

Theoretical Framework

According to systems theory, all the components of an organization are interconnected, whereby a change in one component can affect numerous other components (Kast & Rosenzweig, 1972). Bronfenbrenner and Morris' (2006) bioecological systems model emphasizes the power of context as it describes how a person's development is embedded within both proximal and distal hierarchical systems. As one level of these nested system changes, it can impact other levels of the system. The application of the ecological systems model is particularly relevant in the

field of early childhood as it recognizes how context can play a significant role in a child's development (Hewett & La Paro, 2020; Jorde-Bloom, 1988; Zinsser & Curby, 2014). For children, their immediate environments of home and school are impacted by larger social contexts such as the community and society at large (Davison & Birch, 2001). Children attending early childhood programs are directly influenced by their teachers and are indirectly influenced by center-wide structures and procedures. Early childhood administrators are a vital part of this context as they directly influence the teachers who have a proximal impact on their students.

An interconnected bi-directional relationship exists between the different nested systems. For example, although early childhood administrators influence both teachers and children within their site, they themselves are also being influenced by their teachers and students. Moreover, administrators, teachers, and children are all being impacted by larger forces such as policies, social conditions, and historical context. These contextual relationships are depicted in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Bioecological Systems Model
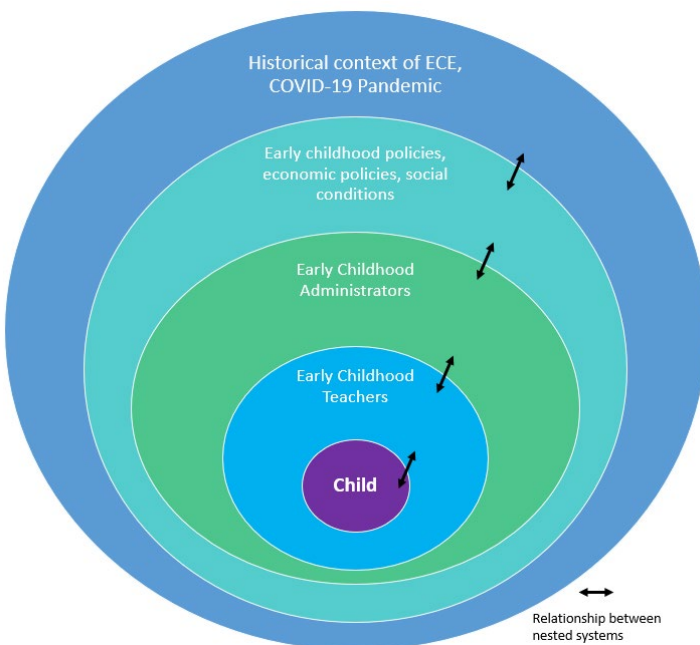
Although system-wide issues that negatively impact the professional well-being of the early childhood workforce exist, there are many thriving programs that cultivate an environment that promotes positive professional well-being for early childhood educators and high-quality experiences for young children. Viac and Fraser (2020) proposed a comprehensive conceptual framework that summarizes the various factors and interconnections of teachers' occupational well-being. The authors explain that working conditions at both a system level and a school level can influence teachers' well-being in a positive or negative way. The framework describes how at a system level, institutional policy settings can impact the quality of working conditions. Institutional policy settings include: material conditions (i.e., earnings), quality standards (i.e., teacher's key responsibilities), distribution/allocation (i.e., working hours), and career structure (i.e., professional development opportunities). Further, the framework uses the job demands-resources (JD-R) model (Demerouti et al., 2001) to outline how at a school level, job demands and job resources can either improve or hinder teachers' occupational well-being. According to the model, job demands refer to the aspects of work that require mental effort and are associated with some type of psychological cost (e.g., exhaustion). Job resources are the aspects of the job that support the employee in achieving work-related goals, lessen the demands of the psychological effort required, and encourage personal growth and development.

Study Purpose

Leadership is widely recognized as an essential driver of organizational performance (Kirby et al., 2021). Early childhood administrators can lessen the psychological toll of teachers' job demands (Kusma et al., 2012; Wong, 2010). However, a paucity of leadership research exists in the field of early childhood compared to other fields (Grantham-Caston & DiCarlo, 2021; Kirby et al., 2021; Muijs et al., 2004). There is a critical need to further explore early childhood

leadership to understand the relationship between administrators and the professional well-being of teachers in early childhood settings (Jeon & Wells, 2018). Further, leadership literature has often examined people's beliefs about the traits and abilities that characterize a general leader but has often failed to consider what traits people want their specific leader to possess (Nichols & Cottrell, 2014; Vecchio & Boatwright, 2002).

To understand what allows some programs to thrive, despite system-wide issues, this paper sought to explore what leadership factors early childhood educators perceive to relate to their own professional well-being as well as the traits that early childhood educators seek in their ideal version of early childhood administrators. The aim of this study was to understand how early childhood teachers' perceptions of their administrator relate to their professional well-being and to understand what traits early educators seek in their ideal version of an early childhood administrator.

Research Questions

Guided by these aims, this study addressed several research questions.

Quantitative

1. To what extent do the perceptions that early childhood teachers hold about their administraors' leadership style relate to their professional well-being?

2. To what extent does the trust that early childhood teachers have in their administrator relate to their professional well-being?

3. To what extent does the level of congruence between teachers' perceptions of ideal early childhood leadership and their perceptions of real administrators' leadership relate to their professional well-being?

Qualitative

1. How do early childhood teachers perceive ideal leadership in early childhood settings?

2. How do early childhood teachers who perceive their administrator to have a more passive avoidant leadership style describe their administrator?

3. How do early childhood teachers who perceive their administrator to have a less passive avoidant leadership style describe their administrator?

By addressing these research questions, this study added to the limited existing literature that examines the ways in which early childhood leadership relates to educators' professional well-being.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Early childhood educators have multifaceted roles which involve providing both care and education to young children. Caring for young children is generally understood as nurturing children and meeting their emotional and physical needs; while educating young children, is often associated with school readiness (Wood, 2015). However, education and care are interconnected and should be seen as inseparable and mutually important (Wood, 2015). Throughout this paper, the term early childhood education (ECE) is used to describe the care and education of young children.

While early childhood traditionally spans from birth to age eight, this paper focuses on early childhood educators who work with three- to five-year-old children in center-based preschool classrooms. These educators work in early childhood programs within the *urban intensive* setting of Chicago, which suggests the density of the population can exacerbate inequitable social conditions and make it more difficult to provide adequate resources to the large number of people who need them (Milner, 2012). This context directly affects the children, families, and educators of such early childhood programs.

Historical Context of Early Childhood Education

The field of early childhood stems from a long history of racism and inequitable power dynamics (Turner & Turner, 2024). The early childhood workforce consists mainly of women, and often of women of color, who care for and educate millions of the nation's youngest learners (Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, 2020; Phillips et al., 2016; Van Laere et al.,

2014). The long history of segregation in Chicago sets the scene for the early childhood work-force.

The metropolitan area of Chicago continues to be highly segregated, characterized by a concentration of White residents in the city center and the north side, while the Black population predominantly resides in the south and west sides of the city (Smith et al., 2021). The segrega-tion of the city was largely influenced by systemic racism in the form of redlining among other factors, which has impacted the patterns of Chicago's historical housing development and pro-duced barriers to housing mobility, which directly impacts schools and the early education set-ting (Novara & Khare, 2017; Smith et al., 2021). Economic and racial segregation remain a per-vasive problem in Chicago (Novara & Khare, 2017). This longstanding history continues to be an influential force on the early childhood professionals involved in his study.

At a national level, Paschall et al.'s (2020) report explains that early childhood teachers in center-based programs primarily identified as White (63%), with 17% of educators identifying as Black and 14% identifying as Hispanic. Similarly, the national K-12 teaching workforce pre-dominantly identifies as White (80%) (Whitebook et al., 2018).

At a state level, the Illinois' Early Childhood Education Workforce report (2020) de-scribes how the early childhood workforce in Illinois typically mirrors the diversity of the region where they work. The majority of Chicago residents identify as White (i.e., 53% White, 22% Latinx, 16% Black, 7% Asian and 2% Native American or Pacific Islander) (Smith et al., 2021). Similarly, K-12 Chicago Public Schools (CPS) teachers primarily identified as White (47%), Hispanic (23%) and Black (21%). However, such mirrored diversity is not present in Chicago between the center-based early childhood workforce and the local residents. The majority of Chicago center-based early childhood teachers identify as Black or Hispanic (43% Black, 30%

Hispanic, and 19% White) (Illinois' Early Childhood Education Workforce, 2020). An overrepresentation of women of color in Chicago's center-based early childhood workforce exists that does not accurately mirror the racial diversity within the city. Systemic oppression based on gender, race, and class have led the women of color to face inequality with regard to access to equitable education, job roles, and earning potential. As a result, this has created disproportionate representation of women of color in the lowest-paying teaching jobs where perceptions persist that educating young children is less skillful work (Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, 2020; Whitebook et al., 2018).

The early childhood workforce continues to face a combination of chronic and unique stressors based on their multiple intersecting minoritized identities (Ryan et al., 2021). Crenshaw's (1993) theory of intersectionality describes how race, gender, and social class intersect to shape structural, political, and representational aspects for women of color. The early childhood workforce accounts for multiples identities as they reside at the intersection of race, gender, and class. Women of color are affected by the biases that separate people of color from White people as well as the biases that separate men from women (Turman, 2017). Both White women and women of color face these struggles based on gender; however, women of color face additional racial biases on top of these gender inequalities (Hall et al., 2012). Women of color continue to face a pervasive undervaluing of their labor (Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, 2020). The undervaluing of the early childhood workforce is evident by the poor compensation and numerous hardships that they face which makes it more challenging to carry out the important work of caring for young children (Wagner et al., 2013).

Challenges Faced by the Early Childhood Workforce

Teachers suffer more stress-related problems than other professions (Wong, 2010). The ECE workforce faces unique challenges compared to the educational workforces that serve older children in K-12 settings (Hu et al., 2019). When compared to K-3 teachers, early childhood educators receive much lower compensation and endure higher workloads (Phillips et al., 2016; Putcha et al., 2020; Whitebook, 1999; Whitebook, 2009).

The ECE workforce faces economic insecurity due to persistent wage gaps between elementary school teachers' salaries and early childhood educators' salaries (Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, 2020; Roberts et al., 2019). Particularly, early childhood workers of color are often in the lowest paid positions (Johnson-Staub, 2017). Despite the vital role that the early childhood workforce plays in the development of our youngest learners, early childhood educators earn some of the lowest wages, receive minimal benefits and are more likely than the general population to rely on safety net programs such as Medicaid (Quinn et al., 2022). Whitebook and colleagues (2014) reviewed early childhood educator salaries between 1997 and 2013 and found that childcare workers earned a lower hourly salary than animal caretakers. Childcare workers' wages grew by only one percent between 1997 and 2013, a smaller increase than fast-food workers, which barely kept pace with the increasing cost of living. While preschool teachers' wages grew faster than childcare workers, preschool teachers in 2013 still earned only 60 percent of the hourly wage of kindergarten teachers (Whitebook et al., 2014). The Governor's Office of Early Childhood Development (2019) published a report that indicated median hourly wages in Illinois for early childhood educators as well as elementary educators illustrated in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Median Compensation Rates for Educators in Illinois

Position	Hourly Wage (approximate)
Early childhood educators	
Infant-toddler assistant teacher	$10
Preschool assistant teacher	$10-$11
Infant-toddler teacher	$12
Preschool teacher in a licensed childcare setting	$12-13
Preschool teacher in a school-based setting	$19
Setting director	$15-16
Other educators	
Kindergarten teacher	$30
Elementary teacher	$34

Despite the low compensation provided to the early childhood workforce, they are tasked with carrying a substantially high workload. The work of early childhood teachers includes expanded duties that go beyond providing a healthy and safe experience for children (Bullough et al., 2014). Their responsibilities include planning a rich curriculum across learning domains, preparing children for kindergarten, conducting numerous child assessments and screenings, and meeting multiple program standards and requirements all while developing meaningful relationships with children and families (Schaack et al., 2020). Teachers regularly complete this multitude of tasks with little to no compensated planning time (Whitebook et al., 2015) in classrooms that are open year-round (Schaack et al., 2020) often with limited vacation and personal time off.

The challenges that the ECE workforce faces have only been exacerbated further by the COVID-19 pandemic (Eadie et al., 2021). Although early childhood workers were considered "essential" during the pandemic, many early childhood programs were forced to close due to staffing shortages and enrollment disruptions which led to large numbers of layoffs across the field causing the workforce to decrease by 35% between February and April 2020 (Kim et al., 2022; Quinn et al., 2022). As such, many early educators experienced high rates of economic insecurity as they struggled to pay for basic necessities (e.g., food, housing, medical care) (Quinn

et al., 2022). Further, in childcare programs that remained open, early childhood professionals faced greater exposure to the virus as they had limited access to personal protective equipment (Kim et al., 2022; Quinn et al., 2022). The pandemic forced early educators to quickly adapt their procedures to ensure children's and adults' safety as they provided childcare (Crawford et al., 2021).

In summary, low compensation and heavy workloads, combined with the COVID-19 pandemic, underscore the challenges faced by the early childhood workforce. Poor working conditions have been shown to be associated with higher risks to educators' psychological well-being (Kwon et al., 2020). Workplace well-being can influence teacher effectiveness, the classroom climate, and children's development (Eyal & Roth, 2011; Kwon et al., 2020; Jeon & Wells, 2018 Roberts et al., 2019). Despite the importance of teachers' workplace well-being, early childhood teachers continue to report feeling stressed and burnt out in their work (Jeon & Wells, 2018; McGinty et al., 2008).

Workplace Well-Being of Teachers

The job demands-resources model (JD-R) (Demerouti et al., 2001) is a theoretical approach aimed at explaining the relationship between working conditions and employee well-being. It demonstrates that professional psychological well-being is impacted by two general factors: job demands and job resources (Demerouti et al., 2001). Job demands refer to the aspects of work that require mental effort and are associated with some type of psychological cost (e.g., exhaustion) (Demerouti et al., 2001; Kusma et al., 2012). Job resources are the aspects of the job that support the employee in achieving work-related goals, lessen the demands of the psychological effort required, and encourage personal growth and development (Demerouti et al., 2001; Kusma et al., 2012). The balance between job demands and job resources influences teacher

workplace well-being. Early childhood educators experience a high amount of workplace stress related to their high job demands and minimal job resources (Quinn et al., 2022). As such, it is important to explore the workplace well-being of early educators.

Many definitions of workplace well-being exist, however, there is not yet a single agreed upon definition (Mccallum et al., 2017). For the purposes of this study, the construct of professional psychological well-being is defined as being composed of two critical components: (1) job satisfaction and (2) stress. Below, I examine teacher job satisfaction as well as the relations among stress, burnout, and teacher turnover. Although these terms have great overlap, I initially discuss them as separate constructs to ensure a clear understanding of each. At the end of the section, I demonstrate the interconnectedness of these terms through their cyclical relationship.

Job Satisfaction

Job satisfaction is a significant component of workplace well-being; it involves being content with work in general, the components of the work (e.g., co-workers, level of autonomy), and the outcomes of the work (e.g., productivity) (Kusma et al., 2012). Job satisfaction is conceptualized as the discrepancy between real conditions and ideal conditions, especially based on the congruence between what one wants from their job versus what they perceive it to offer (Jorde-Bloom, 1988b).

Educators who experience higher levels of job satisfaction are more likely to have lower levels of stress, less staff turnover, and higher organizational productivity (Hall-Kenyon et al., 2014; Stremmel, 1991; Wong, 2010). On the other hand, teachers who experience diminished levels of job satisfaction are associated with higher levels of stress (Jeon et al., 2014; Kusma et al., 2012; Kwon et al., 2020). Further, early childhood teachers' perceived workplace satisfaction

has been found to predict their turnover rates (Jeon & Wells, 2018). As such, job satisfaction strongly relates to stress and turnover in the workplace.

Stress and Burnout

Stress is an individual's emotional state that is influenced by exposure to acute or chronic adverse experiences (Cohen et al., 1983). When stressors disrupt the equilibrium of the cognitive-emotional-environmental system, stress is created for the individual experiencing the disruption (Demerouti et al., 2001). Teacher stress is influenced by stressors such as the overall demands of the job, low teaching autonomy, and high workload (Gagnon et al., 2019). Teachers who possess high levels of stress have been associated with less favorable teacher-child interactions (Quinn et al., 2022). Teachers' occupational stress levels have drastically risen over the past decade and the pandemic has further exacerbated stress levels for early educators. (Oberle et al., 2020; Quinn et al., 2022).

If stressors are not reduced and teachers continue to experience prolonged stress then feelings of burnout will likely manifest (Durr et al., 2014; Russell et al., 2020). Burnout is an important indicator of teacher well-being (Oberle et al., 2020) and is a critical construct in understanding job-related stress (Van Maele & Van Houtte, 2015). Moreover, burnout is one of the leading reasons educators leave the field of teaching (Russell et al., 2020). Maslach (1982) created the most influential definition of burnout, describing it as a syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment (Carson et al., 2017; Demerouti et al., 2001). Respectively, these terms describe feeling overextended by the demands of work, feeling detached/withdrawn from others, and feeling a sense of failure in their work (Carson et al., 2017).

Feelings of stress and burnout can negatively impact the interactions teachers have with their students, resulting in lower quality teaching instruction (Carson et al., 2017). Research indi-

cates that highly stressed teachers are less likely to build caring relationships and connections

with their students, as well as less likely to provide consistent emotional support to their students

(Gagnon et al., 2019; Jeon et al., 2019; Oberle et al., 2020). Moreover, highly stressed or burnt-

out teachers are more likely to use reactive and punitive behavior management strategies with

their students (Oberle et al., 2020). A "burnout cascade effect" is likely to occur as highly

stressed teachers cannot fully meet their students' social-emotional needs (Oberle et al., 2020). In

response, students display increased problematic behaviors (Oberle et al., 2020) which can lead

to staff turnover.

Turnover

The field of early childhood faces a long-standing issue of high levels of turnover (Jeon & Wells,

2018; Totenhagen et al., 2016). Research from the 1990s reveals that 76% of childcare teachers

employed in 1996 were no longer retained in the field by 2000 (Cassidy et al., 2011). More re-

cently, in Louisiana, researchers found early childhood teacher turnover to be relatively high

compared to K-12 teachers, as more than one-third of the observed ECE teachers were no longer

working in their program the following year (Bassok et al., 2021). Similarly, Wells (2015) found

that in the US, approximately 30% of preschool teachers leave their job annually; many of those

teachers cited stress as one of the main reasons for leaving. Markowitz (2019) carried out a study

using the Head Start Family and Child Experiences Survey data to better understand ECE within-

year teacher turnover, which that study defined as when a teacher leaves the Head Start program

during the academic year. Markowitz found an annual within-year turnover rate of 10%, more

than double the within-year turnover rate within K-12 settings. The previously high levels of

turnover have continued to increase in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, more

than half of the respondents who completed a recent survey from the National Education Associ-

ation (2022) revealed that they are more likely to leave the field sooner than planned because of the pandemic. Similarly, early childhood professionals described how over time, the prolonged stress of the COVID-19 pandemic may lead to educator burnout (Crawford et al., 2021).

The high levels of turnover in ECE are concerning because they can negatively affect children's outcomes (Bassok et al., 2021; Brown & Wynn, 2009). Low teacher turnover rates over an extended period are associated with a positive effect on the quality of learning that children experience (Mims et al., 2008). High turnover rates create unstable relationships between young students and their teachers which influences children's developmental outcomes (Cassidy et al., 2019; Hur et al., 2015; Jeon & Wells, 2018; Totenhagen et al., 2016). As teachers continuously leave programs, instability and unpredictability occur for the children left behind in those programs (Grissom, 2011; Markowitz, 2019; Royer & Moreau, 2016). Such instability can disrupt children's learning and impede their developmental progress which can impact their long-term academic and social development (Brown & Wynn, 2009; Cassidy et al., 2019; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Markowitz, 2019; Totenhagen et al., 2016). In a study carried out by Cassidy and colleagues (2011), teachers noted that children experienced sadness after their teacher left the program because children "feel like they've been left behind" (p. 12). Teachers in their study described how children began "acting out" after their former teacher left. In other words, a teacher who is experiencing low levels of stress, is satisfied in their work, and does not plan to quit tends to provide higher-quality instruction to students versus a stressed and dissatisfied teacher who plans on quitting (Ford et al., 2019).

Interconnectedness of Workplace Well-Being

These feelings do not happen in isolation, and often occur in a self-reinforcing cycle. For example, teachers who remain working in their program also experience higher amounts of stress

in response to the departure of their former colleague. To accommodate a staff opening, a great deal of shifting staff needs to occur (Cassidy et al., 2011), which can be stressful for teachers as they are moved around. Similarly, teachers may need to take on more responsibilities to adjust for the staff vacancy, which adds to an already stressful workload. As described above, children may take on disruptive behaviors, making classroom management more challenging for teachers and increasing their stress levels. Burnout is a critical factor that contributes to teacher turnover (Oberle et al., 2020; Van Maele & Van Houtte, 2015). As such, when teacher stress levels increase in response to staff turnover, feelings of burnout are enhanced which causes more teachers to leave their program (Royer & Moreau, 2016).

Influences on Teacher Well-Being

Early childhood educators face a high number job of demands which can negatively impact their workplace well-being (Cassidy et al., 2019; Gagnon et al., 2019; Roberts et al., 2019). Leadership is widely recognized as an essential driver of organizational performance (Kirby et al., 2021) and has been shown to be critical to the success of early childhood programs (Talan et al., 2014). Although leadership research in the school sector is growing, a stark contrast exists in the field of early childhood where leadership literature remains limited (Grantham-Caston & Di-Carlo, 2021; Kirby et al., 2021; Muijs et al., 2004). As such, to explore the relationship between leadership and teacher workplace well-being, we examine the K-12 literature which has demonstrated how principals have been shown to influence the professional well-being of their teachers and how principals can disrupt the negative cycle of stress, burnout, and turnover for their teachers.

School principals have been shown either to support the positive professional well-being of their teachers by decreasing feelings of stress and burnout or to undermine teacher well-being

by fostering feelings of stress and burnout (Lambersky, 2016). Perceived social support from administrators has been shown to be a critical contributing factor to teachers' workplace commitment and burnout (Lambersky, 2016; Oberle et al., 2020; Redding et al., 2019). High levels of social support from been shown to reduce burnout for teachers (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2010), whereas low levels of supervisor support have been associated with higher levels of burnout and diminished workplace commitment (Hakanen et al., 2006).

School principals have been found to play a significant role in creating a work environment that encourages teacher retention (Brown & Wynn, 2009)**.** Lambersky (2016) found that 65% of elementary teachers reported that acknowledgement of their efforts from their school principal was a major influence in their decision to continue working at the same school in the future. Ingersoll (2001) found that principal support and school climate were statistically associated with teacher turnover. Grissom (2011) described how in his study, the effectiveness of the principal was associated with greater teacher satisfaction and a lower probability of teacher attrition. Further, Grissom's research explained how effective principals also promote student achievement by creating positive school environments. In sum, school principals have been shown to play a vital role in creating a work environment that positively impacts teacher professional well-being by reducing teacher turnover levels which cyclically are influenced by stress and burnout.

Within the context of early childhood, administrators provide leadership to their teaching staff. Unlike principals who have a clear title, early childhood administrators may hold various titles, some of which may include center director, site manager, or education coordinator. The following section explores the roles of early childhood administrators and the influence they have on organizational climate in their workplace.

Early Childhood Administrators

Early childhood administrators carry out a diverse set of responsibilities based on the unique needs of their center to provide leadership to their staff. Often, early childhood administrators "wear multiple hats" to fulfill their myriad of daily duties. Administrators' duties can encompass administrative leadership tasks, pedagogical/instructional leadership tasks, or a combination of both (Douglass, 2019). As administrative leaders, they are responsible for hiring, managing, and training qualified personnel; allocating financial resources; and managing the building/facilities (Bloom & Abel, 2015; Jorde-bloom, 1992; Lieberman, 2017). As pedagogical/instructional leaders, they are tasked with selecting appropriate curricula and assessments, setting expectations for developmentally appropriate practices, and coaching and supporting teachers to engage in high-quality teacher-child interactions (Bloom & Abel, 2015a; Lieberman, 2017). Within various early childhood programs, one person may be solely responsible for both administrative and instructional leadership functions; at other programs, the leadership functions may be shared among several people (Douglass, 2019). These responsibilities shift based on the individual program needs, which makes the work of an early childhood administrator particularly nuanced (Catron & Groves, 1999). Although a limited amount of literature examines early childhood administrators' impact on teacher workplace well-being, prior research has identified early childhood administrators' influence on the organizational climate within their workplace. Prior research has linked workplace climate with early childhood teacher job satisfaction, stress, and turnover (Hewett & La Paro, 2020; Jorde-Bloom, 1988b).

Organizational Climate

Policymakers and practitioners agree that strong leadership is critical to the success of early childhood programs (Talan et al., 2014). Early childhood administrators have been shown

to have a strong influence on the organizational climate of their workplace (Bloom & Abel, 2015; Dennis & O'Connor, 2013; Hewett & La Paro, 2020; Lower & Cassidy, 2007; Talan et al., 2014). Administrators are charged with making decisions that directly and indirectly impact the students and staff in their school (Bloom & Abel, 2015). Staff members perceive their leader's decisions and actions as an interpretive filter of the organization (Kuenzi & Schminke, 2009). Some of these decisions include promoting the organization's philosophy and vision, cultivating continuous growth and development of staff and children, setting expectations for developmentally appropriate activities and interactions, and hiring and training skilled employees (Bloom & Abel, 2015).

Researchers today agree that organizational climate is crucial to cultivating an environment conducive for employees to thrive and perform to their fullest potential (Marinova et al., 2019). Organizational climate describes the conditions that exist in the work setting based on the collective perceptions, attitudes, beliefs, and values (Dennis & O'Connor, 2013; Hewett & La Paro, 2020; Jorde-Bloom, 1988; 1996; Kuenzi & Schminke, 2009; Prastiawan et al., 2020). The construct of organizational climate originally became popular in the 1960s (Veziroglu-Celik & Yildiz, 2018). By the mid-1980s, several instruments for assessing organizational climate were developed in both the business world and in primary and secondary educational settings, but not in the field of early childhood education (Jorde-Bloom, 1996).

In response to this gap, Jorde-Bloom developed the Early Childhood Work Environment Survey (ECWES) to provide an assessment tool to early childhood administrators to measure staff perceptions (Jorde-Bloom, 1988). To define the construct of organizational climate in early childhood centers, she outlined the following components as dimensions of the ECWES: collegiality, professional growth, supervisor support, clarity, reward system, decision making, goal con-

sensus, task orientation, physical setting, and innovativeness (Jorde-Bloom, 1988). Taken together, these dimensions define the known components of organizational climate in early childhood environments.

Research shows that schools with low ratings of organizational climate have lower teacher commitment levels and higher teacher turnover rates (Hewett & La Paro, 2020). In contrast, schools with a more favorable climate are associated with higher job satisfaction for teachers, higher levels of engagement in developmentally appropriate practices, and higher ratings of language interactions between teachers and children (Hewett & La Paro, 2020). Stremmel (1991) described how in early childhood centers, an unsupportive organizational climate includes factors such as poor working conditions, high job demands, and lack of support from administrators. These factors have been shown to influence staff morale, stress, and burnout (Stremmel 1991).

The organizational climate in early childhood centers is complex-- involving interrelated systems that significantly impact both students and staff. Organizational outcomes have been shown to be associated with the relationship between employees and their supervisors (Harris et al., 2007; Malik et al., 2015; Peterson, & Aikens, 2017). In other words, the dynamic between teachers and administrators relates to the organizational climate within the workplace.

Relationship Between Teachers and Administrators

Generally, employees seek to have a good relationship with their supervisor (Mikkelson et al., 2015). The styles approach to leadership indicates that relationships between employees and their leaders are impacted by two types of leader behaviors which include (1) task behaviors and (2) relationship behaviors (Malik et al., 2015; Mikkelson et al., 2015; Northouse, 2013). Task-oriented behaviors are intended to help employees achieve their goals and objectives in an efficient way (Mikkelson et al., 2015; Yukl et al., 2002) Relationship oriented behaviors are intend-

ed to support employees by making them feel part of and comfortable in the workplace (Mikkelson et al., 2015; Yukl et al., 2002). The leadership styles outlined by Bass and Avolio (1994) encompass both types of leadership behaviors (Mikkelson et al., 2015). Moreover, relation-oriented behavior is associated with a level of trust between a leader and their employee (Mikkelson et al., 2015; Yukl et al., 2002). As such, the following sections explore the leadership styles outlined by Bass and Avolio (1994) as well as intra-organizational trust. The final section explores how the congruence between employee's perception of ideal and actual leadership can also impact this relationship.

Leadership Style

Early childhood administrators carry out their roles through their various leadership styles. Burns (1978) developed two of the most researched and widely influential leadership theories which includes transactional leadership and transformational leadership. These theories were further extended by Bass and Avolio (1994) as they developed the full range leadership model (FRLM), depicted in Table 2, which includes the three leadership styles: transactional, transformational, and passive avoidant. The FRLM consists of nine different leadership factors that contribute to the different leadership styles. Bass and Avolio later developed the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) to measure the three leadership styles (Avolio et al., 1999).

Table 2. Full Range Leadership Model

Leadership Style	Leadership Factors
Passive Avoidant	Laissez-Faire
	Management by Exception Passive (MBEP)
Transactional	Management by Exception Active (MBEA)
	Contingent Reward (CR)
Transformational	Individual Consideration (IC)
	Intellectual Stimulation (IS)
	Inspirational Motivation (IM)
	Idealized Behaviors (IB)
	Idealized Attitudes (IA)

Transformational leadership is the style that has been most highly researched over the past few decades and has been shown to be the leadership style that has the most positive impact (Bass, 1990; Gardner et al., 2010; Robinson et al., 2008). Transformational leadership involves the leaders' ability to engage with staff in ways to inspire their energy, commitment, and determination so staff can carry out the organization's purpose, mission, and goals (Harrison, 2018; Robinson et al., 2008). This encourages staff to collaborate with each other and look beyond their own self-interest to overcome challenges and reach goals for the good of the overall organization (Bass, 1990; Robinson et al., 2008). Bass and Avolio (2004) describe how transformational leaders are proactive, and help employees optimize individual and organizational development and innovation. Transformational leaders help their staff see opportunities and challenges in new ways so that they can strive for higher levels of standards (Bass & Avolio, 2004). There are five factors associated with transformational leadership: (1) idealized attributes; (2) idealized behaviors; (3) inspirational motivation; (4) intellectual stimulation and (5) individual consideration (Bass & Avolio, 2004). Leaders with idealized attributes instill pride in others, act in ways that build others' respect, and display power and confidence. Leaders with idealized behaviors emphasize and discuss mission, values, and beliefs and have a strong sense of purpose and morals.

Inspirational motivation encompasses leaders who display enthusiasm, optimism, and encouragement and motivate their associates by providing meaning and challenge in their work. Intellectual stimulation represents leaders who solicit innovation and creativity from their staff while avoiding ridicule and criticism. Individual consideration describes leaders who pay attention to the needs of individuals by coaching and mentoring employees and by creating a supportive environment for growth and learning.

Transactional leaders define expectations and promote achievement of these expectations through constructive and corrective behaviors (Bass & Avolio, 2004). Transactional leaders make their staff aware of the expectations around performance and encourage them to meet the expectations in exchange for receiving rewards/recognition (Bass, 1990; Harrison, 2018). When employees do not meet these expectations, transactional leaders penalize those staff (Bass, 1990). There are two factors associated with transactional leadership style: (1) contingent reward, and (2) management by exception (active) (Bass & Avolio, 2004). Contingent reward encompasses leaders who clarify and set expectations and then express satisfaction or recognition when associates meet the goal. Management by exception (active) describes leaders who specify standards for compliance and then closely monitor for mistakes and errors to take corrective action as quickly as possible.

Passive avoidant leadership involves a hands-off approach, or an absence of the leader (Manning, 2016). Passive avoidant leaders provide no feedback and make very little effort to satisfy the needs of their colleagues (Manning, 2016). Passive avoidant leaders often avoid specifying or clarifying standards, goals, and expectations which can negatively impact colleagues. Passive avoidant leadership is associated with two factors: (1) management by exception (passive), and (2) laissez-faire. Management by exception (passive) represents leaders who wait for prob-

lems to become serious before taking action. Laissez-faire leaders are often absent when needed and avoid getting involved or making decisions even when issues become serious.

Trust is a foundational component of any relationship. Both transactional and transformational leaders develop a level of trust with their staff (Cai et al., 2018). Transactional leadership requires trust as it uses motivational strategies based on contingent rewards (Cai et al., 2018). Staff must trust that their leader will keep the promises made to be motivated to work towards receiving that contingent reward (Bass, 1985). Transformational leaders are trusted by their staff for different reasons. As transformational leaders provide a vision with shared goals for their staff to pursue, the staff develops a social bond with their leader which results in perceiving their leader as trustworthy (Cai et al., 2018; Casimir et al., 2006).

Trust

Intra-organizational trust, which specifically examines the trust between employees and leadership or among co-workers, has been recognized as having a critical influence in the workplace (Tzafrir & Dolan, 2004). Trust is a complex construct and has many varied definitions throughout the literature (Dietz & Den Hartog, 2006). In educational settings, feelings of trust are foundational for building positive relationships between teachers and administrators (Kars & Inandi, 2018). Trust in an administrator has been shown to be associated with teachers' job satisfaction, organizational commitment, productivity and overall performance (Kars & Inandi, 2018).

Bryk and Schneider (2002) posited that relational trust exists between administrators and teachers when teachers feel respected by their administrator, and view their administrator as being competent, having integrity and a genuine interest in their personal well-being. Moreover, as trust in an administrator increases, teachers' job satisfaction, performance, organizational com-

mitment, and productivity have been shown to similarly increase (Kars & Inandi, 2018). Social

trust in educational settings has been found to be a major contributor to school effectiveness and

to empower staff (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Casimir et al., 2006).

Congruence Between Ideal and Real Leadership

Leadership schemas are essential knowledge structures that assist in making sense of

leadership in the workplace (Epitropaki & Martin, 2005). Employees create leadership schemas

around the traits they desire in an ideal leader. People tend to be less happy when they don't get

what they want; the same is true for the level of congruence between desired leader traits and

actual leader traits (Epitropaki & Martin, 2005). Discrepancies between the traits that employees

desire in their leader and the traits that their leader actually possesses may lead to negative or-

ganizational outcomes such as lower job satisfaction and commitment (Epitropaki & Martin,

2005; Nichols & Cottrell, 2014). Conversely, high levels of alignment between employees' per-

ceptions of their ideal leader and their real leader have been shown to have a positive influence

in the workplace (Stelmokienė & Endriulaitienė, 2020). The role that employees' leadership

schemas play in the workplace has received limited empirical attention (Epitropaki & Martin,

2005) and requires further exploration.

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Grounding for the Current Study

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Although a robust amount of research indicates that teachers' workplace well-being is

critical to promoting high quality classrooms and positive development of children, early child-

hood teachers continue to report feeling stressed and burnt out in their work (Jeon & Wells,

2018). Within the realm of principal leadership, literature suggests that principals influence

teachers' job satisfaction, stress and burnout by offering support to their teachers (Grissom, 2011;

Lambersky, 2016; Oberle et al., 2020; Redding et al., 2019). However, the scope of early child-

hood leadership research remains limited (Grantham-Caston & DiCarlo, 2021; Kirby et al., 2021; Muijs et al., 2004). Existing studies indicate that early childhood administrators have been found to have a strong influence on the organizational climate of their workplace which has been shown to be influential on both teacher satisfaction and stress (Bloom & Abel, 2015; Dennis & O'Connor, 2013; Hewett & La Paro, 2020; Lower & Cassidy, 2007; Talan, Bloom & Kelton, 2014).

Further research is needed to understand the relationship between early childhood administrators and teachers' psychological well-being in early childhood settings (Jeon & Wells, 2018). Several factors have been shown to be influential within the workplace and to influence the relationship between teachers and their administrators. First, transformational leadership style has been shown to have the most positive impact on employees (Bass, 1990; Gardner et al., 2010; Robinson et al., 2008). Second, trust in an administrator has been shown to increase teachers' job satisfaction, performance, organizational commitment, and productivity (Kars & Inandi, 2018). Finally, high levels of congruence between employee perceptions of their ideal leader and their real leader have been shown to have a positive influence in the workplace (Stelmokienė & Endriulaitienė, 2020).

Although employee's perceptions of leadership can be instrumental in the workplace, leadership literature has often overlooked the traits that employees themselves want their specific leaders to possess (Nichols & Cottrell, 2014; Vecchio & Boatwright, 2002). Instead, leadership research has primarily focused on what employees believe are characteristic traits of general leaders (Nichols & Cottrell, 2014). Because research remains scarce and scattered, it is essential to consider employees' perceptions of ideal leadership traits (Nichols & Cottrell, 2014). Further, as discrepancies between desired traits and actual traits of leaders may lead to negative organiza-

tional outcomes, it is imperative to understand what these desired traits include specifically for the early childhood workforce (Epitropaki & Martin, 2005; Nichols & Cottrell, 2014).

It is through teachers' experiences that the field must respond to the gap in the literature to shed light on leadership in the field of early childhood settings. The Early Childhood Workforce Index calls for a need to amplify the voices of educators who are most often missing from conversations that impact their practice and well-being (Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, 2020). To elevate their voices, early childhood educators must contribute to the creation of this understanding as they share their unique perspectives. If the perspectives of the early childhood workforce, mainly women of color, continue to be marginalized or silenced in academic discourse, then their voices become invisible (Crenshaw, 1993; Turman, 2017). To avoid perpetuating the dominant viewpoints, the early childhood workforce should be seen as the creators and holders of knowledge (Turman, 2017). Although employee's perceptions of leadership can be instrumental in the workplace, leadership literature has often overlooked the traits that employees themselves want their specific leaders to possess (Nichols & Cottrell, 2014; Vecchio & Boatwright, 2002). The field needs to rely on the experiences and perspectives of the women who make up the early childhood workforce to provide a better understanding of early childhood leadership. Not only are the teachers working directly with students and families daily, but they also have firsthand experience working directly with their administrators.

In sum, further research is needed to understand the relationship between early childhood administrators and teachers' workplace well-being in early childhood settings from the perspective of the educators themselves.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Mixed-Methods Research Design

This study aimed to understand how early childhood teachers' perceptions of their administrators relates to their workplace well-being. It used a mixed-methods approach with a sequential explanatory design, where the qualitative methods were used to help explain the quantitative results (Creswell, 2009; Creswell 2021).

The quantitative data provided a breadth of general understanding of the relationship between early childhood administrators and teacher workplace well-being. The qualitative data facilitated a deeper exploration of why the quantitative findings occurred (Creswell, 2021; Palinkas et al., 2015). The mixed methods approach enabled a robust interpretation of the data with a panoramic view to understand the relationships from multiple perspectives (Ivankova et al., 2006; Shorten & Smith, 2017).

The sequential explanatory design occurred in two distinct phases. Phase 1 involved the collection and analysis of quantitative data gathered through an online survey. Quantitative data was analyzed using correlation and regression. Phase 2 involved the qualitative data collection and analysis gathered through semi-structured interviews. Following the first two phases, the mixed methods integration and analysis was carried out by merging and analyzing all data to offer new perspectives and enhance the value of the study findings (Bazeley, 2012; Caracelli & Greene, 1993; Fetters et al., 2013). To provide a detailed description of all the methods, the following sections are presented in the order of the phases in the sequential explanatory design.

Phase 1: Quantitative Methods

Phase one used quantitative methods to analyze how teachers' perceptions of their administrators' leadership style, trust levels, and congruence to ideal relate to their professional well-being (i.e., workplace stress and commitment). Specifically, the quantitative methods explored the following research questions:

1. To what extent do the perceptions that early childhood teachers hold about their administrators' leadership style relate to their professional well-being?

2. To what extent does the trust that early childhood teachers have in their administrators relate to their professional well-being?

3. To what extent does the level of congruence between teachers' perceptions of ideal early childhood leadership and their perceptions of real administrators' leadership relate to their professional well-being?

I hypothesized that teachers with lower workplace stress and higher workplace commitment would perceive their administrators as having a more transformational leadership style, along with higher levels of trust and congruence.

Quantitative Data Collection

Quantitative study participants were recruited through convenience sampling, which is a nonrandom sampling technique that allows members of the population of interest to participate as they meet practical criteria (Etikan et al., 2016). Quantitative data were collected using Qualtrics, an online survey platform. The survey was distributed virtually between July 14th–August 11th, 2023, over several early childhood email listservs and early childhood social media platforms. The recruitment email and posts described the expectations of participating in the study

and informed teachers that by completing the survey. they would be entered in a lottery for the chance to win a $100 gift card.

Quantitative Participants

When teachers interested in participating in this study accessed the survey link, they were first prompted to respond to a screener to ensure they were eligible to complete the survey. Inclusion criteria was based on five items: (1) role in ECE program, (2) children's age range, (3) full-time status, (4) program type, and (5) location of their center. To be eligible to complete the survey, participants must have identified with all of the following criteria: being a full-time teacher, of preschool (3–5-year-old) children, in a center-based program within a Chicagoland region county (i.e., Cook, DeKalb, DuPage, Kane, Kankakee, Kendall, Lake, McHenry or Will). These inclusion criteria were implemented to ensure homogeneity of the study sample on key experiences relevant to the study (Keung et al., 2020). For example, teachers who work with infants and toddlers may face different stressors than teachers who work with preschool aged children. Moreover, teachers who work part-time may have varying levels of workplace well-being compared to teachers who work full-time. Similarly, teachers who work in more rural areas may experience different stressors compared to teachers within the Chicagoland area. Additionally, teachers who work in school systems may have access to varying supports and resources when compared to teachers who work in center-based programs. If an interested teacher did not identify with all the inclusion criteria, they were not able to access the survey and instead were given a brief message ineligibility message. For teachers who did identify with all of the inclusion criteria, they were able to access the full survey which included several measures described below.

In total, 564 survey responses were recorded. All survey respondents were asked to initially answer the five selection criteria questions. Only 191 of those responses passed all five in-

clusion criteria questions and were allowed to access the full survey with the various survey measures. The remaining 373 surveys who did not meet all the selection criteria were provided with the ineligibility message and did not engage in any of the survey measures.

I reviewed the 191 surveys that passed the selection criteria to determine what surveys were likely to have been submitted by "bots" (exploitative non-human respondents). In doing so, I removed 98 surveys for the following reasons: open-text boxes included suspicious phrases (i.e., 50 surveys), incomplete (i.e., 29 surveys), geolocator was outside of the Chicagoland area (i.e., 12 surveys), and duration to complete took less than 7 minutes (i.e., 7 surveys). After reviewing the responses, 93 surveys remained and were included in the quantitative data analysis.

Survey participants included 93 full-time preschool center-based teachers working in the Chicagoland area. The majority of participants identified as female (98%). Participants varied on their racial identification with the majority identifying as White (37%), Black (32%), or Latino/a (23%). The average age of survey participants was 44.52 years old ($SD = 11.90$). Participants identified as having an average of 18.14 years ($SD = 10.58$) working in the field of early child-hood and 6.81 ($SD = 5.93$) years at their current center. A full description of participant demo-graphic information can be found in Table 3.

Table 3. Demographics of Survey Participants

N = 93	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation
Descriptives				
Age	21	68	44.52	11.90
Years in early childhood education	0	50	18.14	10.58
Years at Current Center	0	24	6.81	5.93
	Frequency	Percent		
Gender				
Female	91	98%		
Male	1	1%		
Prefer not to say	1	1%		
Race				
Asian	4	4%		
Bi-racial	2	2%		
Black/African American	30	32%		
Latino/a	21	23%		
Not listed	1	1%		
Prefer not to say	1	1%		
White	34	37%		
Education				
High school or GED	2	2%		
Associate's	19	20%		
Some undergraduate but no degree	3	3%		
Bachelor's	32	34%		
Some graduate but no degree	13	14%		
Master's	24	26%		

Quantitative Measures

To explore the various study constructs, I utilized several different measures. The following sections describe each study construct and the study measures that were used to operationalize each construct. An overview of the quantitative construct and their associated study measures can be found in Table 4.

Table 4. Overview of Quantitative Constructs by Research Question

Research Question	Construct	Variable	Measure
1. To what extent do the perceptions that early childhood teachers hold about their administrator's leadership style relate to their professional well-being?	Leadership Style	Predictor	Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire 5X Short Form
	Professional Well-Being: Commitment	Outcome	Early Childhood Job Satisfaction Scale- Commitment Subscale
	Professional Well-Being: Stress	Outcome	Perceived Stress Scale
2. To what extent does the trust that early childhood teachers have in their administrator relate to their professional well-being?	Trust	Predictor	Trust Me Scale
	Professional Well-Being: Commitment	Outcome	Early Childhood Job Satisfaction Scale- Commitment Subscale
	Professional Well-Being: Stress	Outcome	Perceived Stress Scale
3. To what extent does the level of congruence between teachers' perceptions of ideal ECE leadership and their perceptions of their real administrator's specific leadership relate to their professional well-being?	Congruence	Predictor	Early Childhood Job Satisfaction Scale- Congruence Subscale
	Professional Well-Being: Commitment	Outcome	Early Childhood Job Satisfaction Scale- Commitment Subscale
	Professional Well-Being: Stress	Outcome	Perceived Stress Scale

Leadership Style. To measure the leadership style teachers perceived their administrator to possess, I used the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire 5X Short Form. Bass and Avolio developed the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) to measure key leadership and effectiveness behaviors that have been shown to be strongly linked to success of individuals as well as

whole organizations (Bass & Avolio, 2004). The MLQ 5X Short Form is a 36-item instrument that measures a continuum of different leadership styles including transformational, transactional and passive avoidant, represented by nine leadership factors (Avolio et al., 1999). A summary of the factors associated with each leadership style and number of survey items per factor can be found in Table 5. Participants used a five-point Likert scale from 0 (Not at all) to 4 (Frequently, if not always) to rate the degree to which they believe each of the statements described their administrator. The transformational subscale included 20 items (e.g., spends time teaching and coaching). The transactional subscale included 8 items (e.g., provides me with assistance in exchange for my efforts). The passive avoidant subscale included 8 items (e.g., is absent when needed). Refer to Appendix A for full measure of the MLQ 5X Short Form.

The MLQ 5X Short form has been widely used and referenced in leadership literature across various workplaces. It has been used in nearly 300 research programs internationally (Johnson, 2015) and has been applied in different contextual conditions with samples that have included nurses, educators, business executives, and academic administrators (Xu et al., 2016). It has also been used to compare the leadership styles between males and females as well as across races (Johnson, 2015; Xu et al., 2016). The MLQ Short Form 5X scales have exhibited high internal consistency and factor loadings (Bass & Avolio, 1997). Several meta-analyses have further confirmed the effectiveness and validity of the MLQ Short Form 5X (Judge & Piccol, 2004; Lowe et al., 1996). Antonakis and colleagues (2003) performed a series of Confirmatory Factor Analyses and found an adequate fit (RMSEA < .08 and CFI > .90). All factor loadings were found to be significant and averaged .65 across the items (Antonakis et al., 2003).

For the current study, I computed Cronbach's alpha on the three subscales of the MLQ. The transformational subscale consisted of 20 items (α = .94), the transactional subscale consisted of 8 items (α = .70), and the passive avoidant subscale consisted of 8 items (α = .85).

Table 5. Description of the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire 5X Short Form

Leadership Style	Factors	#	Description
Transformational	Idealized influences (attributes)	4	Leader builds pride and respects from others
	Idealized influence (behaviors)	4	Leader develops a collective sense of mission and values
	Inspirational motivation	4	Leader motivates others by providing meaning and challenge in work
	Intellectual stimulation	4	Leader encourages innovation and creativity
	Individual consideration	4	Leader teaches and coaches on an individual basis
Transactional	Contingent reward	4	Leader clarifies expectations and provides rewards for task completion
	Management by exception (active)	4	Leader monitors for errors then takes corrective action
Passive-avoidant	Management by exception (passive)	4	Leader reacts to situations only after they become serious
	Laissez-faire	4	Leader is absent and avoids getting involved or making decisions

= number of items on the MLQ 5X Short Form

Trust. The Trust Me Scale (Tzafrir & Dolan, 2004) was used to measure the perceived level of trust between teachers and their administrators. It is a 16-item instrument (i.e., My employees/managers are open and up front with me) that is used to measure the level of trust in workplace relationships. Unlike other questionnaires that measure trust broadly, the Trust Me Scale was designed to measure trust specifically in the workplace. For this study, the scale items were modified to replace "employees/managers" with "administrators." Participants used a five-point scale to indicate their level of agreement with each item (i.e., disagree strongly: agree

strongly). Three items were reverse scored. The questionnaire demonstrated very good internal reliability with an alpha coefficient of .92 (Tzafrir & Dolan, 2004). For this study, I calculated the Cronbach's alpha for the 16 items to have an alpha of .94. See Appendix B for full measure of the Trust Me Scale.

Congruence. The congruence subscale from the Early Childhood Job Satisfaction Survey (ECJSS) was used to measure teachers' perception of the level of congruence between their ideal and actual administrator. The ECJSS was designed to measure work attitudes of early childhood administrators, teachers and coordinators who work more than 10 hours a week in a paid capacity (Bloom, 2016). This tool was originally developed for the early childhood workforce by a well-established early childhood researcher, Paula Jorde-Bloom. Bloom (2016) described how across the three samples, the ECJSS demonstrated internal consistency that ranged from .65 to .90. The ECJSS also demonstrated convergent validity as its subscales correlated strongly to the Job Description Index (JDI), a widely used job satisfaction measure in the field of business (Bloom, 2016).

The ECJSS congruence subscale originally included 5 items (e.g., relationship with co-workers, the work itself, etc.) For the purpose of this study, the ECJSS subscale was modified to only include the item "relationship with supervisor." Participants used a five-point Likert scale from one (not like my ideal at all) to five (is my ideal) to rate the degree to which their current supervisor resembles their ideal supervisor. Refer to Appendix C for the congruence subscale of the Early Childhood Job Satisfaction Survey.

Workplace Well-Being.

Commitment. The commitment subscale from the ECJSS was used to measure teachers' perception of their commitment to their workplace. Participants were asked to read ten state-

ments (e.g., I intend to work here at least two more years, I sometimes feel trapped in this job)

and to select the statements that describe their feelings towards their current center/school.

Scores ranged from 0-10 with higher scores indicating higher commitment to their center. See

Appendix D for the commitment subscale of the Early Childhood Job Satisfaction Survey.

Stress. The Perceived Stress Scale (Cohen et al., 1983) was used to measure teachers'

perception of their workplace stress. The Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) was designed to measure

the degree to which an individual perceives situations in their life to be stressful (Cohen et al.,

1983). The PSS is a widely used instrument due to its accessible reading score and its general

nature where its questions can be applied to multiple contexts (Cohen, 1994; Soria-Reyes et al.,

2023; Teresi et al., 2020). The PSS was normed across three samples—two samples consisting of

college students and one sample consisting of a more heterogeneous group of individuals en-

rolled in a smoking-cessation program (Cohen et al., 1983). The PSS has adequate internal relia-

bility, adequate test-retest reliability, and correlates in the expected manner with a range of self-

report and behavioral criteria (Cohen et al., 1983). The PSS was also found to have strong relia-

bility and validity (i.e., Cronbach's alpha 0.91; split-half 0.90) (Wagner et al., 2013).

The PSS is a 10-item measure that asks respondents to use a 4-point scale (e.g., never:

very often) to indicate how frequently they have experienced specific feelings and thoughts with-

in the last month. Six of the items focus on negative experiences (e.g., In the last month, how

often have you been upset because of something that happened unexpectedly). Four of the items

focus on positive experiences (e.g., In the last month, how often have you felt that things were

going your way?) and are reverse scored. I adapted the PSS to focus on workplace stress levels

by modifying the prompt for each item to focus on the workplace (e.g., In the last month, how

often have you felt that things were going your way at work?). For this study, the 10 items on the

PSS had a Cronbach's alpha of .89. Scores ranging from 0-13 are considered low stress, 14-26 moderate stress, and 27-40 are considered high stress. Refer to Appendix E for full Perceived Stress Scale measure.

Quantitative Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed to understand the relationship between teachers' perceptions of their administrator and their workplace well-being. To prepare for the quantitative analysis of the survey, I first exported the survey data from Qualtrics into SPSS and only included the 93 participant surveys that met all the inclusion criteria. Then, I created a password-protected linking file which paired each teacher's name and email address to a personal ID number. Next, I replaced all names and emails in the dataset with the newly created personal ID number to protect the identity of the participants.

I created composite scores for the quantitative measures according to their respective manuals. For the MLQ, a separate composite score was created for each leadership style by taking an average of the relevant items. Composite scores were individually created for the Trust Me Scale, the PSS, and the commitment subscale by calculating a sum of the respective tool's items. The congruence subscale only consisted of one item and that score was used as the congruence score. To check reliability of the scales, I computed Cronbach's alpha on the three measures that had Likert scales (i.e., PSS, Trust, MLQ) and found all scales to have good reliability with an alpha of .70 and above and a range from .70- .94. Therefore, I did not remove any items from any of the scales.

For preliminary analyses, I checked assumptions, conducted descriptive statistics and examined zero-order correlations. For the primary analyses, I ran simple linear regressions to explore the relationship between the independent variables (i.e., leadership style, trust, congruence)

and dependent variables (i.e., stress and job commitment). Linear regression is an extremely valuable technique that goes one step further than correlation to look at the predictability of the independent variable (Boslaugh & Watters, 2008). For the analyses, I carried out six simple linear regressions to test the relationships between variables. I analyzed each research question by running two linear regressions per research question, using one regression analysis for each dependent variable (i.e., stress and commitment). I used stepwise regression by entering the covariates into the first step of each model and entered the relevant independent variables into the second step. An overview of the regression models can be found in Table 6. The preliminary and primary analyses are discussed in detail in the findings chapter.

Table 6. Overview of Regression Models

Model	Outcome Variable	Predictor Variable(s)
1.	Stress	Transformational, Transactional, Passive Avoidant
2.	Commitment	Transformational, Transactional, Passive Avoidant
3.	Stress	Trust
4.	Commitment	Trust
5.	Stress	Congruence
6.	Commitment	Congruence

Note: Covariates (Years in ECE, Race, Income) were controlled in step 1 of all models.

Analyses of the quantitative data provided guidance to determine what results needed further exploration and which participants to follow-up with during phase 2, the qualitative data collection (Creswell, 2009; 2021; Ivankova et al., 2006; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Specifically, the results pertaining to administrator leadership style and teacher workplace well-being were unexpected and warranted further examination. I hypothesized that teachers who had lower

workplace stress and higher workplace commitment would be associated with administrators who they perceived to have a more transformational leadership style. However, linear regressions suggested that teachers who perceived higher levels of passive avoidant leadership style in their administrator experienced higher levels of workplace stress and lower workplace commitment. This finding will be discussed in further detail in the upcoming chapter. As this finding was not in line with the study hypothesis, it warranted further exploration during the qualitative phase to understand the relationship between passive avoidant leadership and teacher workplace well-being.

Phase 2: Qualitative Methods

The qualitative methods focused on identifying the traits that early childhood educators associated with ideal and their actual administrators. Specifically, it looked to shed light on teachers' relationship with leaders whose leadership style they perceived to either have higher or lower levels of passive avoidant leadership. During the interviews, teachers were prompted to describe how their leader influenced their workplace stress and workplace commitment. Phase two was guided by the following research questions:

1. How do early childhood teachers perceive ideal leadership in early childhood settings?

2. How do early childhood teachers who perceive their administrator to have a more passive avoidant leadership style describe their administrator?

3. How do early childhood teachers who perceive their administrator to have a less passive avoidant leadership style describe their administrator?

Qualitative Data Collection

On the Qualtrics survey teachers were asked if they were interested in participating in the follow-up interview. Only teachers who indicated interest were considered for interview selec-

tion. From the interested group, a stratified sample of teachers was selected. Stratified purposeful sampling allowed me to narrow the focus of similarities within strata while I also captured major variations across strata (Palinkas et al., 2015). Teachers who were selected for an interview were sent an email to invite them to schedule an interview in October 2023. Semi-structured interviews were carried out in late October-mid November 2023. All teachers who chose to participate in an interview were compensated with a $25 Amazon e-gift card. I conducted all interviews over a videoconferencing software (i.e., Zoom). Interviews were recorded and transcribed for analysis purposes. Initial transcriptions were completed by a third-party transcription company (i.e., Transcribeme) using an AI powered service. I subsequently reviewed the transcriptions for accuracy to ensure they reflected participants' narratives. Interviews were scheduled for one hour and took, on average, 54 minutes. Transcriptions were maintained in a password protected folder and will be destroyed after the conclusion of the study.

Qualitative Participants

Out of the 93 survey participants, 52 responded they were interested in participating in a follow-up interview. Guided by the quantitative findings, I used a stratified purposeful sampling to determine which of the 52 participants to invite for a follow-up interview based on teachers' perception of leadership style. The interview sample was designed to be evenly divided: half comprised of teachers who viewed their administrator to possess a leadership style that was more passive avoidant and the other half comprised of teachers who perceived their administrator to possess a leadership style that was less passive avoidant. To establish the levels of "more" and "less," I used the MLQ measure and created cut-off scores of one standard deviation above and below the mean for passive avoidant leadership styles ($M = 1.32$; $SD = .879$). Out of the 52 participants willing to complete an interview, 24 teachers met the cut-off score to be included in the

stratified purposeful sample. Specifically, 12 teachers perceived their administrator as being at least one standard deviation above the mean for passive avoidant leadership style and 12 teachers perceived their administrator as being at least one standard deviation below the mean for passive avoidant leadership style.

I determined the intended sample size based on several factors. To begin with, qualitative research necessitates a detailed and intensive amount of work, which requires a smaller sample size than quantitative research (Anderson, 2010). Hennink and Kaiser's (2022) systematic review provides guidance on effective sample sizes for qualitative research. Specifically, they found that on average, studies achieved saturation of categories, the point where little or no relevant new codes and/or categories are emerging, within a narrow range of interviews (n=9-17). As such, I planned to conduct a total of ten one-time interviews. invited all 24 respondents to complete an interview. Out of the 24 invited respondents, eight teachers participated in a follow-up interview. Out of those eight teachers, four identified as perceiving their administrator to be more passive avoidant and four identified as perceiving their administrator to be less passive avoidant.

Interview participants sampled had similar demographics to the demographics of the survey participants. All interview participants identified as female. The average age of interview participants was 43.38 years old (SD = 12.59). Participants identified as having an average of 16.63 years (SD = 8.86) working in early childhood and 7.25 years (SD = 6.84) at their current center. One notable distinction from the racially diverse survey participants was that the interview participants predominantly identified as Black (75%). A full description of the interview participant demographics can be found in Table 7.

Table 7. Demographics of Interview Participants

N = 8	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation
Descriptives				
Age	28	63	43.38	12.59
Years in early childhood education	4	32	16.63	8.86
Years at Current Center	1	18	7.25	6.84
	Frequency	Percent		
Gender				
Female	8	100%		
Race				
Bi-racial	1	12.5%		
Black/ African American	6	75%		
White	1	12.5%		
Education				
Bachelor's	1	12.5%		
Some graduate but no degree	3	37.5%		
Master's	4	50%		

Semi-Structured Interview Protocol

The qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews, which is the most commonly used type of interview (Flick, 2002). Compared to structured interviews, semi-structured interviews have a higher potential to produce knowledge throughout the dialogue as they allow for more leeway for exploring topics deemed important by the interviewee (Brinkmann, 2013). In comparison to unstructured interviews, semi-structured interviews allow the interviewer a greater capacity to focus the conversations on the aims of the research project (Brinkmann, 2013). Brinkmann (2013) describes the four key components of the semi-structured interview to include: (1) purpose, (2) descriptions, (3) life world, and (4) interpretation of meaning.

Purpose involves producing knowledge during the interview to serve the aims of the study. To create a purpose in my interviews, I created a list of interview questions to ensure conversations followed the aims of this research study. See Appendix F for the interview protocol.

Descriptions reflect obtaining the interviewee's narratives of how they experience the world. To maintain the description that interviewees provide, interviews were recorded and transcribed to ensure their descriptions remain intact. In addition, throughout the interview, I asked clarifying questions when something appeared unclear. After the interview, I listened to the recording while reading through the transcription to check for accuracy. I also sent the transcriptions to each participant and asked them to review it for accuracy. Five of the teachers responded to confirm receiving the transcript but did not identify any accuracy issues. The remaining three teachers did not respond.

Life world refers to the shared and meaningful world in which humans conduct themselves and engage with each other. I continuously engaged in reflexivity throughout the process to understand how I influenced the research through my own experiences and biases.

Interpretation of meaning involves interpreting people's lived experiences. As I interpreted meaning through coding the transcriptions, I created codes using the language provided by the interviewees to avoid any misinterpretation of the data.

Qualitative Data Analysis

To carry out the qualitative analyses, I began by transcribing the interviews. Once the transcriptions were complete, I reviewed them for accuracy by simultaneously reading them as I listened to the recordings. This process also helped me to further familiarize myself with the transcriptions as I read through them multiple times. Then, I downloaded the transcriptions into the qualitative coding software, NVIVO. To analyze the transcripts, I used a content analysis method to systematically classify the text as I considered its contents and context (Burla et al., 2008). To do so, I created codes that assigned symbolic meaning to text (Miles et al., 2014). I approached the coding process using two distinct stages, first cycle coding and second cycle cod-

ing. Saldaña (2013) describes how first cycle coding is a way to begin summarizing segments of data by initially assigning codes to chunks of text (Miles et al., 2014). In the second cycle, the researcher works with the resulting codes from the first cycle (Miles et al., 2014). The second cycle coding is used to group those initial summaries into a smaller number of categories or themes (Miles et al., 2014).

For the first cycle of coding, I used an In Vivo coding method to initially code all 8 transcriptions. In Vivo coding is one of the most well-known qualitative coding methods where the researcher uses short phrases from the participants' own language as codes (Miles et al., 2014). In doing so, I created 151 codes, which I organized under the individual interview questions that the teachers responded to. These codes used participants' language to represent behaviors and characteristics of administrators as well as descriptions of scenarios and situations teachers illustrated.

For my second cycle of analysis, I used pattern coding to condense large amounts of codes into broader themes (Miles et al., 2019). Pattern coding also laid groundwork for analysis as it helped me to surface common themes (Miles et al., 2019) which illuminated the educators' perceptions of their administrator. After reviewing the codes for themes and patterns, I was able to condense my first cycle codes by collapsing similar codes together and creating broader categories. This reduced my codes to 50 items. For my second cycle of coding, I coded all 8 transcripts again using the condensed 50 codes.

During my second cycle of analysis, I intentionally made the shift to organize codes by theme, rather than by interview question. I initiated this change as I realized that themes often connected multiple topics which did not neatly align with a single interview question. In total, the 50 codes were grouped into 11 overarching themes that represented behaviors and character-

istics of administrators as well as descriptions of scenarios and situations teachers illustrated (e.g., experience, fair treatment, staffing, etc.). Each of these themes included multiple sub-codes that were often extreme viewpoints of the theme (e.g., matched experience and mismatched experience, favoritism and unbiased treatment, extra staff and not enough staff).

In both my first and second cycle of coding, I established and refined a code-book that defined the emerging codes and themes. As I was the sole coder, I also maintained a reflective journal with copious analytic memos, a method that has been found to add trustworthiness to the data, especially for lone researchers (Saldaña, 2013).

Mixed Methods Integration

Mixed integrative analyses are valuable to offer new perspectives and enhance the value of the conceptual findings of a study (Caracelli & Greene, 1993; Fetters et al., 2013). Integration is the process by which different data elements and analysis strategies are merged throughout a study to become interdependent by achieving a shared theoretical or research objective which results in findings that are greater than the sum of the parts (Bazeley, 2012).

Greene and colleagues (1989) indicated that one purpose for mixed-method integration is complementarity. A complementarity purpose is evident when qualitative and quantitative methods are employed to measure overlapping yet distinct aspects of a phenomena which results in a more comprehensive understanding of the study objectives (Caracelli & Greene, 1993; Greene et al., 1989). This purpose is used to elaborate and clarify results from one method with the results from the other method (Jang et al., 2008). This study implored a complementarity purpose as the qualitative findings were used to clarify and elaborate on the quantitative findings. Approaches to integrate qualitative and quantitative research procedures can be implemented at the design,

methods and interpretation levels of research (Fetters et al., 2013). This study included integration at each of the three levels.

This study implemented integration at the design level. Design level integration is present when a study involves two methods which are intended to either build on each other or be compared (Fetters et al., 2013). This study was constructed with an explanatory sequential design which uses findings from one phase of data collection and analysis to inform the next phase (Fetters et al., 2013; Ivankova et al., 2006). By using such a design, this study used integration at the design level as the interview findings were used to build upon the survey data.

Moreover, this study implemented integration at the methods level. At this level, integration can occur through linking the methods of data collection and analysis in several ways (Fetters et al., 2013). This study incorporated integration through two ways: (1) connecting and (2) merging. Integration through connecting transpires when one type of data links with the other to inform sampling (Fetters et al., 2013). Based on the quantitative findings, I used a stratified purposeful sampling to determine which of the survey participants to invite for a follow-up interview. Integration through merging occurs by bringing together two databases collected using similar questions for analysis and comparison (Fetters et al., 2013). Both quantitative and qualitative methods explored the constructs of leadership, trust, congruence, stress and commitment. The quantitative methods explored these concepts through the survey measures whereas the qualitative method explored these concepts using a semi-structured interview protocol.

Finally, this study implemented integration at the interpretation level. Integration at the interpretation level can occur through multiple approaches which includes: (1) integrating through narratives and (2) integrating through joint displays (Fetters et al., 2013). Integrating through narratives involves presenting the findings in a single report but depicting the quantita-

tive and qualitative finding in different sections (Fetters et al., 2013). In this study, I organized the methodology and results chapters by integration through narratives. For example, I presented the quantitative methods first and then included the qualitative methods in the following section. Similarly, I described the quantitative findings initially and subsequently presented the qualitative findings in their own section. Moreover, I implemented integration by using a joint display. Integration through joint displays allows researchers to bring both sets of data together through a visual means to draw out a new perspective beyond the information gained from the separate quantitative and qualitative results (Fetters et al., 2013). In the following chapter, I present the quantitative and qualitative findings individually and then present a mixed interpretation of these findings which results in meta-inferences drawn from a comprehensive understanding of the combined quantitative and qualitative data. I utilized a joint-display to depict the comprehensive findings.

Data Integrity

Maintaining rigor and trustworthiness is crucial for ensuring the credible and meaningful application of the findings (Pelzang & Hutchinson, 2018). As such, I employed various methods to uphold rigor and trustworthiness. First, I grappled with my own positionality to understand how I am situated within the context of research and the field of early childhood. I engaged in reflexivity and self-questioning to address my own positionality and the influence that it could have on my research. I also considered ethical considerations before carrying out this research.

Positionality

It is widely acknowledged that researchers' own experiences shape the ways they conduct and interpret research (Younas et al., 2023). As I was the sole researcher of this study, it is important to acknowledge my own positionalities, since they impacted the ways that I collected and

made sense of the data. I entered this work with an intimate understanding of the field of early childhood education through my own experiences working as both an early childhood educator and administrator. These experiences greatly motivated me to carry out this research. During the research process, there were occasions when my experiences mirrored those of the study participants. However, there were also instances where my experiences differed from those of the participants. To address my own positionality and ensure my biases did not impact the data, I engaged in reflexivity.

Reflexivity

As the researcher, I was cognizant of the ways that my identities may have supported or hindered teachers to share their perceptions and experiences. Milner (2007) argues that dangers that are seen, unseen and unforeseen can emerge if researchers do not attend to their own racialized and cultural systems of how they experience the world. Although Milner (2007) suggests the researchers do not need to come from the same racial or cultural community of the participants, he does describe how researchers must be actively and thoughtfully aware of such tensions. Although my gender and some of my professional experiences matched the experiences of study participants, my racial background did not match the majority of the interview participants. Engaging in reflexivity pushed me to consistently and consciously examine my own identities in relation to the study's sample (Wilson et al., 2022).

Reflexivity is essential for all types of research but is particularly a critical aspect of mixed methods research (Younas et al., 2023). Reflexivity involves addressing the researcher's positionality through self-questioning (Corlett & Mavin, 2018; Wilson et al., 2022). It is a self-monitoring process where researchers reflect on how the research is being carried out as well as explain how conclusions are being drawn from the findings (Corlett & Mavin, 2018; Wilson et

al., 2022). It allows researchers to reflect on their role and their relationship with the research context, participants, data, and results which adds trustworthiness and honesty (Corlett & Mavin, 2018; Wilson et al., 2022). Reflexivity involves three aspects of research practice which respectively involve: thinking, doing, and evaluating (Corlett & Mavin, 2018; Day, 2012). The first aspect, thinking, pushes researchers to question their understanding of reality and the nature of knowledge. Doing involves questioning the researcher's relationship with the research context (i.e., participants, data). When evaluating, reflexive researchers must question whether what they are doing is valid and valuable.

To add trustworthiness to my findings and avoid misinterpretation of the data, I adapted questions outlined by Corlett & Mavin (2018) to reflect on during the data collection, coding, and analysis process (e.g., How do my own cultural and racial experiences impact the information that participants are willing to share with me?; What power dynamics exists between myself and the people I am researching?). I reflected on these questions in each stage of the research process. Applying reflexivity to my research process held me accountable to accurately collect and interpret the data.

Ethical Considerations

Before beginning research, I completed my human subjects CITI training as well as the Loyola UNIV 370 course (Responsible Conduct in Research and Scholarship). I used this knowledge along with my experiences on multiple research projects to guide me to use best practices and develop procedures that safeguarded the data and confidentiality of participants. Erikson Institute's Institutional Review Board deemed this study as exempt from human subjects review on June 26th, 2023 (see Appendix G). As a result, teachers did not need to complete consent forms to participate in this study. However, at each phase of the study, teachers were advised that

participation was voluntary, and they could choose to refrain at any time. They were also re-minded that their data would remain confidential, and their identity would be protected during dissemination.

To provide teachers with multiple avenues for sharing information, I incorporated both surveys and interviews to collect data. Some teachers may have preferred sharing information through a survey, feeling more at ease without the need for face-to-face interaction. Conversely, others might have felt more inclined to express their perceptions in a private setting like an inter-view rather than via an online survey. These comfort levels and vulnerabilities likely differed among individual teachers.

Overall, I carefully designed this study to gather rich data and inform the outlined re-search questions.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

Findings from the study are discussed below. To maintain consistency with the sequential explanatory design, the quantitative findings are presented first, the qualitative findings are presented second, and finally the mixed interpretation of the data is presented.

Quantitative Findings

The quantitative phase focused on understanding the relationships between teachers' perception of administrator leadership style, trust, and congruence and teacher professional well-being, specifically in terms of workplace stress and commitment. Ninety-three preschool teachers who worked full time in center-based organizations in the Chicagoland area completed an online survey where they responded to several measures related to the study aims.

Preliminary Analyses

I began analyses by first checking the assumptions. All statistical models make assumptions which must be met to avoid misunderstanding the data and forming misleading conclusions (Casson & Farmer, 2014). The assumption of normality requires that the data are normally distributed (Casson & Farmer, 2014). I examined the skewness and kurtosis of the predictor and outcome variables. All variables had values between -1 and 1 which met the assumption of normality. The assumption of homoscedasticity, also known as the constant variance of errors, is assessed by examining the scatter plot of residuals versus the predicted residuals (Casson & Farmer, 2014). A random spread suggests that the variance is constant (Casson & Farmer, 2014). I examined residuals in the scatterplots and there were no obvious patterns which met the as-

sumption of homoscedasticity. Multicollinearity occurs when two or more of the predictor variables are highly correlated (Tsagris & Pandis, 2021). If multicollinearity is present, it can cause difficulty with the reliability of the estimates of the model parameters (Alin, 2010). To check the effect of multicollinearity, the variance inflation factor (VIF) must be examined for each variable and should be less than five (Tsagris & Pandis, 2021). I examined VIFs for all variables and they were below 5.00 which indicated no multicollinearity and met the assumption.

I conducted Pearson correlations to examine correlations among the variables (see Table 8). Pearson correlation is often used in exploratory research to examine the degree of association between two variables and whether the variables have a statistical relationship to each other (Boslaugh & Watters, 2008). Nearly all the independent variables had significant correlations with the dependent variables at the .01 level in the expected directions. I also looked at correlations between the demographic variables and the independent and dependent variables. I found significant correlations at the .05 level between independent and demographic variables. The demographic variables with significant correlations included: teachers' years in ECE, race, and household income. As a result, I controlled for all three variables in each of the regression analyses.

Table 8. Zero-Order Correlations

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1 Transformational	__													
2 Transactional	**.71**	__												
3 Passive Avoidant	**-.47**	-.20	__											
4 Trust	**.78**	**.49**	**-.59**	__										
5 Congruence	**.55**	**.30**	**-.49**	**.70**	__									
6 Stress	**-.28**	-.17	**.49**	**-.41**	**-.30**	__								
7 Commitment	**.45**	**.33**	**-.44**	**.55**	**.53**	**-.39**	__							
8 Gender	-.07	.00	.11	-.11	-.04	.15	-.11	__						
9 Age	-.12	-.18	-.06	.05	-.13	-.15	-.00	-.09	__					
10 Race	-.01	-.07	-.10	.00	.13	-.11	.23*	-.07	-.09	__				
11 Income	.18	.06	-.03	.21*	.06	-.01	-.02	-.08	.16	.04	__			
12 Education	.11	.08	-.02	.15	-.06	.02	.14	-.14	**.30**	-.10	.20	__		
13 Years in ECE	-.16	**-.28**	-.05	.04	-.11	.01	.05	-.07	**.80**	-.08	.15	.23*	__	
14 Years at Center	.05	.00	-.05	-.04	-.04	.09	-.12	.15	.15	-.11	.06	-.01	.24*	__

* Significant at the .05 level (2-tailed).
Bolded correlations are significant at the .01 level (2-tailed).

I examined descriptive statistics of the predictor and outcome variables. Descriptive statistics reveal important insights into the characteristics of the variables examined in the analysis. Table 9 provides a summary of the descriptive statistics for the predictor and outcome variables.

Predictor variables included teachers' perceptions of their administrators' leadership style, trust, and congruence. The MLQ measure was used to examine perceptions of leadership style (i.e., transformational, transactional, passive avoidant). An average was calculated for each subscale; each subscale had a potential range from zero to four. Higher scores indicated that participants perceived their administrator to engage in the behaviors more frequently whereas a low score indicated that teachers perceive their administrators to engage in the behavior less frequently. The Trust Me measure was used to examine the independent variable of trust. The measure had a range from 16 to 80 with higher scores indicating a higher level of trust. The congruence subscale from the Early Childhood Job Satisfaction Survey was used to assess the independent variable of congruence between ideal and actual leadership. The measure had a potential range from one to five, with one indicating a low level of congruence and five indicating a high level of congruence.

Outcome variables included teachers' perception of their commitment to their current center and their level of workplace stress. The commitment subscale from the Early Childhood Job Satisfaction Survey was used to examine teachers' self-reported commitment to their current center. The subscale had a potential range from zero to ten with higher scores indicating a higher level of commitment to their workplace. The Perceived Stress Scale was used to measure teachers' self-reported level of workplace stress. The measure indicated that scores ranging from 0-13 were considered low stress, scores of 14-26 were considered to indicate moderate stress levels, and scores of 27-40 were considered to indicate high stress levels.

Table 9. Descriptive Statistics of Predictor and Outcome Variables

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation
Transformational	90	0	3.85	2.3	0.8
Transactional	90	0	3.75	2.0	0.7
Passive Avoidant	92	0	3.63	1.3	0.9
Trust	92	23	80	56.4	12.8
Congruence	93	1	5	3.4	1.2
Commitment	93	1	10	6.7	2.2
Stress	93	0	32	15.8	7.0

Primary Analyses

The survey data was analyzed to determine if significant relationships exist between early childhood administrators and teacher workplace well-being. Six simple regressions were used to examine how teachers' perceptions of their administrators' leadership style, trust levels and congruence to ideal relate to their professional well-being (i.e., workplace stress and commitment). Each finding is discussed in detail below according to research question.

RQ1: Administrators' Leadership and Teachers' Professional Well-Being

Research question (RQ) 1 aimed to determine whether teachers' perception of their administrators' leadership significantly relates to their professional well-being. Measures that were used to answer RQ 1 included the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire, Early Childhood Job Satisfaction Survey, and the Perceived Stress Scale. Two multiple linear regressions were used to test these relationships, with each leadership style listed as a separate predictor variable (e.g., transformational, transactional, and passive avoidant). One multiple regression was used for each dependent variable (i.e., stress and commitment).

Leadership Style and Teacher Stress. Regression 1 included teachers' perceptions of administrator leadership style and their reported level of workplace stress. After controlling for the covariates, this relationship was found to be statistically significant (Adj. $R^2 = .18$, $F(6, 81) =$

4.26, $p < .001$). Findings suggest that up to 18% of the variability in teachers' workplace stress levels can be explained by their perceptions of their administrators' leadership. Although three distinct leadership styles were included in the model, transformational and transactional leadership styles were not found to be significant predictors. Instead, passive avoidant leadership style was the driving factor in the significant relationship. Teachers who perceived their administrator's leadership style as being more passive avoidant were associated with significantly higher levels of workplace stress (see Table 10*)*.

Leadership Style and Teacher Commitment. Regression 2 included teachers' perceptions of administrator leadership style and their reported level of commitment to their center. After controlling for the covariates, this relationship was found to be statistically significant (Adj. $R^2 = .27$, $F(6, 81) = 6.48$, $p < .001$). Findings suggest that up to 27% of the variability in teachers' workplace commitment level can be explained by their perceptions of their administrators' leadership. Similar to the above finding around leadership style and teacher stress, the significant relationship was again driven by one factor, passive avoidant leadership style. Teachers who perceived their administrators' leadership style as being more passive avoidant were associated with significantly lower levels of commitment to their center (see Table 10).

Table 10. Coefficients Table for Research Question 1

Model	Unstandardized B	SE	t
Regression 1: Administrator leadership and workplace stress			
Years in ECE	0.00	0.07	0.02
Race	-0.28	0.44	-0.64
Income	0.10	0.64	0.16
Transformational	-0.16	1.38	-0.11
Transactional	-0.68	1.49	-0.46
Passive Avoidant	3.62	0.92	3.94**
Regression 2: Administrator leadership and center commitment			
Years in ECE	0.02	0.02	1.29
Race	0.31	0.12	2.46
Income	-0.23	0.18	-1.26
Transformational	0.73	0.39	1.87
Transactional	0.38	0.42	0.90
Passive Avoidant	-0.58	0.26	-2.22*

Significant at the .05 level
Significant at the .001 level

RQ2: Teachers' Trust for Administrator and Professional Well-Being

Research question 2 aimed to determine whether the trust that teachers have in their administrator significantly relates to their professional well-being. Measures that were used to answer RQ 2 included the Trust Me Scale, Early Childhood Job Satisfaction Survey, and the Perceived Stress Scale. Two simple linear regressions were used to test these relationships. One simple regression examined each outcome variable (i.e., stress and commitment).

Trust and Teacher Stress. Regression 1 included teachers' trust level for their administrators and their reported level of workplace stress. After controlling for the covariates, this relationship was found to be statistically significant (Adj. $R^2 = .14$, $F (4, 85) = 4.64$, $p = .002$). Findings suggest that up to 14% of the variability in teachers' workplace stress level can be explained by their perceptions of the trust they have in their administrators. Teachers who have higher lev-

els of trust in their administrators were associated with significantly lower levels of workplace stress (see Table 11).

Trust and Teacher Commitment. Regression 2 included teachers' trust level for their administrator and their reported level of commitment to their center. After controlling for the covariates, this relationship was found to be statistically significant (Adj. $R^2 = .32$, $F (4, 85) = 11.68$, $p < .001$). Findings suggest that up to 32% of the variability in teachers' center commitment can be explained by their perceptions of the trust they have in their administrator. Teachers who have higher levels of trust in their administrator were associated with significantly higher levels of commitment to their center (see Table 11*).

Table 11. Coefficients Table for Research Question 2

Model	Unstandardized B	SE	t
Regression 1:			
Trust in administrator and teacher workplace stress			
Years in ECE	0.01	0.07	0.20
Race	-0.52	0.44	-1.19
Income	0.50	0.64	0.78
Trust	-0.23	0.06	-4.14**
Regression 2:			
Trust in administrator and teacher center commitment			
Years in ECE	0.01	0.02	0.52
Race	0.32	0.12	2.71
Income	-0.30	0.17	-1.75
Trust	0.10	0.02	6.32**

** Significant at the .001 level

RQ3: Congruence and Professional Well-Being

Research question 3 aimed to determine whether the level of congruence between teachers' perception of ideal ECE leadership and their perceptions of their real administrators' leadership relates to their professional well-being. Measures that were used to answer RQ 3 included the Early Childhood Job Satisfaction Survey and the Perceived Stress Scale. Two simple linear

regressions were used to test these relationships. One simple regression examined each dependent variable (i.e., stress and commitment).

Congruence and Teacher Stress. Regression 1 included teachers' reported level of congruence and level of workplace stress. After controlling for the covariates, this relationship was not found to be statistically significant (Adj. $R^2 = .05$, $F(4, 86) = 2.57$, $p = .09$).

Congruence and Teacher Commitment. Regression 2 included teachers' reported level of congruence and level of commitment to their center. After controlling for the covariates, this relationship was found to be statistically significant (Adj. $R^2 = .28$, $F(4, 86) = 9.51$, $p < .001$). Findings suggest that up to 28% of the variability in teachers' center commitment can be explained by the level of congruence between their perceptions of ideal and their actual administrator. Teachers who worked with administrators who are more closely aligned with their perceptions of an ideal administrator were associated with significantly higher levels of commitment to their center (see Table 12*)*.

Table 12. Coefficients Table for Research Question 3

Model	Unstandardized B	SE	t
Regression 1:			
Congruence and teacher workplace stress			
Years in ECE	-0.01	0.07	-0.20
Race	-0.35	0.46	-0.76
Income	0.08	0.66	0.12
Congruence	-1.63	0.61	-2.66
Regression 2:			
Congruence and teacher center commitment			
Years in ECE	0.02	0.02	1.27
Race	0.23	0.12	1.91
Income	-0.15	0.18	-0.84
Congruence	0.91	0.16	5.63**

*** Significant at the .001 level*

Quantitative Summary

The analysis of the survey data suggests a significant association exists between early childhood administrators and teacher workplace well-being. Six simple regressions were used to analyze how teachers' perception of their administrators' leadership style, trust levels and congruence to ideal relate to their workplace stress and commitment. Five of the regressions indicated significant associations between variables (see Table 13). Teachers who perceived their administrator to have a higher passive avoidant leadership style reported experiencing higher levels of workplace stress and lower workplace commitment. Teachers who perceived higher levels of trust in their administrator were associated with lower levels of workplace stress and higher levels of commitment. Teachers who perceived their administrator as being closely aligned with their perceptions of ideal had significantly higher levels of workplace commitment.

Table 13. Summary of Quantitative Findings

	Workplace Stress	Workplace Commitment
Leadership Style	Teachers who perceived their administrator's leadership style as being more passive avoidant were associated with having significantly higher levels of workplace stress ($B = 3.62$, $p < .001$).	Teachers who perceived their administrator's leadership style as being more passive avoidant were associated with having significantly lower levels of commitment to their center ($B = -0.58$, $p = .029$).
Trust	Teachers who have higher levels of trust in their administrator were associated with having significantly lower levels of workplace stress ($B = -0.23$, $p < .001$).	Teachers who have higher levels of trust in their administrator were associated with having significantly higher levels of commitment to their center ($B = 0.10$, $p < .001$).
Congruence to Ideal	This relationship was not found to be statistically significant.	Teachers who work with administrators who are more closely aligned with their perceptions of an ideal administrator were associated with having significantly higher levels of commitment to their center ($B = 0.91$, $p < .001$).

Qualitative Findings

Semi-structured interviews were conducted to unpack and better understand the quantitative findings. The qualitative methods focused on identifying the traits and behaviors that early childhood educators associated with an ideal version of an early childhood administrator as well as their actual administrator. Eight early childhood teachers participated in a one-time virtual interview. Four of the teachers perceived their administrator as having a higher level of passive avoidant leadership style whereas the other four teachers perceived their administrator as having a lower level of passive avoidant leadership style.

The next section provides a detailed description of each of the interview participants. An overview of participant descriptions can be found in Table 14. Following the participant descriptions, qualitative themes that emerged across the interviews are presented and are organized by research question. To provide thick descriptions and allow the reader to fully engage in the findings and clearly see the researcher's interpretation of the data, participants' direct quotations are included with each theme (Anderson, 2010). To protect participants' identities, their names have been replaced with pseudonyms.

Descriptions of Interview Participants

Amanda

Amanda is a 46-year-old Black woman who has worked in the field of early childhood for 16 years. She has worked at the same center for her entire early childhood career. On the quantitative survey, Amanda's perception of her administrator was that they exhibit a high level of passive avoidant leadership style. In the interview, she described her site director as someone who shows a lot of empathy and believes in her staff. Amanda illustrated how her workplace is always flexible for the needs of her and her family, which is something that she described as im-

portant. She said "I would say personally, what has kept me at [my center] for a long time is I have children. You know. And then their time kind of fluctuates sometimes up and down. You know. So, for them giving me that flexibility, sometimes I ask myself, I don't know if when I go to another place, I will be able to get that flexibility." At the same time, she has faced some challenges in her workplace as she described feeling that the needs of the parents sometimes come before the needs of the teaching staff.

Aria

Aria is a 29-year-old mixed race woman who has been in the field of early childhood for ten years. She started working at her current center after graduating college and has been there for seven years. On the survey, Aria's perception of her administrator was that they exhibit a high level of passive avoidant leadership style. In the interview, Aria described how her director has an open-door policy and is very friendly with staff. However, miscommunications sometimes arise as her director and education coordinator collaboratively share administrator responsibilities. Aria appreciates the strong sense of community that exists in her workplace and how her workplace feels like a close-knit family. She illustrated, "It's definitely my colleagues that have helped me and shaped me…it's definitely felt like a family. Like, it's definitely been like a close type of community for the well-being of the kids."

Denise

Denise is a 35-year-old Black woman who has worked in the field of early childhood for twelve years. She has been at her current center for ten years. On the survey, Denise' perception of her administrator was that they exhibit a high level of passive avoidant leadership style. Denise described her director as someone who can become defensive or dismissive and often gives preferential treatment to select staff. She elaborated to say, "You know Just seeing that certain

staff aren't their favorite. Certain staff can get away with certain things and other staff can't. So, some favoritism by who can get away with what and others, like feeling like not only can I not get away with it, but I'm definitely not a favorite in their book." Even though other aspects of the job can be stressful, she loves teaching children and being with her students. Denise described, "Yeah, I love what I do. Yeah, there's stressful days with the kids. For the most part, work like that, I like what I do that. That work I enjoy with the children, teaching them, learning, doing little things."

Kimberly

Kimberly is a 63-year-old White woman who has been in the field of early childhood for 32 years. She has worked at her current center for 18 years and plans to stay working there until she retires. On the survey, Kimberly's perception of her administrator was that they exhibit a low level of passive avoidant leadership style. In her interview, Kimberly described that she has a strong relationship with her director and feels like her director is supportive and someone she can confide in without feeling judged. She elaborated how at times, her director is not as assertive and direct as she would prefer her to be. Kimberly loves her job and feels like she offers a lot to the students and families that she works with. She illustrated, "I think I'm good at what I do. I think I've helped children. I think I have a lot to bring to the table or the classroom still. I think I have a lot to bring."

Maria

Maria is a 28-year-old Black woman who has worked in the field of early childhood for four years and at her current center for two years. She has worked as both an infant and pre-school teacher. On the survey, Maria's perception of her administrator was that they exhibit a low level of passive avoidant leadership style. In her interview, she described her director as someone

who supports her and can balance the needs of families and staff to treat everyone fairly and with respect. She would prefer her director to come into the classroom to observe her more regularly, but she also understands how the teacher shortage impacts her administrator's capacity. Maria described the many tasks that early childhood teachers regularly balance. She said, "The paperwork, the attendance, the emails, all of that on top of just your normal work that you're doing in the classroom, that brings in a lot of stress, for sure. So, it's just pile on, pile on."

Ruby

Ruby is a 51-year-old Black woman who has been in the field of early childhood for twenty-five years. She has worked at her current center for four years. On the survey, Ruby's perception of her administrator was that they exbibit a low level of passive avoidant leadership style. In her interview she described her director as knowledgeable and good at her work. She also elaborated that her director really cares about staff. At times, she's been surprised by how familiar her director is with students and their families. Throughout her interview, Ruby described how the workforce does not value early childhood teachers. She said, "We're not paid enough. We're not paid enough. You know, we're low on a totem pole in this business that is standing because we are here. Because it wasn't for us, the business wouldn't be you know so yeah. That's what I mean when teachers not valued." Moreover, Ruby described how being short-staffed has been a challenge and although other administrators may try to support her, she elaborated on how important it is for her to have a regularly assigned and knowledgeable co-teacher.

Samantha

Samantha is a 55-year-old Black woman who has worked in the field of early childhood for 20 years and has been at her current center for less than one year. On the survey, Samantha's perception of her administrator was that they exhibit a high level of passive avoidant leadership

style. In her interview, she described her director as someone she trusts to always get her time-sheet in on time and someone who will always work to accommodate personal matters like medical appointments or a child's needs. But Samantha feels that her administrator is not direct in her communications with her which has caused stressful situations in the classroom. When Samantha has tried to communicate with her director, she often has felt not listened to which has caused her to create a distance between her and her administrator. In response to such situations, Samantha said she will "turn my emotionals off on that type of situation and focus on the children."

Siera

Siera is a 40-year-old Black woman who has worked in the field of early childhood for 14 years and at her current center for less than one year. On the survey, Siera's perception of her administrator was that they exhibit a low level of passive avoidant leadership style. In her interview, she shared that she feels like her director often goes out of her way to show appreciation and to support the staff. Her administrator often checks in about work and personal lives of staff and tries to create opportunities for staff to bond with each other. Even so, Siera feels most comfortable turning to a colleague for advice and support as they have worked together for over five years at a previous organization. She said, "I'm able to you know talk to her and feel comfortable. I feel comfortable talking to her more than a supervisor because I know her."

Table 14. Summary of the Descriptions of Interview Participants

Pseudonym	Age	Race	Years in the field of ECE	Years at current center	Perception of passive avoidant leadership style
Amanda	46	Black	16	16	High level
Aria	29	Mixed	10	7	High level
Denise	35	Black	12	10	High level
Kimberly	63	White	32	18	Low level
Maria	28	Black	4	2	Low level
Ruby	51	Black	25	4	Low level
Samantha	55	Black	20	>1	High level
Siera	40	Black	14	>1	Low level

RQ1: Ideal Leadership in Early Childhood Settings

Teachers across both interview groups were asked to describe the characteristics of an ideal version of an early childhood administrator. Across all eight interviews, teachers illustrated how they prefer to work with an administrator who is approachable and supportive. Seven teachers described how an ideal administrator would demonstrate being approachable by being available and by making teachers feel comfortable discussing situations or problems with them. Six teachers illustrated how an ideal version of an administrator would offer support as teachers need it by being aware of happenings in the teacher's classroom and addressing problems that arise.

When I asked what an ideal administrator would do or say, Samantha underscored the importance of working with administrators who are available to turn to when she needs guidance or assistance. She said, "I would love for them to be approachable, like you know not necessarily because they have things that they have to do but have an open-door policy."

Similar to Samantha, Aria described a former administrator who she considered to be approachable. Aria described her former administrator, "She was always available. Like we would see her often throughout the hallways, and she was always I don't want to say a complete open-door policy, but available via email too." It was evident from our conversation how connected

Aria felt to her former administrator, especially as she described how much she missed working with that person.

When Denise was asked to describe what it would be like to work with her ideal version of an early childhood administrator, her initial response was similar to Samantha's as she said her ideal administrator would have an "open-door policy." When asked to elaborate what that would look like, Denise illustrated, **"**Being able to come to the director because I kind of think of the administrator as like the site director, like being able to come to them and let them know what's going on or things of that sort." Later in the interview, Denise often talked about how her current administrator was not someone she felt comfortable talking to. There was a clear juxtaposition between Denise's version of an ideal administrator and her perception of her actual administrator. Numerous comments in her narrative suggested she was looking for traits in an ideal version of an administrator based on what she felt was missing in her current administrator.

Although Kimberly did not use the same term, "open-door policy," her description of an ideal early childhood administrator matched what other teachers described as an open-door policy. She elaborated that an ideal administrator would be someone she could turn to at any time for support or guidance. She said:

> [They] would be a listener, someone who I feel I can go into their office and talk to them about a troubled student, an issue with a student, or an issue with a staff member. And I know that she'll take me seriously or he'll take me seriously and will help me work on solutions, but also follows through.

Kimberly's comments about her ideal administrator later were aligned with how she described her current administrator.

When Ruby described her ideal version of an early childhood administrator, she stressed the importance of having administrators who are present. She described how it is only when administrators are truly present that they can offer needed support to teachers:

Being present. That's more important. I mean, that's important too, to be present because you can be there. Administrator can be there, but they're not there. [They should be there] physically, mentally. They can be there, but you never see them throughout the day. They're only there to give you directions. Send emails. Helping out, you know helping out the staff and stuff. You know.

Samantha echoed Ruby's comments about the importance of administrators being present and available. She explained how ideally, administrators should offer their own guidance or other resources to support teachers:

I need to go to get the information that I need to succeed in what I'm doing. So you know be able to you know handle the things that they have to handle in their position, but be able to assist in getting the help teachers need or stepping in or just being available. I guess that's a good way to put it. Being available to assist or to get someone to assist.

When Siera was asked to think about someone in her life that she considered a good leader, she described a former administrator. She illustrated how her former administrator would use her knowledge and experience to offer support and guidance to teachers. She highlighted the benefit of having a leader that you can look towards for advice and guidance:

And you know a lot of people looked up to her, went to her for advice about how to do something. So, she knew how to do portfolios, educational folders, any personal issues, we will always come to her, how to do observations.

RQ1 Summary

Across both interview groups, teachers described common behaviors and traits that they would prefer their ideal version of an early childhood administrator to possess. Amongst the teachers who participated in their interviews, differences were present in their workplace organizations, their ages, their racial backgrounds, even the way that they each described their administrators. Despite these differences, teachers had commonalities in what they perceived to be ideal traits of early childhood administrators. They described these administrator traits as being approachable and supportive. Through their illustrations, teachers highlighted the importance of having an administrator who is present and makes them feel comfortable when seeking support

or discussing problems. Further, they emphasized that ideal early childhood administrators would offer support to teachers by being aware of happenings in the teacher's classroom and addressing problems that arose. At times, these descriptions were in line with how teachers described their actual administrator and other times these ideal descriptions contrasted with how teachers perceived their current administrator. The following research questions explore teachers' perceptions of their actual administrators.

RQ2: Administrators Perceived to Have a More Passive Avoidant Leadership Style

Four teachers perceived their administrator to have a more passive avoidant leadership style. Although they each described their administrators in various ways, there were similarities across their interviews. Guided by these commonalities, two main themes emerged. The themes and their associated categories described by teachers who perceived their administrator to have a more passive avoidant leadership style are portrayed in Table 15. Theme 1 portrayed teachers describing their administrators as being unresponsive to and unsupportive of problems. This theme included two categories. The first category illustrated teachers' belief that their administrators would ignore problems that they and their colleagues faced. As administrators responded to issues in this way, teachers described how that caused them to develop feelings of mistrust toward their administrator. The second category represented teachers' perception that their administrators were unsupportive because of their lack of presence and awareness of the classroom. As a result, teachers described how lack of support from their administrators causes an increase in their stress levels in the workplace.

The second theme portrayed teachers' description that their administrators create an environment that is inconducive to meeting expectations. Theme 2 was comprised of two categories. The first category depicted how teachers believed their administrators had poor communication

styles which increased teachers' stress levels, describing how their administrators engaged in inconsistent and ineffective methods of communication. The second category illustrated how teachers perceived their administrator to create unrealistic deadlines, which led teachers to feel that their needs were not being prioritized. As a result, teachers described having increased stress levels and feeling less effective.

Table 15. Summary of Qualitative Findings: Research Question 2

Theme	Category	Description
1. Being unresponsive to and unsupportive of problems	a. Ignoring problems	Administrators ignore or have a very delayed response when issues arise with the teachers or their colleagues.
	b. Lack of presence/ awareness of the classroom	Administrators do not come into the classroom to offer help and/or are not familiar with the classroom to be a support.
2. Creating an environment that is inconducive to meeting expectations	a. Poor communication	Administrators use inconsistent and ineffective methods of communication.
	b. Unrealistic deadlines	Administrators establish short-turnaround times for due dates. Because of such time constraints, they do not prioritize the needs of teachers by failing to give notice/training.

Theme 1: Being Unresponsive to and Unsupportive of Problems

Teachers described the way their administrator responded to problems that occurred in the workplace. Across all four interviews of teachers who perceived their administrator to have a more passive avoidant leadership style, each participant described how their administrator was often unresponsive and unsupportive when problems arose.

Being Unresponsive: Ignoring Problems. Teachers portrayed that when issues were presented, administrators often overlooked the issues and failed to respond to them. When they did respond to such situations, their response was extremely delayed.

For example, when Amanda was talking about the amount of trust she has in her director, she described how she feels like administrators "side with the parents more than the teachers." She offered a specific example of a time when this has occurred:

> So our breakfast cut-off time is supposed to be 9:30, but if a child has a doctor's appointment, it's 10 o'clock. You know I had a child that went to CPS evaluation, came in the morning, left for CPS evaluation, and came back at 12:15, which personally, like I was telling them, I feel like the mom should take the child home. You know 12:15, 12:30 is nap time. So come on. What is the child going to do? But the parent was let in, which I was a little upset with the whole thing…but my whole thing is they let the child in. Coming from the front is the director's office, is the reception. So if they let the child in, do they want me to be the bad person, go home? You know So I also just left it as it is.

Even though Amanda's administrator created this rule, when it was time to enforce it, her administrator ignored the situation. As the director did not respond to this situation, it made Amanda feel like they intended for her to enforce this rule, which upset her. She chose to follow her director's lead and similarly did not enforce the rule.

Like Amanda, Samantha similarly experienced her administrator ignoring problems that arose. When asked to describe her director, Samantha's first response was to illustrate how her administrator could ignore a problem for a persistent amount of time and then wait until the very last minute to respond to the issue. She provided an example of a time when she needed coverage to allow her to leave the classroom to complete her observations and child assessments. Instead of providing coverage in advance of the deadline to allow Samantha the opportunity to fulfill the assessments in a timely manner, her director waited until the week the assessments were due to intervene. Samantha explained:

If you didn't, let's say, complete a task, then she'll wait till this deadline time, and then she'll say, "Oh, let me get you out the class to complete this," or, "Let me get somebody in to help you to complete this today." It's like we know checkpoints is coming, but you keep telling, "We're shorthand, I can't get you out. I can't get you out. I can't get you out." Then the week that checkpoints are due, you get me out…. When it was time to do assessments, it got down. That's when I first realized. I'm like, "Oh, wow. I'm not getting out to do these assessments. I have 18 children, no assistant." So I had all 18. I have an aide in the room, but that person don't do paperwork. And so again, when it was time, the 45 days coming up, okay, we're getting to 45 days. The week of the 45th-day week, they got me out four days in a row to do it. Still, we haven't increased staff.

Samantha ended this example by saying "So like if a stranger meets my director, "Oh, a beautiful person, so warm, so welcoming. But to work with the person I find different." Throughout the interview, it became clear that such exchanges had created tension between Samantha and her director. These interactions have led Samantha to anticipate that her director will wait until the last minute to respond to situations and problems. As a result of her director's lack of response, Samantha shared how she recently considered quitting her current job since she felt her current center "can't be the place [to work]."

Working with an administrator who is perceived as unresponsive to problems over a long period of time is something Aria has also experienced. In her interview, she described how her director ignored a prolonged issue that her co-worker faced which led Aria to develop feelings of mistrust towards her director:

So my neighbor teacher just recently got her assistant teacher. It's been a whole year, and so she finally has that person supporting her. So we work closely together, right? My classroom and the neighbor classroom. And so you know we would confide in each other. And she was very stressed, like having to deal with a new sub every single day, right? And that's out of my supervisor's control. But they wouldn't really check in with her. They wouldn't prioritize her whenever something new popped up…But you know as like a colleague, like knowing how my other coworker feels, as you know we're in the same boat. We're both teachers, that kind of kind of leads me to that kind of mistrust, you know that result. I'm like, "Oh, well, if I were in that situation, you know what would that look like for me?" And empathizing with her you know dealing with stuff on her own. That's really difficult, and that's really hard.

After watching her neighbor teacher struggle for over one year without an assistant teacher, Aria was surprised that her supervisor would not check-in or offer additional support to her colleague. Although Aria understood that her supervisor did not have full control over the situation, her supervisor did not leverage things that were within her control to better the situation.

Similarly, Denise also witnessed her director's response to a situation between two of her colleagues. She described a circumstance where her director knew two staff did not get along, but ignored the issue. She said:

> Like if you know staff members don't get along, why would you put them in a class together to work? That's like some of the stressful stuff and the confusing things. Like you know they don't get along and some stuff just went on, but now you're putting them in the class together. Why?

In summary, all four teachers who were interviewed in the high passive avoidant group expressed concern around the timing and the response from their administrators when problems arose. When their administrators did not respond to issues, it led teachers to develop increased stress levels and feelings of mistrust. Moreover, administrators were not expected to solve all the problems, but teachers did expect administrators to acknowledge the problem in a timely manner and to use what was within their control to attend to the issue. Teachers described how they did not feel supported by their administrators when their issues were ignored. The next category explores another way that teachers described feeling unsupported by their administrators.

Being Unsupportive: Lack of Presence and Awareness. Teachers described how their administrators were not regularly present in their classroom which resulted in a lack of awareness about the assistance that teachers needed. For example, when Denise was asked to reflect on her stress levels in the workplace, she described the high amount of paperwork and demands of the various funding streams that contribute to her stress levels. She elaborated:

"I don't think we should be doing as much [paperwork] if we're supposed to be with the children more...We're literally just doing it to get the stuff done to show that we got it done in a timely manner before DFS comes and sees that you know the teachers don't have it, and they're dinged for something."

In response, I asked Denise how her site administrator influences her stress levels. She had a strong reaction to describe how her administrator does not regularly come into her classroom to check-in. She said, "When they could be helping and just bring your ass around and check your-selves. We only got three floors. It ain't that many rooms." She further elaborated that even when her administrator does come into her classroom, her administrator is unfamiliar and seems out of place which causes Denise to feel stressed. She said:

You know, it's like if you came here on a regular basis, you know it was going to be something different. But it's like I don't know. Somebody's just coming in your room. Like not your parent, but you know like your parent coming in your room and just start doing stuff and you like never came in. Why are you touching my stuff? What are you doing?.... And that's just, again, stressful, like, "Oh, my gosh."

Although the paperwork and funding streams, which cause Denise to feel stressed, are not some-thing the administrator controls directly, Denise noted how her administrator does not lessen the stress from these factors. Further, she elaborated that her administrator often exacerbates these stressors by not being fully present or aware of happenings in the classroom. By not being pre-sent in the classroom, her director was not aware of the challenges Denise faces and the supports that Denise needs.

Similar to Denise, Aria would prefer for her administrator to be more present in her class-room. Aria described how her administrator does not regularly check-in or observe in the class-room. Even though formal observations are not her responsibility, Aria expressed how much she would appreciate if her administrator would check-in on the classroom more regularly so she can familiarize herself with the students and the problems teachers are facing:

> Like she doesn't really do check-ins with us too much. She doesn't really come in to ob-serve. Maybe she can't, right? That's a different person's role. But you know that would be really nice to just have her come in and see what we're doing and check in and see what's going on in the classroom, and what are we learning about, and which kids are kind of you know the ones that are a little more challenging for us teachers.

By not coming into the classroom regularly, Aria's director is not able to have a comprehensive awareness of all the happenings in the classroom.

Samantha described how her administrator's lack of presence in the classroom results in her administrator never offering any assistance. Further, Samantha described that her administrator is often is out of touch with the tasks that are required of Samantha.

> But never, not once, have she said, "Well, let me step in to help." She don't come in class-rooms. It's like she just don't. I've never physically seen her step in a classroom and assist in a classroom.

By not being present in the classroom, Samantha's administrator is unfamiliar with the issues that arise and the assistance that Samantha needs.

All three of these teachers offer insight into how administrators who are not present within the classroom are not aware of the challenges that teachers face and resultingly are not famil-iar with the supports they need. Although administrators are not always the direct source of stress for teachers, when they are not present in the classroom, they lack awareness of challenges that teachers face. This lack of awareness exacerbates teachers' stress as their administrator is not familiar enough to offer assistance and support.

In summary, theme one pertained to how teachers described their administrators to ignore problems and lack presence in their classrooms. As a result, administrators failed to respond to issues and were not aware of classroom happenings. The second theme moves beyond the admin-istrators' response and awareness of issues to better examine the ways that administrators directly influence the workplace environment.

Theme 2: Creating an Environment that is Inconducive to Meeting Expectations

Teachers described the ways that their administrators set workplace expectations. Across all four interviews of teachers who perceived their administrator to have a more passive avoidant leadership style, each participant described how their administrator engaged in poor communication and created unrealistic deadlines.

Poor communication. All four teachers referenced ineffective communication methods between their administrator and staff. Teachers described how their administrator engaged in inconsistent and ineffective methods of communication which can increase teachers' stress levels. For example, Amanda expressed that when she has communication issues with her administrator, it can increase her stress-levels "Sometimes to poor communication between you and the manager, you know, also kind of bring stress to you." Other teachers elaborated on what this poor communication entails.

When asked about her stress levels in the workplace, Samantha illustrated that her administrator would add to her stress levels by engaging in ineffective communication. Samantha provided an example where instead of speaking directly to Samantha about a topic, her administrator relayed a message to Samantha through another staff member:

> If she feels that I have some tension about something that we've discussed, she'll send another teacher to relay a message. She won't directly excuse me, come. She'll send somebody else to relay a message. Like she'll even get like the aide in my classroom has been there 20 years. So I rely on this person because she knows families. She knows the children. She know the center. She's been there longer than the director. So it's a plus. And so I was like, "I'm not a body count type of person." I say, "I want to be effective in what I'm doing. I want children to learn and to grow and to be safe." So I said, "You need to relay messages to me that is important to, I say, not only my job title, but to my classroom to me."

As Samantha described, when matters deal with her students within her classroom, she believed she had a priority to have information communicated directly to her. When reflecting on this

example, Samantha said, she was confused and surprised by her administrator's methods of communication of choosing to not speak directly with Samantha.

When describing her current director, Aria was asked what she might change about her. She explained how she would want to change her administrator's inconsistent communication which makes it challenging to meet the requests that her director has. Aria elaborated:

> I would just say like communication, a little bit more direct, a little bit more clear, a little bit more consistent. Yeah. Consistency is just like the big thing. If you say one thing and you mean something else, and then it's like we get emails like, "Oh, reminder, this and this is supposed to happen when it's actually the first time you've ever said it to me or you know my colleagues." That's not really a reminder. We never knew this information. Like I can go back in my emails and see no one ever told us this. If you would let us know, we would do it the right way that you would like. But yeah. So how am I supposed to know if you didn't tell me?

Aria illustrated that she would like to fulfill her director's requests and "do it the right way that [her director] would like." But her administrator's inconsistent communication style creates an environment where it is challenging for her to do that. Aria expressed how she believes that her administrator's communication style is not the most effective method to ensure that expectations are clearly set.

Similarly, Denise described how her administrator does not always communicate in a way that is effective to ensure teachers receive the message. When she described how the high amount of paperwork adds stress in the workplace, she elaborated to include how her director adds to that stress. She said:

> You want us to do one thing, and then things are changing, and you expect us to keep up with the change and know what form changed or this and this and that. Well, it was in the email. Honey, that's some of the last things we're doing is we're trying to work with the actual kids.

Denise noted that her center was a non-profit that received multiple funding streams which entailed having "to abide by all these rules and regulations that I'm sure contradict each other at

times." It was clear that Denise described challenges that arose outside of the control of the administrator. However, Denise continued to describe how her director's method of communicating these rules and regulations was not effective. Although her director cannot control the expectations of their funders, she believed her director could better communicate these expectations to staff in a way that would be more effective.

In summary, all four teachers who were interviewed in the high passive avoidant group expressed concern around ineffective communication methods of their administrators. Teachers described that ineffective communication would entail not communicating directly with the teacher and not communicating in a way that was effective for the teacher. Such poor communication increased teachers' stress levels. Moreover, teachers expressed that at times the stressors were outside of the control of the administrators. However, administrators were able to control the way they presented information to teachers, even if they couldn't control the stressors themselves. These methods created an environment that was inconducive to meeting the administrator's expectations. The next category explores another way that administrators created an environment that was inconducive to meeting expectations.

Unrealistic Deadlines. Teachers explained how their administrator would create tight deadlines to complete a task. Such tight deadlines increased teachers' stress levels and led them to feel less effective in their work. When asked to reflect on what she would change about her current director, Amanda described how she would prefer more time to complete tasks since she felt constrained by the timeline:

> I feel like the time period they give is sometimes limited. It's short. You know and yeah. Personally, that's what I feel. Time for this is due. This is due. This is due. Those kind of time period is kind of short to me.

Amanda elaborated to describe the many tasks that teachers balance in their work. Although she

did not advocate for getting rid of these tasks, she did advocate for more time to be able to complete them.

Aria also described having many due dates in her work. She extended this idea as she illustrated her feelings that these urgent due dates are often created to prioritize the needs of others, instead of considering the many responsibilities that teachers have:

> It kind of feels sometimes like people have their own you know I need this. I need this done now. It's like, okay, but I'm also doing this. There's a lot of things that go on in the classroom.

Like Amanda, Aria was not advocating for getting rid of tasks. But she was requesting a clear balance between the needs of the teachers in the classroom and the needs of administrators. Aria suggested that it is important for administrators to take into account all of the necessary tasks that teachers balance when creating deadlines and due dates.

Denise elaborated on this idea of rushed deadlines. She explained that when deadlines are rushed, teachers often cannot receive proper notice or time to adjust:

> Everyone needs to hurry up and do this. So now we only get 30-minute breaks because the state has changed something, or the city has changed something, or the country has changed something, and we have to go abide by it. And it's on a hurry basis. So sometimes we're not even learning some of the stuff. We're literally just doing it to get the stuff done to show that we got it done in a timely manner before DFS comes and sees that you know the teachers don't have it, and then they're dinged for something.

Although many factors influence the tasks that teachers must carry out, Denise advocated for not losing focus on the teachers themselves. She highlighted the critical need to train and familiarize teachers with the ever-changing standards.

Samantha explained how her director creates unrealistic deadlines which increases her stress and causes her to feel less effective as she carries out her work. She explained that she would prefer her administrator to not create such a rushed environment:

I would want her to realize that we shouldn't have to do everything at crunch time, but spread it out, it will become more effective for the teachers, and the teachers won't be so stressed. So, making her realize that you know things should be done. And let's say, do some this one. Like spread it out so it's not always a crunch that we're completing tasks… I like my work to be spreaded out so that I'm doing it. That's going to be most effective. I think when I'm crunching for a deadline to be met, I could miss something.

Although Samantha did not advocate for getting rid of tasks, she did offer a solution to spread out the tasks. She elaborated that this would help her to feel more successful and less stressed.

In summary, theme two pertained to how administrators can create an environment that is inconducive to meeting expectations. All four teachers described how their administrators created these environments through ineffective communication and unrealistic deadlines. As a result, teachers described feeling higher levels of stress and less effective in their work.

RQ2 Summary

Teachers who worked with administrators who they perceived to have a highly passive avoidant leadership style, described their administrator as being unresponsive to and unsupportive of problems as well as creating an environment that is inconducive to meeting expectations. In doing so, administrators fostered feelings of mistrust, stress and ineffectiveness. Teachers articulated how they understood that many factors influenced their workload. Often, these factors were out of the control of the administrators themselves. But each teacher reiterated the way their administrator responded to these factors was within the control of the leader. Even though administrators cannot fully resolve every issue, their response to the situation matters. Teachers in this interview group described how their administrators' response to the issues often exacerbated the challenges teachers faced.

Moreover, to address RQ3, teachers who perceived their administrator to have lower passive avoidant leadership style were also interviewed. The themes that emerged revolved around

similar topics as the themes that teachers with perceptions of higher passive avoidant leadership style discussed. However, the themes that emerged from teachers in the lower passive avoidant group had opposing viewpoints to the themes from the higher passive avoidant group.

RQ3: Administrators Perceived to Have a Less Passive Avoidant Leadership Style

Teachers who perceived their administrator to have a less passive avoidant leadership style described their administrators in many ways. Across all four interviews, two main themes emerged. The themes described by teachers who perceive their administrator to have a less passive avoidant leadership style are portrayed in Table 16. The first theme involved teachers describing their administrators as addressing problems by being aware and responsive. The second theme portrayed administrators as being approachable by creating a safe environment where teachers feel comfortable seeking support and talking with their administrator.

Table 16. Summary of Qualitative Findings: Research Question 3

Theme	Category	Description
1. Addressing problems	Being aware and responsive to problems	Administrators are aware of problems and attempt to resolve problems that arise.
2. Being approachable	Creating a safe environment	Feeling comfortable to talk with administrators

Theme 1: Addressing problems

Across all four interviews of teachers who perceived their administrator to have a lower passive avoidant leadership style, each participant described how their administrator is responsive to addressing issues and challenges. Teachers described how their administrators were able to address these problems as they made themselves aware and familiar with the classroom setting as well as by checking in on teachers. Teachers illustrated how their administrators' responsive-

ness was useful to support them when dealing with a range of challenges such as with parents, students and staff shortages.

For example, Siera described how her administrator regularly comes into the classroom to check on the staff and the students. Doing so allows her administrator to be aware of what is happening in the classroom:

> And then she always checking up on me, coming in the classroom, checking on the classroom, making sure that, like I said, the staff is okay. The children are doing what they're supposed to do.

Siera's administrator is regularly present within the classroom to familiarize herself with what is happening. However, this does not mean that Siera does not face problems within the workplace. She acknowledged how stressful her work can be "when you have challenging kids that you have to deal with." I probed further to understand in what ways if any she feels like she can address challenges that arise with her students. Siera illustrated how her administrator offers support that at times alleviates the stress she faces in the classroom. She said:

> My supervisor will provide resources or say something or you know talk to that child about what's going on. The child is crying, continuing to cry all through the day. She will come in, step in, and then you know pull her child out of the classroom and you know speak with the child about what's going on.

Moreover, I asked Ruby if there had ever been a time when her administrator missed an opportunity to support her, Ruby said "No. It's never been a time. Never. She always support me." To further explore this relationship, I asked her to illustrate what support from her administrator looks like. She provided an example of when she had a challenging student. Her administrator supported her in an ongoing process both in the classroom and in having a discussion with the child's parent. In doing so, Ruby felt supported by her administrator. She illustrated:

> So I had a child that was- I don't know. He was just being defiant. He didn't want to do anything. He didn't want to do anything. He would never come to any other centers. No, in any of the large groups. He would just you know roam around the room and want to do

his own thing. And you know that's okay. That's fine. But he would throw things, scream in the classroom, try to walk out, just hit children. Even at nap time, he wouldn't take a nap. She would come in at nap time and sit with him, you know talk him down, try to get him to lay down, but he still wouldn't lay down. Or she had sent someone in there, another teacher from his previous class to come in and you know try to lay them down, and she could lay him down. You know At least sit on his bed, you know instead of walking around the room. So we had a parent meeting with his mom. And you know she was in that. She was talking. She spoke you know about his behavior. So we all came to a conclusion about it. So that's how she supported me at that time…. the director at the meeting, I actually- see that amazed me at how well she spoke about the child. I didn't even know she knew so much about him.

Ruby's administrator did not "solve" the problem. Instead, her awareness of the situation gave the director the opportunity to be part of the ongoing process to try to try to accommodate a child's needs. The administrator would come into the classroom to provide support to the child or she would assign other colleagues to provide the support. Her administrator also involved herself in the meeting with the child's parent. Ruby felt supported as her administrator addressed the situation in multiple ways offering various types of supports.

Similar to Ruby, Maria expressed that she never experienced feeling unsupported from her current director. To provide a specific example how she received support from her administrator to address challenges, Maria illustrated an instance of when she struggled to effectively communicate with a parent and her administrator collaborated with her to effectively support communications with the parent:

I remember when I was an infant toddler teacher. So that was like a year ago, almost a year ago. And I was really having a tough time with a parent effectively communicating with her, the child's parent. And so my director gave me supports as well as she met with the parent as well to see what was going on. And then he had it set up where we have like a family review.

By meeting with Maria and the parent, her administrator helped to establish clear lines of communication. Maria further described how this process helped to smooth out communications between her and the parent.

Kimberly also described how her director supported her to overcome challenges she faced with her students. Specifically, she described how she recently had considered resigning, but her director's support allowed her to overcome these challenges. After working at her center for 19 years she said she "can't see going anywhere else" and she attributed that level of commitment to her director. She illustrated how her administrator has been so influential in her commitment to the center because of the support she offers Kimberly. She described:

> I told her that if it wasn't for her at this time last year at the Christmas break, I probably would have resigned. It was a really horrendous beginning of last school year, the worst I had in all my years. And that had to do with these children. And it had to do with having little or no support and understanding of these children's issues from my assistant. And so you kind of felt like you were going at it all by yourself. And if it wasn't for my director and I sitting down and brainstorming ideas of how to fix all of it, whatever, you know how to help the children, how to work with this assistant, all that. If it wasn't for her, and I've told her that I would have left in last year, it was not fun. And I have never said that. I've never had a year where I taught that I said, "I'm not finishing this year." So because of her support and willingness to listen to me and allowing me to come in her office and sometimes just vent about something, and then at the same time, working with me on ways to make some more positive changes.

Kimberly articulated how critical her administrator was in Kimberly's decision to not quit. After working at her center for almost two decades, Kimberly faced some major challenges which made quitting seem like a good solution. Her administrator was aware of the problem and persistently supported Kimberly in multiple ways over time which helped to mitigate the idea of resigning. Her administrator was present throughout this situation to listen to Kimberly and to brainstorm possible solutions. As the early childhood workforce continues to face high levels of turnover, Kimberly's example of the awareness and support of her administrator underscores the ways that administrators can serve as a buffer to mitigate this growing problem.

Moreover, teachers described how sometimes, larger problems could not be solved, but they acknowledged their administrator's effort to try to find solutions to the problem. Siera rec-

ognized the limitations her administrator may have in solving an issue as she said: "If any issues

that goes on, they will try to handle to the best of their ability."

Maria described how even amidst the staff shortage, her administrator advocated for fill-

ing staff vacancies:

> They try to give us teacher time. However, it's not so much teacher time that you have in
> that day, in that week, actually, because it'd be shorter staff, right? So a lot of the class-
> rooms that my students don't have a teacher through. But my director, she's been advocat-
> ing for us to have a teacher three because over this past year, all the preschool pre-K
> classrooms in my center got a whole lot of IEP students. So now we need more hands-on
> in the classroom because I got to get this paperwork done to benefit my students. But at
> the same time, I got to be supervising and you know you know visually seeing them.

Although her administrator did not solve the problem of being short-staffed, advocating for addi-

tional staff helped Maria to know that her administrator was working towards addressing the

staff-shortage issue. Workforce shortages are widespread within the field of early childhood. Ma-

ria acknowledged how the advocating of her administrator served as a buffer to this growing

problem.

In summary, as administrators are aware and attempt to address problems, it influences

the workplace environment. All four teachers underscored the importance of having an adminis-

trator who is aware of and able to address problems that arise. Teachers acknowledged how at

times their administrators' efforts to respond to problems alleviated stress for them. However,

teachers also discussed how administrators do not need to solve all problems, but their awareness

of a problem that is happening combined with their attempt to support the teacher to overcome

the problem was noted by multiple teachers.

Theme 2: Being approachable

Teachers described the ways their administrator set the tone for the workplace environ-

ment. Across the interviews of teachers who perceived their administrator to have a less passive

avoidant leadership style, three participants explained how their administrator created an environment where they feel comfortable talking to their administrator. Two teachers described how their administrator established their trust by consistently maintaining confidentiality. One of the teachers illustrated how her administrator's approachability increased her workplace commitment.

For example, Ruby explained how her administrator makes me feel comfortable to seek her out to talk about something because her administrator has earned Ruby's her trust. She said:

> Well, I feel like I can trust her because if I go to her with something and I say, "Please don't say anything," and then she hasn't said anything about it. But other than that, I feel like I can trust her because I do.

The level of trust that Ruby built with her administrator makes her feel comfortable talking to her about a topic. Ruby is confident that her administrator will respect her request to not share this information.

Similarly, Kimberly described how the trust that she has established with her administrator allowed her to feel comfortable talking with her director. Like Ruby, this trust was built on understanding that what she shares with her administrator will stay in confidence. She illustrated:

> I trust her implicitly, and I think that's very important… I know that I could go into her office and close the door and talk to her about something personal, something personally private to me. I can go into her office and talk to her about an issue with a child. And I can go into her office and brainstorm and vent about issues with this assistant that I have. And I know she's not going to the next day go, "Guess what Kimberly told me about you yesterday?" you know Or anything like that. I know that what I say in her office and confidentially, confidence stays in her office. And honesty and confidentiality is one thing that's very, very important to me.

From the many instances of going to talk to her administrator in confidence, Kimberly has established a high level of trust. As a result, she is comfortable seeking input and discussion with her administrator.

Moreover, Maria provided insight into how her administrator's approachability influences her work commitment. She described that her administrator is very approachable and makes her feel welcome to seek out her administrator's input or to request resources. Maria illustrated, "Oh, they you know make you feel welcome. Come on. You can always talk to me. Let me know if you need some resources." Maria explained that this level of approachability from her administrator has increased Maria's commitment to her work.

RQ3 Summary

Teachers who worked with administrators who they perceived to have a low level of passive avoidant leadership style, described their administrator as being aware and responsive to problems as well as being approachable. In doing so, administrators fostered feelings of trust. Teachers described how administrators who were present in their classroom became familiar with their challenges and could respond appropriately. Further, they articulated that many factors influenced their workload. Even though administrators cannot fully resolve every issue, their response to the situation matters. Teachers in this interview group described how their administrators' response to the issues often helped them to feel supported.

Mixed Interpretation of Findings

The mixed interpretation of the findings provided the most comprehensive understanding of these relationships. Rigorous analysis and interpretation of the quantitative and qualitative data paved the way for a more complete understanding through the formulation of several meta-inferences. The formulation of meta-inferences is the final step in mixed methods research as it integrates the various quantitative and qualitative data and reveals the study's outcomes (Schoonenboom, 2022). Meta-inferences are discussed in detail below.

To begin with, the qualitative findings expanded upon the quantitative understanding of how passive avoidant leadership style relates to workplace well-being. Teachers who perceived their administrator to have a more passive avoidant leadership style described their administrator as being unresponsive to and unsupportive of problems. These descriptions are in line with the MLQ factors management by exception (passive) and laissez-faire. However, the qualitative interviews expanded these findings to go beyond the MLQ factors. Teachers who perceived their administrator to have a more passive avoidant leadership style also described their administrator as someone who creates an environment that is inconducive to meeting expectations.

Moreover, meta-inferences can be drawn from the mixing of the quantitative findings and the four themes that emerged from the qualitative analysis. The quantitative understanding of passive avoidant leadership style is expanded upon by the qualitative findings. The first inference suggests that teachers who viewed their administrator to have a more passive avoidant leadership style perceived their administrators to overlook teachers' needs. Administrators who overlooked teachers' needs were associated with teachers with higher workplace stress levels and lower workplace commitment. The second inference suggests that teachers who viewed their administrator to have a less passive avoidant leadership style perceived their administrators to acknowledge teachers' needs. Administrators who acknowledged teachers' needs were associated with teachers with lower workplace stress levels and higher workplace commitment. The interpretation and integration of the findings are summarized in Table 17.

Table 17. Joint-Display

Quantitative Findings	Qualitative Findings	Mixed Methods Meta-inferences
Teacher's perceptions of their administrator's leadership style as being more passive avoidant related to: • Significantly higher levels of workplace stress ($B = 3.62$, $p < .001$). • Significantly lower levels of commitment to their center ($B = -0.58$, $p = .029$).	Teachers who perceived their administrator to have a more passive avoidant leadership style describe their leaders as: 1. Being unresponsive and unsupportive to problems 2. Someone who creates an environment that is inconducive to meeting expectations Teachers who perceived their administrator to have a less passive avoidant leadership style describe their leaders as: 1. Addressing problems 2. Being approachable	1. Teachers who had higher levels of workplace stress and lower levels of job commitment described their administrators to overlook their needs. 2. Teachers who had lower levels of workplace stress and higher levels of job commitment described their administrators to acknowledge their needs.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

Each phase of this mixed methods sequential explanatory study offered a deeper understanding of how the perceptions that early childhood teachers hold about their administrator relate to their workplace well-being. Data collected through an online survey and semi-structured interviews revealed several key findings. The quantitative phase indicated that teachers perceived their administrator to relate to their workplace stress levels and job commitment. The qualitative phase elevated teachers' voices to shed light on perceptions of ideal and actual leadership in early childhood and provided a deeper examination to understand the relationship between administrator leadership style and workplace well-being. Key themes emerged which related to administrators' awareness and responsiveness to problems as well as the workplace environment which administrators established. The mixed interpretation of these findings led to two meta-inferences: (1) teachers who had higher levels of workplace stress and lower levels of job commitment described their administrators as overlooking their needs; and (2) teachers who had lower levels of workplace stress and higher levels of job commitment described their administrators as acknowledging their needs. The implications of these findings are discussed in detail below.

Reconceptualizing Leadership Within Early Childhood Settings

This study found a relationship between administrator leadership style and teacher workplace well-being that was not in line with prior leadership literature. Decades of leadership research have attributed leaders who are considered to possess a more transformational leadership style to relate to employees' job satisfaction, commitment and self-efficacy (Lanaj et al., 2016).

However, this study found no association between transformational leadership and workplace stress or job commitment. Instead, this study revealed that administrators who are perceived to possess high passive avoidant leadership styles were associated with higher workplace stress and lower workplace commitment for early educators. Findings from this study challenges prior literature that often overlooked passive avoidant leadership and instead focused on transformational leadership as the style associated with the most positive outcomes. This study offers critical insight about the field of early childhood; it is uniquely distinct from other disciplines.

The early childhood workforce has many stark differences from other fields, and as a result, it is necessary to understand leadership in the specific context of early childhood. Unlike private-sector organizations whose leadership is male dominant, the early childhood workforce is comprised predominantly of women (Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, 2020; Whitebook et al., 2018). Despite this, the field of early childhood has historically been informed by the perspectives of white men (Salazar Perez, 2017). In its inception, leadership research focused on studying male leaders who were working in large private-sector organizations (Avolio et al., 2009; Binns, 2008). To date, much of the research around leadership continues to be developed around male leaders (Hard & Jónsdóttir, 2013).

However, the old mantra of "think manager, think male" is not applicable to early childhood (Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, 2020; Offermann & Coats, 2018; Whitebook et al., 2018). If male focused leadership theories continue to be applied to leaders in female dominated workforces, systematic discrimination will continue to disadvantage women leaders (Pullen & Vachhani, 2021). To avoid further silencing the marginalized workforce, current ideologies must be decentered and new applicable theories that honor the marginalized voices must be created (Crenshaw, 1993; De Sousa & Varcoe, 2022; Turman, 2017). The women, often wom-

en of color, who make up the early childhood workforce must be recognized for their unique perspectives.

This study critiques the masculine leadership norm to reconceptualize leadership within a highly feminized and minoritized field. This finding disrupts the dominant tendency for feminine leadership to be reduced to male dominated traits. It demonstrates that leadership literature must consider the context to where it originated from and where it is being applied. Findings from this study expand the understanding of what ideal leadership entails in early childhood spaces. In doing so, this study recognizes the intersectionality of the early childhood workforce and encourages the expression of early educators' lived experiences to reconceptualize leadership within the early childhood setting.

Early Childhood Administrators as Buffers for Teachers' Workplace Well-Being

To rigorously explore leadership within the context of early childhood, this study examined early childhood teachers' perceptions of leadership behaviors of both ideal versions of administrators as well as their actual administrators. Teachers described their actual leaders as either overlooking or acknowledging their needs. Leaders who acknowledged teachers' needs were associated with positive teacher workplace well-being. Similarly, teachers perceived ideal early childhood leaders as being supportive and approachable. In other words, there was an alignment between teachers' perceptions of ideal early childhood leadership and descriptions of actual leaders. The behaviors that teachers described were grounded in cultivating relationships by leveraging both care and trust. As such, early childhood administrators who foster relationships based on care and trust with their teachers can serve as a buffer for educators' workplace well-being.

Relational Leadership: Trust and Care in Early Childhood Leadership

Honoring the voices of the workforce, this study reconceptualized leadership within the context of early childhood to outline ways that early childhood administrators use relational leadership to foster connections with teachers through care and trust. Administrators who fostered relationships founded in care and trust were associated with teachers who had more positive workplace well-being.

Care

Care is a foundational element of the relationship that exists between an early childhood educator and young learners. Receptive listening is at the heart of caring for others (Noddings, 2012). Educators care for children by listening and responding to their needs by creating a nurturing environment where they strive to meet children's emotional and physical needs (Wood, 2015). Similarly, the practice of care is an essential element of early childhood leadership (Nicholson & Kurucz, 2019). Parallel to the care that teachers demonstrate for their students, early childhood leaders can similarly demonstrate care for their teachers by listening and responding to their needs. As an early childhood administrator demonstrates care for their teachers, they model ways that teachers can care for their students and add to educators' sense of well-being within the workplace.

Caring leaders give attention to what is going on in the workplace and use their presence to offer a source of comfort to their staff (Ciulla, 2009). Teachers' narratives from this study provided many examples of administrators who demonstrated care for their teachers as they acknowledge teachers' needs. Interview participants like Siera and Ruby described how their administrators are responsive to addressing issues and challenges because they are familiar with their classrooms and regularly check-in on teachers. Teachers such as Kimberly, Maria and Ruby

illustrated how their administrators' responsiveness was useful to support them when dealing with a range of challenges such as with parents, students and staff shortages. These illustrations exemplify the behaviors of administrators who care for their teaching staff.

Trust

Teachers' narratives offered many examples of ways that they developed trust in their leaders as administrators acknowledged teachers' needs. Findings from this study are consistent with the five facets that contribute to trust previously outlined by Hoy and Tschannen-Moran (1999). These facets include: benevolence, competence, reliability, honesty, and openness.

Benevolence is characterized by a willingness to extend oneself to support the well-being of someone else (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015). It offers a sense of confidence that one's well-being will be protected by the trusted person (Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999). Maria and Siera's narratives underscored how their administrators were benevolent in demonstrating concern for their welfare as they described how their supervisors checked on them regularly to ensure their well-being.

Competence involves the skills, knowledge, and abilities to effectively perform a task appropriately and in a timely way (Hungerford & Cleary, 2021). Leaders who demonstrate competence can consistently support staff through problem solving and dealing constructively with conflicts (Hungerford & Cleary, 2021; Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015). In their interviews, Ruby and Siera described how their administrators were competent to apply their skills and knowledge to address problems. Further, they discussed how their administrators would often offer resources and guidance in response to challenges teachers faced.

Reliability looks at the extent to which one can predictably count on another to come through with what is needed since the best predictor of future behavior is past behavior (Hoy &

Tschannen-Moran, 1999; Hungerford & Cleary, 2021). Ruby illustrated how her administrator demonstrates predictability by always feeling supported, noting there was never a time that her administrator did not assist her when needed.

Honesty describes individuals who possess a high level of integrity and the expectancy that one's word can be relied upon (Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999). Kimberly highlighted how her director demonstrates integrity as she feels comfortable sharing personal information with her director since she knows it will remain confidential.

Openness is the extent to which relevant information is not withheld (Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999). Although teachers did not explicitly reference the openness of their administrators, Samantha noted how her administrator added to her stress levels when she withheld information from her.

Trust is a dynamic process that is sensitive to the context where it is being established (Turner & Turner, 2024). As a result, trust must be understood within the specific context of early childhood to effectively understand its components. Teachers in this study illustrated the behaviors of administrators who have established trust amongst their teaching staff within the context of early childhood. As administrators engaged in the behaviors described by teachers, they established trust between themselves and their teachers.

Alignment of Ideal and Actual Leadership

Teachers' narratives illustrated an alignment between their perception of an ideal version of an early childhood administrator and their perception of their actual administrators. Both versions of administrators were described to foster relationships with teachers based on care and trust. Prior research indicates that high levels of congruence between employees' perceptions of their ideal leader and specific perceptions of their real leader have been shown to have a positive

influence in the workplace (Stelmokienė & Endriulaitienė, 2020). Consistent with prior research, this study found teachers' perceptions of congruence between ideal and real leadership to be significantly associated with workplace commitment. In the quantitative data, this study found no significant association between congruence level and perceptions of workplace stress. However, in their interviews, teachers described instances when a lack of alignment between their ideal and real administrator increased their workplace stress levels. For example, Samantha described an ideal administrator as someone who would not create rushed deadlines and elaborated that her actual administrator often created unrealistic deadlines which increased her workplace stress. Thus, there was qualitative evidence that congruence level relates to workplace stress levels.

Workplace Well-Being

This study found that early childhood teachers who had significantly lower workplace stress levels and significantly higher levels of job commitment perceived their administrator to foster a relationship built on care and trust. Findings from this study demonstrated how early childhood administrators can act as a job resource when they foster relationships built on care and trust which will be associated with teachers who have lower workplace stress and higher workplace commitment. Alternatively, early childhood administrators who do not engage in relationship building in this way add to teacher job demands and will be associated with teachers who have higher stress levels and lower job commitment. This study adds to the limited scope of existing research to highlight the pivotal role that early childhood administrators play in shaping the well-being of educators.

Pressures of Being a Leader

Although administrators can act to buffer the stresses that teachers face, they cannot extinguish the stressors entirely. Adapting Bronfenbrenner and Morris's (2006) bioecological sys-

tems model to an early childhood context (see Figure 1), there are many systems, such as the historical context of early childhood, as well as the policies and social conditions that influence early childhood educators and administrators. Although administrators can alleviate some of the stress that results from these systems, they cannot fully control the influence of these systems. Within care work, there are many times when caregivers cannot satisfy the expressed needs of the cared-for due to aspects such as lack of resources or lack of ability (Noddings, 2012).

Through their narratives, teachers described how sometimes, larger problems could not be solved, but they recognized their administrator's effort to respond to the problem. For example, Maria described how even though teachers faced a staff shortage, she acknowledged her administrator's efforts to advocate for filling vacancies. Maria's administrator could not "solve the problem" of the staff shortage, likely due to a lack of resources. Even so, she made an effort to respond to the problem in a way that was within her control. Similarly, Siera described how her administrator will try to handle any issue to "the best of their ability." Siera recognized that her administrator could not solve each issue, since some things may be beyond her ability level. However, Siera acknowledged that her administrator would work within their ability level to address any issue. Through their interviews, teachers described how their administrators had many systems that were impacting their own work. For example, several teachers cited the funding streams that create demands outside of the control of the administrators. Nevertheless, teachers acknowledged the efforts that their leaders made to buffer teachers' stress, even amidst the various pressures that leaders themselves faced. This study provides a novel conceptualization that early childhood administrators can serve as a buffer for their staff against systems that are often out of the control of the administrators themselves.

Although early childhood administrators work to protect their staff from these pressures, they are often tasked with "pulling themselves up by their bootstraps." Historically, pathways into the role of early childhood administrator have been unclear (Bloom et al., 2013; Hewett & La Paro, 2020). A lack of specialized pre-service training exists as well as a lack of understanding about the types of on-the job learning that early childhood administrators have access to (Bloom & Sheerer, 1992; Douglass, 2019; Lieberman, 2017). Early childhood administrators can support the workplace well-being of early educators. However, they must not be tasked to take on this burden alone. Instead, our field must value and support the well-being of early administrators. By engaging in such a parallel process, early childhood administrators must be prepared and supported to allow them to foster workplaces where educators have positive well-being.

Limitations

Although I thoughtfully considered how to carry out this study in the most effective way, several limitations still exist. Even so, the benefits of carrying out this research along with the findings that emerged outweigh the limitations. These limitations include lack of causality, being the sole coder, timeline constraints, and participant bias.

To begin with, the quantitative data did not allow for a strict test of causality or direction of effects. As a result, this study cannot fully rule out "third variable" confounds which may be present. For example, teachers' temperament may make them more likely to perceive their well-being and their administrator more positively. Thus, this study cannot make claims of predictability or causality based on the variables presented. However, the application of the qualitative data increased the plausibility of the presented theories. Future studies should test these relationships to determine causality.

Another limitation is that I was the sole researcher to analyze the qualitative data. Without the collaboration of others, I was not able to establish inter rater reliability during the coding process. Additionally, I did not match the cultural background of the majority of the interview participants. With these limitations in mind, I engaged in the reflexivity to add trustworthiness to my findings and to avoid misinterpretation of the data. I also used detailed analytic memos to document my observations throughout the interview and coding process. These processes helped to ensure that I did not influence the data based on my own biases. Future studies should use the coding themes and meta-inferences established in this study as a-priori codes to confirm if they exist in other studies and if so, to determine if a group of coders could reliably apply these themes and meta-inferences.

Moreover, the timeline of the study posed several challenges. This study used a static approach of assessing workplace well-being as it collected quantitative data at one timepoint. It would have been ideal to examine how workplace well-being changes over a longer period of time (Bloom, 2016). However, due to time constraints, that was beyond the scope of this study. Future studies should assess workplace well-being at multiple timepoints. Moreover, a three-month period existed between the quantitative survey and the qualitative interviews. Although teachers did provide qualitative descriptions that were in line with their quantitative data, it would have been preferable to shorten the period between the quantitative data collection and the qualitative data collection.

Further, there was likely self-selection bias present. Although the opportunity to participate in this study was shared on various listservs and social media pages, teachers were not required to participate. As such, certain types of early childhood educators may have self-selected to com-

plete the survey or interview over others. Future studies would benefit from involving multiple teachers from each center. By doing so, it would balance out the potential for self-selection bias.

Moreover, this study was designed to focus on the perspectives of early childhood educators as research has indicated employee perceptions are important since their perceptions have been shown to relate more strongly to organizational performance than leaders' intentions about their leadership (Jacobsen & Bøgh Andersen, 2015). While it is critical to gain the perspectives from the educators themselves, it would also be beneficial to gather their perspectives alongside their administrators' perspectives. By gathering the perceptions of teachers and the administrator within a site, a more complete understanding of staff's perception could be assessed. Future studies should aim to involve teachers and administrators within each center.

Implications

A paucity of early childhood leadership research exists (Grantham-Caston & DiCarlo, 2021; Kirby et al., 2021; Muijs et al., 2004). This study adds to the limited amount of research to shed light on early childhood leadership. In doing so, it offers several important implications.

First, this study offers a reconceptualization of leadership within the context of early childhood. This study contradicted prior findings that transformational leadership is the style with the most positive associations (Bass, 1990; Gardner et al., 2010; Robinson et al., 2008). Instead, participants illustrated how they positively viewed administrators who demonstrated care and trust by acknowledging teachers' needs. This is an important contribution since organizations have typically favored masculine-dominated leadership styles (Syed & Murray, 2008). As such, this study emphasized the notion that the field of early childhood can no longer rely on the leadership literature of other disciplines. Early childhood is a woman dominant field which makes it

distinct from many other disciplines. This study disrupted the male focused dominance to instead value the voices of the women of the early childhood workforce.

Second, this study indicates how critical it is for the field to regard early childhood administrators as a resource who can serve as a buffer for the workplace well-being of educators. The early childhood workforce is plagued by high levels of stress and turnover (Cassidy et al., 2011). This study highlights how administrators can serve as a support for early childhood educators through relational leadership. Teachers described how they had lower levels of workplace stress and higher levels of commitment when they worked with administrators who acknowledged their needs by addressing workplace problems and being approachable. These administrators were perceived as being supportive even in situations where they could not fully resolve the issue, often because it stemmed from a larger system that was out of their control. Despite some system-wide issues that exist within the field, this study illustrates how early childhood administrators can serve as a buffer against some of these challenges to support educators' well-being by establishing relationships based on trust and care. This study adds to the limited research that examines the relationship between early childhood administrators and educator well-being.

Finally, this study highlights the critical need to support to early childhood administrators so they can effectively serve as resources for their teachers. Early childhood administrators should no longer be expected to overcome the many challenges and stressors they face in their work independently. Rather, they must be provided with adequate resources and supports to promote their own workplace well-being. Just as passengers on a plane are instructed to secure their own oxygen masks before assisting others, early childhood administrators must also be prioritized to ensure they are supported before they can effectively provide support to their staff.

Conclusion

This study examined the experiences and illuminated the voices of early childhood teachers. This work serves as a call to action for our field. First, it is imperative to recognize the often-overlooked women within the early childhood workforce. This study offered critical insight to understand leadership within the female-dominated workforce of early childhood. Second, our field must embrace relationship-focused leadership. This research demonstrated how early childhood administrators who fostered relationships with teachers by acknowledging teachers' needs were considered ideal. Third, the field must acknowledge the relationship between early childhood administrators and educators' workplace well-being. Findings from this study uncovered an association between early childhood administrators who fostered relationships with teachers' workplace-well-being. Finally, the field must leverage administrators as catalysts for positive change. This study underscored how early childhood administrators can serve as a valuable resource to support teachers' well-being, even amidst systemic challenges. We must draw upon these insights to promote workplace well-being for early childhood educators.

APPENDIX A

MULTI FACTOR LEADERSHIP QUESTIONNAIRE

Rater Form

Name of Leader: _____ Date: _____

Organization ID #: _____Leader ID #: _____

This questionnaire is used to describe the leadership style of the above-mentioned individual as you perceive it. Answer all items on this answer sheet. **If an item is irrelevant, or if you are unsure or do not know the answer, leave the answer blank.** Please answer this questionnaire anonymously.

Important (necessary for processing): Which best describes you?

___ I am at a higher organizational level than the person I am rating.
___ The person I am rating is at my organizational level.
___ I am at a lower organizational level than the person I am rating.
___ Other than the above.

Forty-five descriptive statements are listed on the following pages. Judge how frequently each statement fits the person you are describing. Use the following rating scale:

Not at all	Once in a while	Sometimes	Fairly often	Frequently, if not always
0	1	2	3	4

The Person I Am Rating. . .

1. Provides me with assistance in exchange for my efforts

2. *Re-examines critical assumptions to question whether they are appropriate

3. Fails to interfere until problems become serious

4. Focuses attention on irregularities, mistakes, exceptions, and deviations from standards

5. Avoids getting involved when important issues arise

6. *Talks about his/her most important values and beliefs

7. Is absent when needed

8. *Seeks differing perspectives when solving problems

9. *Talks optimistically about the future

10. *Instills pride in me for being associated with him/her

Not at all	Once in a while	Sometimes	Fairly often	Frequently, if not always
0	1	2	3	4

11. Discusses in specific terms who is responsible for achieving performance targets

12. Waits for things to go wrong before taking action

13. *Talks enthusiastically about what needs to be accomplished

14. *Specifies the importance of having a strong sense of purpose

15. *Spends time teaching and coaching

16. Makes clear what one can expect to receive when performance goals are achieved

17. Shows that he/she is a firm believer in "If it ain't broke, don't fix it."

18. *Goes beyond self-interest for the good of the group

19. *Treats me as an individual rather than just as a member of a group

20. Demonstrates that problems must become chronic before taking action

21. *Acts in ways that builds my respect

22. Concentrates his/her full attention on dealing with mistakes, complaints, and failures

23. *Considers the moral and ethical consequences of decisions

24. Keeps track of all mistakes

25. *Displays a sense of power and confidence

26. *Articulates a compelling vision of the future

27. Directs my attention toward failures to meet standards

28. Avoids making decisions

29. *Considers me as having different needs, abilities, and aspirations from others

30. *Gets me to look at problems from many different angles

31. *Helps me to develop my strengths

32. *Suggests new ways of looking at how to complete assignments

33. Delays responding to urgent questions

34. *Emphasizes the importance of having a collective sense of mission

35. Expresses satisfaction when I meet expectations

36. *Expresses confidence that goals will be achieved

APPENDIX B

TRUST ME QUESTIONNAIRE

Trust Questionnaire

The following instructions prefaced the scales. Indicate the degree to which you agree with each statement by using the following scale.

1	2	3	4	5
Disagree strongly	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Agree strongly

Think about specific core employee(s) *in your organization*. For each statement, write the number that best describes how much you agree or disagree with each statement.

1. Managers'/employees' needs and desires are very important to employees/managers.

2. I can count on my employees/managers to help me if I have difficulties with my job.

3. Employees/managers would not knowingly do anything to hurt the organization.

4. My employees/managers are open and up front with me.

5. I think that the people in the organization succeed by stepping on other people. (R)

6. Employees/managers will keep the promises they make.

7. Employees/managers really look out for what is important to the managers/employees.

8. Employees/managers have a lot of knowledge about the work that needs to be done.

9. Employees/managers are known to be successful in the things they attempt to accomplish.

10. If I make a mistake, my employees/managers are willing to "forgive and forget."

11. Employees'/managers' actions and behaviors are not consistent. (R)

12. Employees/managers take actions that are consistent with their words.

13. It is best not to share information with my employees/managers. (R)

14. There is a lot of warmth in the relationships between the managers and workers in this organization.

15. Employees/managers would make personal sacrifices for our group.

16. Employees/managers express their true feelings about important issues.

APPENDIX C

CONGRUENCE MEASURE

Subscale taken from the Early Childhood Job Satisfaction Survey
If you could design your ideal job, how closely would your present position resemble your ideal
join with respect to the following:

Not like my ideal at all		Somewhat resembles my ideal		Is my ideal
1	2	3	4	5

Relationship with co-workers
Relationship with supervisor
The work itself
Working conditions
Pay and promotion opportunities

APPENDIX D

COMMITMENT MEASURE

Subscale taken from the Early Childhood Job Satisfaction Survey
This section asks questions that relate to your commitment to your center and to the early childhood field. Check all that describe how you feel about your organization:

- ☐ I intend to work here at least two more years.
- ☐ I often think of quitting.
- ☐ I'm just putting in time.
- ☐ I take pride in my center.
- ☐ I put a lot of extra effort into my work.
- ☐ I feel very committed to this center.
- ☐ I don't care what happens to this place after I leave.
- ☐ It would be difficult for me to find another job as good as this one.
- ☐ It's hard to feel committed to this place.
- ☐ I sometimes feel trapped in this job.

APPENDIX E

PERCEIVED STRESS SCALE

Perceived Stress Scale

A more precise measure of personal stress can be determined by using a variety of instruments that have been designed to help measure individual stress levels. The first of these is called the **Perceived Stress Scale**.

The Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) is a classic stress assessment instrument. The tool, while originally developed in 1983, remains a popular choice for helping us understand how different situations affect our feelings and our perceived stress. The questions in this scale ask about your feelings and thoughts during the last month. In each case, you will be asked to indicate how often you felt or thought a certain way. Although some of the questions are similar, there are differences between them and you should treat each one as a separate question. The best approach is to answer fairly quickly. That is, don't try to count up the number of times you felt a particular way; rather indicate the alternative that seems like a reasonable estimate.

For each question choose from the following alternatives:

0 - never

1 - almost never

2 - sometimes

3 - fairly often

4 - very often

_____ l. In the last month, how often have you been upset because of something that happened unexpectedly?

_____ 2. In the last month, how often have you felt that you were unable to control the important things in your life?

_____ 3. In the last month, how often have you felt nervous and stressed?

_____ 4. In the last month, how often have you felt confident about your ability to handle your personal problems?

_____ 5. In the last month, how often have you felt that things were going your way?

_____ 6. In the last month, how often have you found that you could not cope with all the things that you had to do?

_____ 7. In the last month, how often have you been able to control irritations in your life?

_____ 8. In the last month, how often have you felt that you were on top of things?

_____ 9. In the last month, how often have you been angered because of things that happened that were outside of your control?

_____ 10. In the last month, how often have you felt difficulties were piling up so high that you could not overcome them?

Figuring Your PSS Score

You can determine your PSS score by following these directions:

- First, reverse your scores for questions 4, 5, 7, and 8. On these 4 questions, change the

scores like this:
$$0 = 4, \ 1 = 3, \ 2 = 2, \ 3 = 1, \ 4 = 0.$$

- Now add up your scores for each item to get a total. **My total score is _____.**

- Individual scores on the PSS can range from 0 to 40 with higher scores indicating

higher perceived stress.
► Scores ranging from 0-13 would be considered low stress.

► Scores ranging from 14-26 would be considered moderate stress.

► Scores ranging from 27-40 would be considered high perceived stress.

The Perceived Stress Scale is interesting and important because your perception of what is happening in your life is most important. Consider the idea that two individuals could have the exact same events and experiences in their lives for the past month. Depending on their perception, total score could put one of those individuals in the low stress category and the total score could put the second person in the high stress category.

APPENDIX F

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Congruence/Leadership Style

1. Think of someone who you consider to be a good leader. Take a moment to think about that person. Once you're ready, describe what characteristics you believe make them a good leader.

2. Now, I want to focus you on the field of early childhood. Think of your ideal ECE administrator. I'll be using the term administrator throughout the interview. So, to clarify what I mean when I say administrator, I'm referring to the person who oversees the day-to-day management at your center and who you interact with regularly. This could be someone like a center director, owner, or direct supervisor. Take a moment to think about your ideal ECE administrator. Describe what it would be like to work with your ideal ECE administrator.

    a. What characteristics do they have that would makes them an ideal admin? Describe what you want your ideal ECE administrator to do or say.

3. Now think of your actual ECE administrator. This is that person who you interact with regularly and they oversee day-to-day management at your center. This might be your director, supervisor, or owner. As a reminder, nothing that you discuss will be shared with your administrator or colleagues. Describe what it is like to work with your actual ECE administrator.

    a. Tell me about a time your admin did something that made you feel supported. What things do you like that your administrator says or does?

    b. Tell me about a time your admin may have done something that made you feel unsupported. What things do you not like that your administrator says or does? Are there things that you would want to change about your administrator?

Trust

4. Thinking about that same administrator tell me about the level of trust you have for them.

    a. What makes you feel like you can trust them?

    b. What makes you feel like you can not trust them?

Stress

5. Now let's transition to think about how you feel mentally and emotionally at work. Are there times you feel stressed with your work?

6. How does your administrator influence your stress levels?

    a. *If no*, what are major sources that do influence your stress levels at work?

Commitment

7. Now think about the level of commitment that you have to continue working at your current center. How committed do you feel to continue working at your current center?

8. How has your administrator influenced your commitment to your center?

    a. *If no, w*hat are major sources that do influence your level of commitment to your center?

Wrap-Up

9. Is there anything else you want to share about your experiences?

10. Thank you. Do you have any questions?

APPENDIX G

IRB EXEMPTION LETTER

Erikson Institute
Graduate School in Child Development

06.26.23

Erikson Institute
451 North LaSalle St.
Chicago, IL. 60654

<u>PROJECT INVESTIGATOR</u>: Crystasany Turner, Supervisor of Joanna Skourletos' dissertation

<u>PROPOSAL TITLE</u>:
Early Childhood Educators' Perceptions of How their Administrator Impacts their Workplace Well-being.

<u>Type of Review</u>: EXEMPT

Dear Dr. Turner and Ms. Skourletos:

The Erikson Institute Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects has received your letter noting intention of conducting survey and interview research with early childhood educators about their administrators. It is our opinion that this research is exempt from human subjects review, as specified in United States Department of Health and Human Behavior guideline for protections of human subjects, Final Rule. Specifically, your research involves only adults, no deception, low-risk information, and separation between data collection methods and employers. Therefore, we will not be providing oversight of this project. If your research design changes non-trivially in terms of either risk or burden (e.g., additional measures), you will need to submit an application to the board before continuing your research activities.

If you have any questions regarding the subject of this letter do not hesitate to contact me (ext. 7192).

Sincerely,

Amanda Moreno, Ph.D.
Chair, Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects

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VITA

Prior to pursuing her Ph.D. at Loyola University/Erikson Institute, Dr. Joanna Skourletos earned an M.S.Ed. in Early Childhood Education from Dominican University and a B.A. in Applied Psychology from the University of Illinois Chicago. Dr. Skourletos has extensive experience in the field of early childhood. She began her career as a preschool teacher in a center-based Head Start community organization and later became the Education Manager for the agency. Additionally, she has worked as an early childhood coach, professional development facilitator, and has taught courses for both graduate and community college programs.

Dr. Skourletos has contributed to several early childhood research projects. She was awarded a Doctoral Fellowship in 2018 from Erikson Institute and joined the Early Math Collaborative. Dr. Skourletos has also worked with the McCormick Center for Early Childhood Leadership on several research projects focused on early childhood leadership. In 2021, she became the Data Coordinator for the University of Illinois Chicago's Alternative Licensure Program (ALP), an initiative which provides an alternative pathway for the incumbent early childhood workforce to earn their professional educator licenses. In this role, she supported the longitudinal evaluation of the iterative development and impact of the ALP. Her combination of professional and academic experiences have deepened her interest in understanding and addressing the multifaceted challenges facing the early childhood workforce.

Following graduation, Dr. Skourletos will begin a Postdoctoral Fellowship at the University of Illinois Chicago's Collaborative for Young Children and Families on the Illinois

Early Childhood Registered Apprenticeship project. This program aims to address critical

workforce challenges such as workforce shortages and insufficient compensation. Dr. Skourletos

is committed to continuing to support the early childhood workforce in her future work.