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Leadership Practices of Founding School Leaders in Canadian Private Schools

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Leadership Practices of Founding School Leaders in Canadian Private Schools

by

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ABSTRACT

In Canada, and around the world, in recent years there has been a proliferation in school choice. School choice includes options for K-12 students that include public, Catholic, charter, private schools, home schooling, and online schools. Without exception, leadership in all types of schools plays a critical role in the success, or failure, of the institution. When private schools close, students are required to move to another school and this may have a negative overall impact on their learning and educational experience. This study focused on founding school leaders' leadership practices as the schools progressed from start-up to sustainability. The researcher utilized a multiple site case study analysis of four founding private school leaders who helped lead their schools and achieve sustainability. Semi-structured interviews and artifact analysis were used to determine common leadership practices that contributed to school sustainability. Specifically, the founding school leaders in this study discussed practices, such as: setting direction, building relationships and developing people, developing the organization to support desired practices, and improving the instructional programs. Furthermore, the founding school leaders reflected on their perceived ability to adapt their leadership style as was required, generally moving from visionary leadership to servant and then to distributed leadership. Finally, leaders in this study reported an adherence to a systems thinking orientation and a growth mindset that allowed them to provide the leadership required throughout the process of starting a private school.

Acknowledgements

On the surface, as noted by the cover page, there is a singular author who earns the ownership and achievement of completing a dissertation. The truth of the matter could not be farther from the truth. The completion of this thesis could not have happened without the support of countless teachers, mentors, colleagues, friends, and partners.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Overview

School choice, quality of a child's education, and school leadership all matter. In fact, as many researchers have indicated, these three factors play a significant role on the overall quality of education a child will receive (Dixon, 2019; Hallinger & Heck, 2010; Jabbar & Lenhoff, 2020; Johnson, 2007). The Canadian and global landscape of education continues to evolve and offer additional choices for parents and students to consider when selecting an educational setting and curriculum (A Class Apart, 2019; Bielmier, 2022; Bosetti et al., 2017; Bosetti & Gereluk, 2016; Ladd & Fiske, 2020; McShane, 2022a; Wohlstetter & Zeehandelaar, 2015). Furthermore, parents are choosing the school they want their children to attend based a wide range of factors (Bosetti, 2004; Bosetti et al., 2017; Bosetti & Pyryt, 2008; Corcoran & Jennings, 2020; Jabbar & Lenhoff, 2020; Our Kids, 2019a; Wolf & Egalite, 2018). In the case of non-religious private schools, Bosetti and Pyryt (2008) found, "private school parents choose schools that reflect their values and beliefs about education (27%), have a strong academic reputation (21%), and have a particular approach to teaching (17%)" (p. 101). As the educational landscape evolves, and the knowledge economy becomes more prominent, society is seeing the emergence of new schools that are meant to meet the unique wants and needs of parents and students (Bosetti et al., 2017; Bosetti & Gereluk, 2016; Harari, 2017; Ladd & Fisek, 2020; McShane, 2022b; Schwab, 2017).

Research indicates that the practices of school leaders have a tremendous impact on the school's overall success and, as a result, on student learning (Day & Sammons, 2016; Hallinger, 2003; Hallinger, 2011; Hallinger & Heck, 2010, Huguet, 2017; Kouzes & Posner, 2017; Leithwood et al., 2020; Wong & Ng, 2020). Leadership also has an impact on the overall success

and sustainability of the school (Branch et al., 2013; Mulford & Moreno, 2006). Well before new schools even open their doors, founders and boards are faced with first selecting and trusting a leader to guide the school through the uncertain first days to a sustainable future (McConaghy, 2006). With what is known about the leader's impact on student learning and school sustainability, understanding the practices of founding school leaders will have an important role to play in the success of a new private school. In the context of private education in North America, the leadership role has a variety of titles, such as head of school or principal, and the role aligns most closely with a superintendent of a public school (McConaghy, 2006). The founders of a private school can be a group of founding board members, a concerned parent, or the first school leader (Ricci, 2008).

As with any organization, sustainability is a key concern for founders and boards when they consider opening a new school. Sustainability, which is akin to organizational longevity or the school's ability to maintain operations over several years and remain in existence, is a critical factor when opening a new private school. Of note, Canadian private schools that are members of Canadian Accredited Independent Schools (CAIS) and have achieved CAIS Accreditation have all remained in operation, and therefore, can be considered sustainable (Macdonald, 2019). However, little is known about the leadership practices of founding heads of schools in developing sustainable private schools that offer school choice and quality learning programs for their students.

Context of the Research Study

I have worked in the education sector since 1999. Throughout my career, I have had the opportunity to be an educator in the public and private systems. Over the course of my time in education, I have also had the opportunity to see how the landscape of school choice has grown

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and evolved (A Class Apart, 2019, Bielmier, 2022; Bosetti et al., 2017; Ladd & Fiske, 2020; McShane, 2022a, Wohlstetter & Zeehandelaar, 2015). The choice of schools and programs in Canada is vast and varied (Bosetti & Gereluk, 2016), with 2000 private schools in Canada (Kerr, 2018) and over 180 private school options in Alberta (Government of Alberta, 2019b). The choices in Canada range from private to public, from charter to online, and from separate to homeschooling (Bosetti et al., 2017; Bosetti & Gereluk, 2016). Beyond the differences among systems, there is a wide variety of choice in education within each system. It is not uncommon to see schools specialize on gender, athletics, philosophical, religious or pedagogical approaches (Bosetti et al., 2017; Jabbar & Lenhoff, 2020; Ladd & Fiske, 2020).

In this wide array of choices, there are established schools and upstart schools. In some instances, established schools have existed for over a century and would be considered sustainable, such as Upper Canada College in Toronto, Ontario, or Kings-Edgehill School in Windsor, Nova Scotia (Our Kids, 2020a). However, in other cases, such as the International School of Excellence in Calgary, Alberta (CBC, 2014) or Pinehurst School in St. Catharine's, Ontario (The Star, 2014), private schools close within a relatively short period of time, for a multitude of reasons. School closures leave parents and students with no choice but to enroll in another educational institution. In the context of this study, I aim to see what can be learned from leaders who have established an upstart school and brought it to a place of sustainability.

Problem Statement

Globally, over the past two decades, there has been an increased interest and investment in private school education (A Class Apart, 2019, Bielmier, 2022; Bosetti et al., 2017; Bosetti & Gereluk, 2016; McConaghy, 2004; McShane, 2022a, Wohlstetter & Zeehandelaar, 2015). There have also been successes and failures in new schools (McConaghy, 2004). It is worthwhile to

consider what may be critical factors in a school's overall sustainability or in its failure. In the pursuit of this understanding, I draw on the work of researchers who have argued that school leadership has a significant impact on the overall success and sustainability of educational institutions (Branch et al., 2013; Mulford & Moreno, 2006), including private school systems. The problem is that occasionally a new private school will fall victim to a fail-fast mentality (Adams, 2019), a mentality that encourages early investment with the hope of a rapid success or failure. As a result, failing private schools end up closing and leaving children's educational futures in jeopardy due to unnecessary school transitions, social and psychological harm (Hattie, 2009; Heinlein & Shinn, 2000; Lynch, 2009). Despite the increase in private schools, there has been little research examining the leadership practices described by school leaders involved in the establishment of sustainable private schools.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of my research was to explore the practices of founding private school leaders who have established sustainable schools. I interviewed founding leaders of schools that opened more than 20 years ago, have received CAIS accreditation, and are still in operation in 2020. The founding school leaders who participated in the study served at the school for a minimum of five years.

Research Questions

To better explore the perceptions and practices of founding school leaders who have served in a sustainable Canadian private school, I used the following questions to guide my research:

1. How do founding school leaders describe the vision of the private school?

2. How do founding school leaders describe their leadership practices enacted in the beginning phases of operating the private school?

3. How do founding school leaders describe how they perceive how their practices have changed over the course of their tenure at the private school?

4. What leadership challenges do founding school leaders describe from their early years of operating a private school and how did these challenges change over time?

Definitions of Key Terminology

Below are the key terms that are relevant to my research:

- **Founding School Leader** – For the purposes of this research, the founding school leader is an individual who became school leader within two years of the private school establishing their operations.

- **Leadership Practices** – Leadership practices is a term used to help explore the practices that the founding school leaders undertook while leading their school to sustainability. The academic definition of leadership practices is informed by the research of Kouzes and Posner (2017) and Leithwood (2020). Kouzes and Posner (2017) focus on five dependent variables that include (a) challenging the process, (b) inspiring a shared vision, (c) enabling others to act, (d) modelling the way, and (e) encouraging the heart. Leithwood (2020) focuses in on setting direction, building relationships and developing people, developing the organization to support desired practices, and improving the instructional program.

- **Private School** – In the context of this study, a private school refers to any Kindergarten – Grade 12 school which charges tuition. In Canada, the terms 'private school' and 'independent school' are used interchangeably and have the same

meaning. In each Canadian province there are unique guidelines, legislations, and funding mechanisms that govern private school operations (Our Kids, 2019b).

- **School Leader** – For the purposes of this study, I use 'school leader' as the umbrella term for the most senior school administrator. Titles such as headmaster/mistress, head of school, and principal will be referred to as 'school leader.' The school leader in private schools is an official term that refers to the person in a private school context who oversees all business and the educational operations of the institution. Often in a public, charter, or separate school context, this role is referred to as school superintendent. The school leader in the context of private schools is typically the only employee of the school's Board of Directors (NAIS, 2011). All teachers and staff are then considered employees of the school and under the supervision of the school leader.

- **Start-Up School** – In terms of private schools in Canada, I use the term 'start-up school' in relation to any K-12 educational institution that is created free from the influence of currently existing educational organizations. The private schools that qualify as 'start-up schools' have no pre-existing board of directors, school leadership, or students.

- **Sustainable Private School in Canada** – In the context of this research, the definition of a sustainable private school is a private school in Canada, that at the time of the research has achieved a CAIS accreditation (CAIS, 2019b). As of this writing, no school that has successfully completed their CAIS accreditation has ceased to operate and, thus, this uninterrupted operation will serve as the indication of a sustainable school (Macdonald, 2019).

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Role of the Researcher

The experience I have working in leadership in Canadian private schools and my ongoing role in the CAIS organization uniquely positions me to understand the context of private schools and the potential challenges they may face as they pursue sustainability. Further, I have had the opportunity to see Rundle Academy follow a path from start-up to sustainability and have been a founding member of Canada's first virtual school for students with learning disabilities, Rundle Studio. Being aware of my bias I have carried into this study, and research, is also an important consideration. The breadth of the impact of this bias will be more formally considered in the next section where I explain my perspectives and biases.

Researcher Perspectives and Assumptions

Throughout my research, I have investigated concepts which I am very passionate about, including leadership (Hallinger, 2003), change management (Fullan, 2009; Kotter, 1995; Senge, 2006), and school engagement (Leithwood et al., 2010). Over the course of my career, I have seen how integral all three of these elements are to the student, organizational success (Collins, 2001), and positive school culture (Murphy & Seashore Louis, 2018). In exploring the entanglement of these concepts, I have been able to add knowledge to the preexisting theories and create opportunities for leaders of startup private schools to fully understand what the leadership practices may be required as they aim to achieve sustainability. Moreover, I have focused on how leaders can be compelled to consider their own strengths in relation to the practices that are required to create sustainable schools for the generations to come.

To better understand my subjectivity on these matters, I will now provide an overview of my personal and professional journey to this point. I believe my path through education started well before I was born, as my family has a long history of involvement in formalized education.

My mother served as a junior high administrative assistant for over 30 years and my father taught in our town's high school for nearly 35 years. Needless to say, the setting for the bulk of my childhood, whether as a student or my dad's son, was at a school. Whether it was accompanying my father to school events or watching him prep for his upcoming classes or helping my mother with filing on the weekend, if I was not sitting in a desk, I was somewhere in the school passing time. The majority of these memories with my parents at the school were positive; however, unfortunately, many of my memories as a student in school were quite the opposite.

From the very beginning of my conscious memory, I remember struggling in school. Perhaps one of my most vibrant school-age memories came in Grade 4. It was at this point in my life when I was becoming more aware of my surroundings, aware enough to see that I was the only student in the room with a letter strip taped across the top of my desk. From this point forward, it did not take long for me to realize I was the only one with a pencil. In fact, due to my poor spelling, I was not allowed to write with a pen, I was the only one writing in a larger printing journal, and I was the only one reading from the easiest books in our school library. Almost instantaneously I had connected a few dots and made one singular conclusion; I was different than everybody else. Generally speaking, in my mind as a child, being different was a bad thing. Being different in a classroom of my peers was seen the worst thing you could be, and in the end I equated this difference as my lack of intellect. In short, I had determined that I must be dumb. So, in these moments, I had figured it out – I was clearly the dumb kid. I now know that my challenges were a result of a reading disability, but at the time there was not the will or the means for my parents or my school to figure this out.

The realization of my academic inadequacy and the negative self-concept and persistent talk or these challenges created much acrimony between me, school and my family. I remember

avoiding school, fighting with my mother over homework and relentlessly pursuing things I could succeed at, like basketball. By the time I had reached junior high, I had willed myself not to fail and was committed to finding a way to overcome the odds. In short, I was able to get through my schooling with sheer determination and hard work. Most of my days in high school started at 7:15 AM in my teachers' classrooms and ended around 6:00 PM on the basketball court.

I then went to university and unsuccessfully pursued a degree in chemistry, followed by a degree in business, and then a degree in literature. It was not until I stumbled into an elective course titled, "Education of Exceptional Children" at the University of Saskatchewan that I realized what my calling was. It was through the learning and self-reflection in the area of special education that I identified where my challenges were and how I could potentially be of assistance to students in the system. I share more about my journey in a TEDx talk I delivered (Rogers, 2015).

Upon receiving my Bachelor Degree in Education, I was given the opportunity to teach at Princess Alexandra Community School in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. My assignments ranged from teaching a Grade 3-5 split, to a Grade 6-8 split, to finally the being a resource room teacher. During this time, I was able to refine many of my thoughts around inclusion and the delivery of special education services to a vulnerable population. After my brief tenure at Princess Alexandra Community School, I was then fortunate to be hired to work at a small school for children with learning disabilities, Rundle Academy in Calgary, Alberta.

When I first arrived at Rundle Academy in 2000, it had just become a school and it had 119 students, 10 staff and was housed in a windowless second level of an office building. In a lot of respects, the school could be typified as a start-up. We were a school starting to build our

identity, and with that transformative process came much change (Conklin, 2010). Over the course of a decade, we managed to double our enrollment, significantly improve the school's academic standing, and build a culture of pride. At this writing, according to Alberta's Fraser Report rankings, Rundle Academy is respected as one of the top schools for children with learning disabilities in Canada (Fraser Report, 2020) and has a stable student enrollment (Conklin, 2010). The 15 years I spent at Rundle Academy as a teacher, learning leader, and principal was the most formative of my life and it is my learnings in this space that I hope to validate through research and, hopefully, use as the basis for my own contributions to educational theory.

Looking back on my time at Rundle Academy, a few key factors stand out as I consider the change that took place over a short period of time. The first factor to consider is faculty culture. As a result of the required intensity of the faculty engagement, teachers at Rundle Academy are deeply invested in the pursuit of excellence for their students' betterment. Over the years, the leadership of the school has promoted a organizational culture that values the qualities of connection (Murphy & Seashore Louis, 2018), curiosity (Robinson, 2017), and candor (Scott, 2017). Secondly, Rundle Academy's community has a very high tolerance for change. In my experience, if there was a case to be made that a change would improve the student experience, academically or socially, the staff were willing to consider it. With change came an agility and a growth mindset (Caliskan, 2020; Dweck, 2008; Dweck & Yeager, 2019; Schechter, 2021) among the leaders and teachers that allowed the school to continually improve. Finally, with this strong leadership came a very engaged school community. It was not uncommon to see students, teachers, and parents working together to design learning opportunities or learning spaces for our students to thrive in.

Since leaving Rundle Academy as principal, I have moved into a system leadership role as Head of School of Rundle College Society. Rundle College Society is made up of four schools, one being Rundle Academy, another being Rundle Studio and the other two being Rundle College programs. The difference between Rundle Academy and Rundle Studio and Rundle College initially lies within the student population. As previously mentioned, all students at Rundle Academy and Rundle Studio have a diagnosed learning disability, whereas generally the majority of students at Rundle College do not have a learning disability and respond to a more traditional style of education, akin to instructionism (Sawyer, 2012).

My personal motivations here are to continue to help Rundle College Society improve and stay at the forefront of quality education. In Rundle College Society's future, there will be opportunities to start new programs or expand current offerings. The completion of this study will provide me with a deeper understanding of what leadership practices contribute to achieving sustainability. Outside of my personal interests, as I consider school choice in Canada (Bosetti et al., 2017; Bosetti & Gereluk, 2016), I can appreciate that educational choice is an entrenched, important and emerging facet of our learning landscape. As private schools continue to proliferate, it is important to understand what leadership practices lead to a sustainable school. As I share this research further, I aim to increase the odds that students will have positive experiences in new private schools in Canada.

Organization of Dissertation

This dissertation is organized into six chapters. Chapter One serves to outline the nature of the study, identify key definitions, and explore my relationship to the study. Chapter Two provides a review of the literature to assist the reader to gain an understanding of: (a) choice in education in the Canadian context, (b) private schools in Canada, (c) private school leadership,

and (d) organizational sustainability. Chapter Three outlines research methodology as a qualitative multiple case study and discusses the methods employed to select the cases and collect data from the founding school leaders. The third chapter also includes ethical considerations that include my subjectivity and the transferability of the findings. Chapter Four provides a comprehensive overview of the semi-structured interviews, the artifacts, analytic memos, and the results. Furthermore, Chapter 4 begins the exploration of this data in the context of this study's research questions. Chapter Five provides a discussion of the findings. The discussion includes considerations of the cross-case analysis, an updated conceptual model, an exploration of the components of the newly formed conceptual model, and insights into the implications for school founders. Finally, Chapter Six provides a conclusion to the research along with recommendations for future research and closing remarks.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

In all parts of the world, schools are a critical element in the evolution of a progressive society (Friedman, 2006; Harari, 2017; Schwab, 2017). As of 2020, in the Canadian context, 92% of school aged students attended school in a government funded system (Government of Canada, 2020) and these large systems continue to adapt their structure to service the students who live in proximity or the physical catchment of the school. As a result of the size of the systems and the support they receive from the government (Government of Canada, 2019a), it is highly unlikely that one of these systems will fail to exist. However, in the past few decades, there has been an emergence of private school options for parents and their children to choose from (A Class Apart, 2019, Bielmier, 2022; Bosetti et al., 2017; Bosetti & Gereluk, 2016; Ladd & Fiske, 2020; McConaghy, 2004; McShane, 2022a, Wohlstetter & Zeehandelaar, 2015). Educational options are important as school choice is an integral part of a strong and effective educational system (Berends, 2020; Coulson, 2009; Dixon, 2019; Fraser Report, 2020; Johnson, 2007; Milke & MacPherson, 2019; OECD, 2000; Van Pelt & Bosetti, 2015).

In the context of school choice, Ladd and Fiske (2020) stated, "the central challenge for any country is to design its choice program to serve not only the interests of specific groups or individuals but also the broader public" (p. 98). When parents have the means, access, and opportunity to do so, having choice in education allows parents and students to select a program and school that may best meet the learning needs of the individual. In fact, the OECD (2000) concluded, "both autonomy and private schooling are significantly positively associated with performance" (p. 94) and Dixon (2019) further supported this in saying, "a majority of the studies find statistically significant results, indicating that private school choice leads to improved civic outcomes for individuals and society" (p. 85).

In the vast majority of Canadian provinces, these educational choice options are required to report to government agencies (Bosetti et al., 2017), but their success and failure is solely dependent on their own ability to sustain their organizations (Adams, 2019). Much like private companies, for all private schools they must maintain sustainability or they risk failure (Collins & Porras, 1994). The unique context pertaining to private schools and their opportunity to succeed and fail is what necessitates this study on leadership practices of founding leaders that lead to private school sustainability. Ultimately, as schools fail, it is the children who are forced into an unnecessary school transition and in turn are at a high risk of educational, social, or psychological harm (Hanushek & Rivkin, 2001; Hattie, 2009; Padilla-Romo, 2020).

Searches in the literature in the area of school sustainability bring up important topics such as sustainable leadership (Cook, 2014; Hardie, 2015; Hargreaves & Fink, 2004; Hargreaves & Fink, 2006), sustainable change initiatives (Hargreaves & Goodson, 2006; Hartman et al., 2017; Teague & Anfara, 2012), environmental stewardship (Rickinson et al, 2016; Wake & Eames, 2013), and cultural sustainability (Lee & Seashore Louis, 2019; Miller & Callender, 2018). Furthermore, a comprehensive literature search for *founding a school* also derived few related items. On the topic of *founding a school* there is the occasional article (Ricci & Simpson, 2008), an applicable dissertation (McConaghy, 2004), and book (McConaghy, 2006) on the topic founding a private school, but beyond that the remainder of research articles are typically case studies of how schools have started up. Of note, sustainability or longevity of schools is relatively limited in the academic research pertaining to educational institutions (Bellei et al., 2019). After a comprehensive search of research published in English in the University of Calgary library resources that included journal, book and dissertation searches, there were few articles that pertain to sustainability of private K-12 schools as I have defined it for this research.

These gaps in the literature compelled me to better understand the phenomena of leadership practices of founding leaders whose schools have found sustainability.

To situate the reader's understanding of the phenomena of sustainable private schools in Canada, I provide an exploration of the context and history of Canadian private schools. This exploration allows the reader to fully understand the trajectory of the private school movement and the broader context for its origin and current proliferation. A look at the historical and philosophical underpinnings allows for an understanding and appreciation of how private schools fit within the overall educational landscape in Canada.

Following the review of the Canadian elements of educational history and landscape, I then turn my attention to the important consideration of who is most likely to start a private school, who opts to attend, and why people choose to attend private school. From there, I look at leadership and what the research says about leadership practices and Canadian private school sustainability. I close the literature review by examining the CAIS accreditation requirements and what the literature has to say about why these may be critical elements of a sustainable private school. I close this chapter with a conceptual framework informed by the literature that guided this study.

Choice in Education – The Canadian Context

In the context of Canada, school choice in education can often be divided into several subcategories: public, Catholic, charter, home, online, private, and other (Bosetti et al., 2017; Bosetti & Gereluk, 2016). To better understand school choice, this section provides a brief history, constitutional rights, and an overview of some school options.

History of School Choice in Canada

For over a century, the idea of school choice has been a topic of educational conversations in all corners of the globe. In Canada, the educational choice debate started with the founding of our nation (Bosetti & Gereluk, 2016). As Holmes (2008) pointed out, there are some notable characteristics in the Canadian educational system. Holmes (2008) stated:

Governance of Canadian elementary and secondary education differs from that in the United States in three important respects: (1) there is no constitutional separation of church and state; (2) education is a provincial jurisdiction (although U.S. states have comparable jurisdiction, federal incursions are resisted more strongly in Canada, particularly by Quebec); and (3) English and French are both official languages, giving parents (except in Quebec) the right to educate their children in their mother tongue. (p. 199)

In addition, Bosetti and Gereluk (2016) illuminated a philosophical difference in schools in Canada and the United States when they stated that "unlike the United States, school choice in Canada is generally not hailed as a mechanism to boost test scores, promote the desegregation of students from minority groups or improve failing inner-city schools" (p. 7). Furthermore, Bosetti et al. (2017) asserted:

that historically provision for school choice in Canada has been motivated less by the creation of competitive educational markets with the intent of improving the quality of education and enhancing student achievement, than the need to accommodate pressing political issues in each region. (p. 3)

There is no doubt that these characteristics of the Canadian educational system have an impact on educational policy and school choice.

Constitutional Rights and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms

Since the Confederation of Canada in 1867, school choice has been enshrined as a central tenant of the Canadian educational system. Canada's educational landscape started to form when the federal government delegated educational policies to the provincial level (Government of Canada, 2019b). As Bosetti and Gereluk (2016) stated, "because of these arrangements, the 10 provinces and three territories that now make up the Canadian federation each has its own Ministry of Education and is not subject to any federal oversight" (p. 35). The original intention of this action was to allow Quebec to maintain the unique cultural identity of language, religion and education (Government of Canada, 2019b). The federal government did, however, require the provinces to provide both Catholic and Protestant education as well as education in both English and French. These enshrined choices in education can be viewed as the first steps towards the right of parents to choose the educational setting for their children.

More recently, the Charter of Rights and Freedoms (Government of Canada, 2019a) has provided increased rights for religious and cultural accommodations in society. As result of this powerful legislation, Canada is seen as a global leader in recognizing the rights of minority groups. In an educational context, Alberta and Ontario have been leaders in creating educational choice that supports the mandate of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms (Bosetti & Gereluk, 2016). These rights and freedoms have extended beyond language and religion to the rights of groups, such as those in the LGBTQ+ and special needs populations.

Variety of School Choice in Canada

Public schools are free from tuition and are funded primarily by provincial government funding and have the largest number of students enrolled in comparison to the other school choice options in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2019). Public schools are controlled by a publicly

elected Board of Directors. School populations who attend public schools are typically defined by a school catchment area. All schools in Canada are accredited at the provincial level and follow a curriculum that is provided by the provincial authority (Bosetti et al., 2017).

Catholic schools, in Canada, refer to schools that provide education to students from the Catholic faith. As of 2018, only Ontario, Saskatchewan, and Alberta still have Catholic School Systems (Bosetti et al, 2017; CBC, 2018). The origin of the opportunity for this distinction is found in Section 93 of the Constitution Acts (Government of Canada, 2019c) and the Alberta Act (Government of Canada, 2019b). Manitoba, Quebec, and Newfoundland and Labrador have all opted to eliminate Catholic schools and the Atlantic provinces have a hybrid model of Catholic schooling for their population (CBC, 2018). In the provinces that still have Catholic schools, other than having a focus on teaching Catholic religion, they are the same as public schools; they are publicly funded, governed, and populated.

In the United States, charter schools are common; however, in Canada there are only charter schools in the province of Alberta (Van Pelt & Bosetti, 2015). According to Van Pelt and Bosetti (2015), "charter schools aim to provide innovative or enhanced educational programs designed to improve student learning" (p. 1). Charter schools in Canada select their students, have an independent board of directors, and adhere to a specific focus for their education. An important consideration for Alberta's charter schools is that they must offer something that is not available at a local public school. As of 2021, there were 13 charter schools in Alberta. The charters that these schools have range from arts academies, to girls' schools, to traditional learning schools, to gifted education (TAAPCS, 2022). Unlike private schools, charter schools cannot charge tuition and do receive the full per student funding from the government (Government of Alberta, 2019a).

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Home schooling is available to parents and students in all regions of Canada (Van Pelt, 2019). To homeschool a child, a parent needs to report their intention to a school board or a private school. The school that has been notified is required to oversee the educational requirements, however the parents retain the primary responsibility for educational practices. In the past, parents may have chosen to homeschool their children primarily for religious or ideological reasons, such as the unschooling movement (Bosetti & Gereluk, 2016), however this may not necessarily be the case anymore. Research is showing that more and more parents are choosing to home school their children because of a lifestyle reason such as athletic pursuits or flexible scheduling that optimizes their family life (Van Pelt, 2019).

Online schools are set up and operated by a registered school authority and the curriculum is web-based and offered over the internet. According to the Canadian E-Learning Network, 795,000 students in Canada are educated in 81 schools online (CELN, 2019). Online schools can be used as stand-alone delivery of curriculum or can be used to supplement curriculum that is being provided in another setting.

Beyond the examples of options explained in this section, there is a plethora of alternative school choices in Canada. Among these are francophone schools, hybrids such as public/online, private/online, home/private, and magnet schools, such as sport, art, and religious (Bosetti & Gereluk, 2016). It is clear there are many examples of school choice in Canada, including private schools. The present study focuses on private school contexts.

Private Schools in Canada

Private schools are learning institutions that charge tuition and, depending on the province they are located in, may be supported by a level of public funding. These schools have the opportunity to select their own students based on the school's defined mission, vision, and

values. Private schools also have an independent board of directors who are responsible for the governance of the program. Bosetti et al. (2017) defined private schools as:

> Schools that charge tuition, allow for selective admission of students, and are governed by an elected or appointed governing board and offer a variety of approaches in pedagogical orientation, program focus and religious affiliation. In Canada regulatory frameworks and funding for independent schools vary among provinces. (p. 6)

Each province has its own guidelines for accrediting private schools and monitoring the deployment of their services (Our Kids, 2019b). There are national and provincial accrediting bodies such as CAIS (CAISb, 2019), Alberta Independent School and Colleges Association (AISCA, 2019), Independent Schools Association BC (ISBC, 2019), and the Conference of Independent Schools of Ontario (CIS Ontario, 2019). These accrediting bodies aim to add additional oversight of these schools and provide further assurance to parents and provincial authorities that these schools are well managed and following best educational practices.

For the remainder of this section, I focus specifically on private schools and their impact on education as a whole and on other systems. Specifically, I review the philosophical considerations of education in democracies, education as a public versus a private good, and reasonable pluralism in education. From there, I further pursue the specifics of private schools in Canada by taking a closer look at the history of private schools in Canada, including who typically opts to start a private school and why parents may choose to send their children to private schools.

Philosophical Considerations of Education in Democracies

Formalized schools have long been a tool of governments to educate their public, train them to meet the societal objectives, and improve life for the populous (Bosetti & Gereluk,

2016). However, since the onset of schools, in democratic societies there has been a debate on the topic of the role of the state in providing education, the role of the parent in choosing the education for their children, and the role of the school in delivering high quality instruction and curriculum to its students (Bosetti & Gereluk, 2016). Bosetti and Gereluk (2016) emphasized: "Increasing levels of urbanization and immigration and a shift to a knowledge-based economy requiring more highly skilled workers have intensified pressure on schools to reform the common schooling model" (p. 4). The shift to a knowledge-based economy (Schwab, 2017) has challenged society to look at education through the lens of private versus public and profit versus non-profit. Next, I aim to unpack these macro-level educational considerations.

From a global historical perspective, education has been important to nation states as a method of advancing a countries character and ambitions. Glenn (2015) stated:

A democratic regime is of course deeply concerned about the character of its citizens, and about their loyalty to the common good, but it entrusts the formation of the hearts and the habits of youth to their families and to the voluntary associations of civil society, intervening only when there is clear evidence that a family or a school or a religious institution is acting in a way that abuses the interests of a child or nurtures antisocial attitudes and behaviors. (p. 149)

It is for this reason that democratic nations such as Canada and the United States often have focused assurance measures for schools and how their youth will be educated. These measures come in the form of a government mandated curriculum, standardized exams, and government monitoring processes.

Education as Public Versus Private Good

A debate about the benefit of public education versus that of private education has carried on for generations. Advocates for an exclusively public education system often conclude that private education can be used to distract from the importance of a public education for all (Apple, 2004; Ben-Porath, 2009). On the other side, private school supporters are quick to point to the free market and the advantages that come with competition and innovation (Ball & Lund, 2011; Johnson, 2017). To best understand the entirety of the context, I will examine the points of view on both sides of the argument. Understanding arguments for, and against, will invariably give some insight into why there may be an acceleration in the increase of school choice options available to students and their parents in Canada (Bosetti et al., 2017) and globally (A Class Apart, 2019). In fact, Bosetti et al. (2017) found that between 2000 and 2012, the percentage of students attending private schools increased in 9 of 10 Canadian provinces.

One of the primary arguments that is put forward by those who contest private schools is that of fairness and accessibility. Apple (2004) contested that private schools may not be a part of our democratic value statement in the comment, "not only is the world deeply unfair but also that schools themselves are prime examples of institutions that simply respond to those who already possess economic and cultural capital" (p. 38). The idea of the advantage of privilege is strongly supported by Ben-Porath (2009) as she stated that "the ability of individuals to choose under the existing conditions of school choice policies is significantly restricted" (p. 528). The restrictions may be due to physical location, socioeconomic standing, or other prohibiting factors (Loeb & Valant, 2020).

Critics of the private school movement are quick to point out that if influential parents opt to move their children from a public to private system, so too moves their overall influence

(Brighouse, 2004). Lastly, as Bosetti and Gereluk (2016) warned, "[advocates of school choice] assume school choice will foster equal access of opportunity" (p. 25). This assumption has many risk factors including access to school choice options for those in a low socioeconomic standing, lack of options in rural settings, and parental understanding of educational choices (Berends, 2020). Potentially, one risk of a fully integrated school choice system is that of a two-tier educational system (Bosetti & Gereluk, 2016). Bosetti and Gereluk (2016) stated, "critics fear that school choice policies may lead to an elitist, two-tiered school system that separates the 'haves' and the 'have nots'" (p. 26). In democracies, such as Canada, there is certainly a public will to provide for the entire population and not create a system that divides and weakens the people of the nation.

On the positive side of private schools consideration, Ben-Porath (2009) stated: "[School] Choice is sometimes presented as a panacea to social and educational problems" (p. 527). In her work, he is referring to the acknowledgment of differences of religion, culture, and learning that may be underrepresented or not acknowledged in the scope of a pluralistic public education system. Ball and Lund (2011) stated that "finding the balance between educational excellence, equity, access, and choice is a daunting task, but one that many administrators and educators are willing to strive towards" (p. 50).

As I come back to the importance of student learning in the context of school choice, it is important to realize that policy, school choice, and student education are inevitably linked. Ben-Porath (2009) stated: "In the context of school choice, scholarship and policy should focus on individuals and families, and on the challenges and advantages they encounter as they strive to benefit from choice programs" (p. 541). On another side of the positive argument is the assumption that school choice proponents will inevitably be doing public good and providing

quality educational opportunities. Without a balance of assurance and regulation the state cannot be certain of the greater good of school choice initiatives. Furthermore, there needs to be a deep consideration of availability of options inside a school choice context. Considerations such as individualized learning institutions and outcomes may create additional conditions in favor of school choice.

The larger societal question may be: Can we have the best of both worlds? In a succinct argument, Brighouse (2004) stated that "choice and privatization are different" (p. 630). It is this distinction, between privatization and choice, where the real potential in educational optionality lies. If society continues to support parent choice and build up the capacity for all members of our communities to benefit from exercising the parent's right to choose, research proves that we can improve the overall educational experience for children (Johnson, 2013).

Reasonable Pluralism in Education

A large part of the school choice debate comes back to the idea of reasonable pluralism in education (Lynch, 2009). Lynch (2009) defined reasonable pluralism as "the existence and persistence of diversity in human society with a claim about the nature of human judgement" (p. 77). The idea has a large impact on school choice as critics of school choice would argue that private schools actively work to deconstruct a society's claim to reasonable pluralism. One of the overarching goals of a public education is to create an inclusive environment that represents a pluralistic and democratic learning landscape.

As stated by Bosetti et al. (2017), "Canada is distinguished by its commitment to pluralism and respect for the right of parents to have voice in the education of their children, which has contributed to an ethos of tolerance for diversity and choice" (p. 20). A common critique of an education system that only has a public component is that it does not adequately

represent the multiple worldviews that are embodied in any high functioning liberal democracy (Bosetti & Gereluk, 2016; Ball, 2011). As Ball and Lund (2011) stated, "public education in Canada has grown to focus on its inclusive character to build a strong pluralistic democracy, bringing together students from different socioeconomic, cultural, religious, linguistic, and ability groups" (p. 49). In many respects, as our nation looks through the lens of reasonable pluralism, public education based on regional catchment, may be a great equalizer for society.

Proponents of school choice and privatizing education will argue that reasonable pluralism can be maintained through the structures of a variety of educational offerings. Bosetti and Gereluk (2016) affirmed the idea that school choice further supports reasonable pluralism in education by stating that "school choice has the potential to make provisions for reasonable pluralism, particularly for students whose identity and self-understanding depend on the vitality of their own cultural, religious, ethnic, racial, or gender context" (p. 24). The topic of diversity inside private schools is often an area of great focus. Private schools offer a broad scope of opportunity when considering families preferred educational perspective, the student's background, and learner's ability (Scott, 2005). On the public education side of the education spectrum, a trend towards specialty schools in the public system is challenging the opportunity for true inclusion in a public school environment (Ball, 2011). As these speciality schools, also referred to as magnet schools, start to emerge, even the public sector is faced with deep considerations on reasonable pluralism. When magnet schools are established, they tend to draw a specific subsection of the learning population, ultimately creating schools with an increased uniformity in the type of student who attends. It is clear that as school systems continue to evolve and adapt, the notion of reasonable pluralism in schools will need to be continually considered in both the private and the public school systems.

It is clear that all educational options must continue to consider diversity and reasonable pluralism in a Canadian context. A society does no favors if it opts to seclude and isolate students from the lived experience that can come with being with people of different points of view. Lynch (2009) concluded: "Diversity and disagreement is an irreducible feature of social life that cannot be ignored, wished away or solved" (p. 93). This statement is a reflection on the positives and negative perspectives associated with school choice and private schools. His argument may compel one to believe that the existence of private schools is an integral part of social life.

History of Private Schools in Canada

In the past half century, there has been an emergence of private schools in Canada and the United States (Holmes, 2008). Many argue that this emergence grew out of the recession of the 1970s and 1980s, the flattening of the world (Friedman, 2006), and the emergence of the knowledge economy (Bosetti & Pyryt, 2007; Shwab, 2017; Harari, 2017). Bosetti and Pyryt (2017) stated, "inherent in these national government documents is a view of knowledge as a strategic national asset and enhancing the level of education and skill set of citizens is a national priority" (p. 91). As this knowledge economy has continued to grow, parents have increasingly opted to consider private schools for their children to provide them with an opportunity for a competitive advantage (A Class Apart, 2019; Berends, 2020; Loeb & Valant, 2020). As stated by Bosetti et al (2017), "in a knowledge-based, rather than a resource-based economy, intellectual capital has currency" (p. 5). Much of this change has come in the form of educational options that aim to provide options for parents and students and is driven by intellectual capital.

In the Canadian context, in the 1980s Alberta led the way by introducing opportunities for charter education in the province. Furthermore, in the 1980s and 1990s, Alberta continued to

create and improve their assurance measures to allow for public accountability from private schools (Bosetti & Gereluk, 2016). As of 2019, all Canadian provinces and territories have unique approaches to funding and monitoring school choice options. The population of students who attend private school in Canada ranges from 12.6% in Quebec to 0.7% in New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island (Bosetti et al., 2017). Quebec, at 12.6%, and British Columbia, at 11.6%, lead in the national percentage of students educated in private schools (Bosetti et al., 2017). In Ontario, between 1992 and 2005, attendance in private schools rose 38% (Holmes, 2008). As stated by Ball and Lund (2011), "since 1994, the numbers of private schools, charter schools and public magnate schools have increased significantly. The enrollment of students in private, charter, virtual and home schools had grown to 6.7% of Alberta students by 2001" (p. 36). Currently, Alberta provides the most school choice options and among the highest level of government funding. The Atlantic provinces and the territories currently provide the fewest options and the least support for Canadian school choice (Bosetti & Gereluk, 2016).

The overall increase in private school attendance could be partially attributed to the perceived affordability of a private option. Affordability is an important element to access to private schools. Although religious private schools often charge less tuition than other private schools, financial considerations are often a consideration for families considering a private school education for their children. On the topic of how parents choose elementary schools in Alberta, Bosetti (2004) found that "children from both ends of the income distribution attend private schools" (p. 391). Notably, Allison et al. (2016) found that only 4.7% of private schools in Canada would be considered as elite private schools due to the cost of tuition. Finally, private schools in Canada have a broad spectrum of focuses; including approaches to teaching and

learning, such as Waldorf or Montessori, religious, boarding, special education, language, gender, and academic rigor, to name a few.

Who Starts a Private School?

There has been some research done into why an individual or group might choose to start a private school. In the global context, it is clear that some individuals and entities consider starting a private school because of the opportunity to profit from education (A Class Apart, 2019). However, in the Canadian context, all private schools that are associated with CAIS are non-profit entities (CAISa, 2020). In the North American context, there are several parties who may choose to start a private school, including a founding board, a founding head of school, a founding group or a combination of all these groups (McConaghy, 2006). As McConaghy (2006) stated, "successful school founders frequently pointed to their passions as guiding forces that helped them weather the various challenges they faced throughout the years" (p. 17).

Why and How Do People Choose Private Schools?

When parents or guardians are considering what private school to enrol their children, there are a myriad of factors that play into the decision-making process (Bosetti, 2004; Bosetti et al., 2017; Bosetti & Pyryt, 2007; Corcoran & Jennings, 2020; Jabbar & Lenhoff, 2020). One commonly held reason why parents choose a private school may be a desire for academic excellence. Bosetti (2004) stated, "all parents hold academic excellence as the primary goal of their child's education" (p. 398). In an international context, Jabbar and Lenhoff (2020) supported this notion, as they stated, "parents ultimately choose schools based on the same factors they weigh in the decision-making process, including school academic proficiency or test scores, racial demographics, safety, location, values, and discipline" (p. 354). In addition, when looking at elementary schools in Alberta, Bosetti (2004) found that when it comes to school

choice, achievement was not the only factor parents considered. The primary factors in choosing a non-religious private school, according to Bosetti (2004) are: "Smaller Class Size (60%); Shared Values and Beliefs (50%); Teaching Style (47%); and Strong Academic Reputation (46%)" (p. 397). In a Canadian context, Bosetti et al. (2017) asserted that, "[parents who choose private schools] perceive and experience independent schools as places where their children and families are known, heard and respected, and where quality academics and caring, responsive teachers can be found" (p. 21).

Bosetti (2004) stated: "To make decisions regarding their children's education, parents will rely on their personal values and subjective desired goals of education, as well as others within their social and professional networks to collect information" (p. 388). Parents also demonstrate their right in a liberal democracy to exercise choice of education that is consistent with their lifestyle, religious beliefs, and political values (Bosetti, 2004). These choices will manifest in schools that include religion in their daily curriculum, offer out-of-school sport activities, or create opportunities for a particular style of teaching and learning or focus. Another reason parents opt to choose a private school is to meet the special needs of their children. As an example, in Alberta, 8% of private schools are designated for students who have unique learning needs (Milke & MacPherson, 2019).

When considering some of the limitations parents and students face in choosing public schools, is the potential for choice paralysis. Ben-Porath (2009) stated, "one of the most difficult aspects of school choice programs is the high cost of information acquisition, and the unfamiliarity of many parents with the details of the process and what they might entail" (p. 536). The abundance of options often makes making the right choice nearly impossible. Jabbar and Lenhoff (2020) asserted, "there are unintended psychological consequences when consumers

have too many options, such as anxiety or doubt about the decision" (p. 359). One option to assist families in this pursuit of the 'perfect fit' could be a school choice counsellor (Ball, 2011) to assist parents with the difficult work of vetting and selecting the best school for their children.

If the objective of school choice is to improve the overall educational system, Bosetti (2004) advocated for a balanced approach to access great schooling for all, and stated that "there needs to be sufficient financial support or incentives for public alternative programs and private schools to recruit actively students from low income/disadvantaged families" (p. 393). One additional consideration is a family's ability to access a private school network. Ball (2011) found that school choice in Alberta typically appealed to those families who are advantaged.

According to Jabbar and Lenhoff (2020), the process of choosing a school for their children is "morally and cognitively complex" (p. 353) and Loeb and Valant asserted that "choosing schools is difficult and parents make choices without full information" (p. 3). When looking at how parents in Alberta choose an elementary school, Bosetti (2004) found that, "the top three sources of information used by all parents in selecting a school were talks with friends, neighbors, and other parents; talks with teachers, principals and/or guidance counsellors; and visits to the school" (p. 395). Jabbar and Lenhoff (2020) supported this notion as they stated, "choice is highly subjective, emotional, value-laden, stratified by social class, and shaped by social networks, perceptions, social capital and identity" (p. 354). Furthermore, Bosetti (2004) stated that when parents are doing their research, parents are looking for, "a school that addresses the individual needs of their child. They focus on the class size, shared values and beliefs, teaching style and that their child will receive more individual help" (p. 397). In addition to the tangible considerations, according to Bosetti (2004), when considering elementary school choice in Alberta:

parents appear to employ a 'mixture of rationalities' involving an element of 'the fortuitous and haphazard'. To make the decisions regarding their childrens' education, parents will rely on their personal values and subjective desired goals of education, as well as others within their social and professional networks to collect information. (p. 388)

It is clear that educational consumers face a complex decision when considering which school to choose for their child's education. In considering the importance of creating sustainable private schools, it is critical to consider parent choice, individual needs of students, and the overall importance of school consistency in student learning.

Private School Leadership

Understanding the core elements of how leadership impacts a school's overall ability to first come to existence and then become sustainable is important to understand the private school context. In this section of the chapter, I explore several of the qualities of founding leaders including: the great man theory of leadership, leadership practices, leadership theories and frameworks, growth mindset, and systems thinking. Furthermore, I consider components of sustainable schools and how the CAIS Accreditation (CAIS, 2020c) supports the research on what allows a school to achieve longevity.

Great Man Theory of Leadership

As I consider the concept of founding school leaders, it is worthwhile to look at the literature pertaining to leadership practices. Although there is limited research in the English language found in the specific area of founding school leaders, one can learn from other sectors and what has been learned about leadership in those contexts. In particular, there is a natural alignment with the non-profit sector and organizations that are founded in that non-profit private school niche, such as the schools in CAIS (CAISa, 2020). With respect to the leadership qualities

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of founding leaders, Carman and Nesbit (2013) indicated that they are described as "being personable, charismatic, and inspirational" (p. 604). Zaleznik (2004) further supported this idea in finding that transformational leaders, embody the qualities of magnetism and charisma. It may be of note that these qualities are consistent with some of the thinking embodied in 'The Great Man Theory' (Cawthon, 1996).

The 'Great Man Theory,' although it has recently fallen out of favor in leadership research, may provide some insight into the leaders of private schools. It is worthwhile to consider if leaders can learn about effective leadership traits of founding private school leaders and if there are some natural, innate, or untrainable qualities that have allowed founding leaders to bring their schools to sustainability. To be conscious of this leadership theory is worthwhile in the examination of private schools and what may have contributed to sustainability of these new schools.

In the simplest version of the theory, one might ask if a leader is born or made? The 'Great Man Theory' would have one believe that leaders who are able to find the greatest success are primarily born. If one ascribes to the 'Great Man Theory,' it may be easy to simply assume that it is the result of a 'great person' that a school shifted from a start-up to a sustainable school. However, critics of the theory, such as Cawthon (1996), refuted the theory and stated, "although there is a certain attractiveness to the proposition, there is little evidence to support it" (p. 2).

If then, leaders are not born to greatness, then one might ask what leadership practices have allowed them to be successful and how might this information inform the practices of leaders who aspire to start sustainable private schools in Canada? Locke (1991) concluded,

> Regardless of whether leaders are born or made or some combination of both, it is
>
> unequivocally clear that leaders are not like other people. Leaders do not have to be great

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men or women by being intellectual geniuses or omniscient prophets to succeed, but they

do need to have the "right stuff" and this stuff is not equally present in all people.

Leadership is a demanding, unrelenting job with enormous pressures and grave

responsibilities. It would be a profound disservice to leaders to suggest that they are

ordinary people who happened to be in the right place at the right time. Maybe the place

matters, but it takes a special kind of person to master the challenges of opportunity. Let

us not only give credit, but also use the knowledge we have to select and train our future

leaders effectively. We believe that the realm of leadership (and in every other realm), the

individual does matter (p. 58).

This assessment of leadership suggests training and understanding of leaders in unique

situations, such as starting a private school in Canada, is necessary if new schools aim to support

their overall aspiration of starting a sustainable organization. A broad understanding of

applicable leadership practices, visionary leadership, a growth mindset, and systems thinking,

has informed the research and the implications for future research and implementation.

Leadership Practices

To more fully conceptualize educational leadership, it is important to review of the broad

concept of leadership practices in an educational context. Leadership practices are broadly

defined by Kouzes and Posner (2017) as the embodiment of five dependent variables; these

variables are (a) model the way, (b) inspire a shared vision, (c) challenge the process, (d) enable

others to act, and (e) encouraging the heart.

When considering how to model the way, Kouzes and Posner (2017) encouraged leaders

to "clarify values by find their voice and affirming shared values and set the example by aligning

actions with shared values" (p. 46). Similar to visionary leadership (Leithwood et al., 2020;

Collins, 2001; Alberta Education, 2020; Barett-Baxendale, 2009; Loughead, 2009), Kouzes and Posner (2017) defined inspiring a shared vision by encouraging leaders to not only imagine the possibilities for their organizations but by also enlisting others to share this vision and living up to the aspirations. While discussing the notion of challenging the process, Kouzes and Posner (2017) encouraged school leaders to have an innovative mindset when looking for opportunities to improve and innovate. Experimentation and risk taking, in an attempt to build momentum through small wins and learning experiences, is valued in this element of leadership. As Kouzes and Posner (2017) promoted enabling others to act, they indicated that trusting relationships provide opportunities for team members opportunities for collaboration and ultimately will strengthen self-determination among all members of a community. Finally, Kouzes and Posner (2017) recognized the importance of encouraging the heart through recognition of individual excellence and by celebrating the values and victories in your community. Aspects such as inspiring a shared vision and modelling the way have been viewed as instrumental when others (McConaghy, 2006) have considered what is most important to founding heads of private schools. The practices put forward by Kouzes and Posner (2017) have been studied widely and have been proven to have a significant impact on school improvement and school culture (Turan & Bektas, 2013; McFarlane, 2010; Hallinger, 2011).

To deepen the understanding of leadership practices, it is also worthwhile to understand the impact of direction-setting leadership practices (DSLPs) on a school culture (Sun & Leithwood, 2015). DSLPs encompasses both instructional leadership and transformational leadership (Hallinger, 2003). The combination of providing strong instructional leadership that focuses on "instructional management, instructional expertise, personal characteristics of effective instructional leaders… [and the] leaders' developing vision, providing individualized

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support and intellectual stimulation to staff and engaging them in the achievement of shared

goals" (Sun & Leithwood, 2015, p. 500), create a powerful combination of practices that allow

leaders to inspire school improvement.

Beyond leadership practices, and in a broader context, school leaders embody several

theories and frameworks. Considering these leadership theories and frameworks will provide a

broader understanding of how founding school leaders supported the overall development of

their programs from the onset until they arrived at sustainability.

Visionary Leadership

When a leader sets to create something new, in this case a new private school in Canada,

it is essential that the leader embody visionary leadership (McConaghy, 2006). In addition to

visionary leadership being identified as an essential element to the founding of a private school,

researchers continually point to visionary leadership as being a central tenant of school success

(Leithwood et al., 2020; Collins, 2001; Alberta Education, 2020; Barett-Baxendale, 2009;

Loughead, 2009). Prior to studying how founding leaders have leveraged their visionary

leadership, one must first fully understand the term visionary leadership. According to Collins

(2001), "Vision-based leaders set the course for the organization by using their own vision to

create an overall vision to which all stakeholders can commit" (p.17). This ability to convey a

strong vision for the school to multiple stakeholders has been identified as a critical element for

founding a private school (McConaghy, 2004).

The ideal of a visionary leader goes deeper than simply looking ahead, it also requires the

school leader to connect with the heart of their school (Kouzes & Posner, 2017). The leader and

the school's stakeholders must have more than a shared vision, they must also share a deeply

understood purpose, also referred to as purposing (Sergiovanni, 1992). The combination of the

shared vision and purpose creates a cohesive meaning for the leader, board members, parents, and students to embrace as they move into the uncharted new school territory.

Furthermore, as a result of research about what qualities of leadership private school leaders need to embody in the coming century, Barett-Baxenale (2009) concluded: "Fundamentally, whilst leaders may not need to be excellent pedagogical practitioners themselves they do need to be able to both recognize and promote such excellence as well as to provide visionary leadership within a challenging new context" (p.105). This is not to say that instructional leadership (Leithwood et al., 2012) is not a critical part of a leader's role in founding a school, but it is to say that the components of their leadership stretch far beyond being the sole source of inspiration for instructional excellence in their schools. However, as stated by Barett-Baxendale (2009), the idea of a "challenging new context" (p.105) would never be more present than that of having to start a new private school and this creates the conditions whereas the founding school leader must simultaneously serve both as visionary, business manager, and school principal.

Finally, research has clearly articulated that visionary leadership is an important and valued part of a leader's ability to help their school succeed (Leithwood, et al., 2020). The research presented in Leithwood, et al. (2020) revisited a comprehensive review of a decade of literature on educational leadership. As Leithwood et al. (2020) posited in their paper regarding what successful leaders do, they indicated that setting a direction and sharing a vision are critical actions that school leaders take to create a successful school. Furthermore, as Alberta Education (2020) established their Leadership Quality Standards, the ministry articulated that "Embodying Visionary Leadership" (p. 5) as one of the government's nine strands for all school leaders to learn about and demonstrate in their leadership. Beyond embodying visionary leadership, school

leaders also may benefit from the ability to be adaptable in their leadership work and deploy a more distributed leadership style (Chitpin, 2020; Spillane, 2005; Spillane, 2006).

Distributed Leadership

Distributed leadership (Chitpin, 2020; Diamond & Spillane, 2016; Harris, 2008; Spillane, 2006; Spillane et al., 2004), is defined by Chitpin (2020) as leadership that "acknowledges the contributions of the many actors who, in their various capacities, arrive at a somewhat more comprehensive account of leadership and the activities associated with that position" (p. 2018). Spillane (2006) supports this notion in stating that distributed leadership requires the "responsibility for leadership routines involves multiple leaders, through the number depends upon the routine and subject area" (p. 145). When considering the components of distributed leadership, Spillane et al. (2004) stated, "our distributed frame also specifies an integrative model for thinking about the relations between the work of leaders and their social, material, and symbolic situation" (p. 28). This brings us to the understanding that for a leader to successfully distribute leadership, they need to have a firm grasp on the interplay of situations, leadership, and followers (Spillane, et al., 2004).

Distributed leadership, as defined in this context by Hargreaves and Fink (2006), is "leadership that spreads, that is a distributed and shared responsibility that is taken as well as given. Sustained and distributed leadership inspires staff members, students and parents to seek, create and exploit leadership opportunities" (p. 154). Furthermore, Diamond and Spillane (2016) concluded that "taking a distributed perspective is about more than acknowledging that leadership is distributed; it pushes us to interrogate how it is distributed" (p. 148). Studies on distributed leadership have found that when leaders leverage this practice, they build greater capacity for interdependence among faculty, they leverage greater comprehensive knowledge

across school staff, they deepen the understanding of school goals and outcomes, and they create systems that support leadership succession (Davis, 2006; Gold et al., 2003; Robinson, 2008). Distributed leadership is also supported through the work of Kouzes and Posner (2017), as they recognized the importance of enabling others to act.

Servant Leadership

Servant leadership was popularized over five decades ago by Greenleaf (1970) and continues to be an applicable leadership philosophy for schools and business leaders. Recently, in their review of servant leadership, Eva et al. (2018) defined servant leadership as "a holistic leadership approach that engages followers in multiple dimensions (e.g., relational, ethical, emotional, spiritual), such that they are empowered to grow into what they are capable of becoming" (p. 111). Leaders who are using practices that align with servant leadership will demonstrate characteristics such as listening, showing empathy, and focusing on a commitment to growth. The leadership practices that align with servant leadership are further supported by Collins (2007), who stated that effective leaders show, "extreme personal humility with intense professional will" (p. 30).

Sustainable School Leadership

Even though there appears to be a gap in the literature in relation to sustainable private schools, there is a body of evidence surrounding the importance and positive impact of sustainable school leadership (Fullan, 2005, Cook, 2014). As Cook (2014) stated, "schools depend on leadership in order to shape productive futures through self-renewal" (p. 2). It has also been found that sustainable school leadership is a shared responsibility that aims to create the conditions where financial and educational programs are effectively stewarded over a long period of time (Hargreaves & Fink, 2004).

Hargreaves and Fink (2006) argued that "change in education is easy to propose, hard to implement, and extraordinarily difficult to sustain" (p. 1). In their assessment of sustainability and school leadership, they pointed towards important factors such as succession planning. Succession planning refers to:

> Grooming successors to continue important reforms, by keeping successful leaders in schools longer when they are making great strides in promoting learning, by resisting the temptation to search for irreplaceable charismatic heroes to be the saviours of schools by requiring all districts and improvement plans to include succession plans. (Hargreaves & Fink, 2004, p. 10)

These aspects further support the necessity to look into succession planning as a critical element of creating the conditions for a school to be sustainable.

Succession planning is an important element to consider when conceptualizing sustainability of schools (Fusarelli et al., 2018; Hardie, 2015). Fink and Brayman (2006) completed a study on succession planning and asserted that "incorporating succession plans and processes into all school improvement plans and processes will push all administrators and those around them to take the long-term challenges of succession and sustainability more seriously" (p. 86). Beyond knowing that succession planning is important, it is essential that leaders have a firm grasp on how to create opportunities for effective succession plans. Hardie (2015) indicated that shared leadership is critical in establishing the opportunity for effective succession planning.

Zepeda et al. (2012) found that succession planning needs to be contextualized to the environment that it is taking place in. This is to say that business models may not be simply transferred to a private school any more than one can transfer succession planning models from public schools to private schools. Likewise, Cook (2014) argued that "sustainable leadership

focuses on the integration of stakeholders and structure into the school culture in order to ensure continuous school improvement beyond an individual principal's tenure" (p. 3). Ultimately, for private schools to find longevity, the leader must be involved in developing, training, and inducting successful leaders through succession planning. To this end, it is important to consider how outgoing founding school leaders established ways to create sustainability in their context of a private school in Canada.

Additional Leadership Considerations

Robinson's (2011) work on student centered leadership also applies to effective and sustainable leadership of schools. As I consider founding leaders actions, it has been worthwhile to remain aware of Robinson's (2011) dimensions of student centered leadership. She puts forward that leaders must establish goals and expectations, strategically resource their schools, ensure there is quality teaching taking place, lead teacher learning, and ensuring the environment is safe and orderly. There appears there may be a natural connection between elements such as creating a safe environment and creating a strong mission, vision, and values that link Robinson's (2011) theory of student-centered leadership and sustainable Canadian private schools.

Finally, a relevant framework for successful leadership is positive school leadership (Murphy & Seashore Louis, 2019). Murphy and Seashore Louis (2019) outlined several dimensions of positive school leadership including having a strong professional calling, a strong moral framework, a focus on character and virtue, a focus on the interests of others, personalized relationships, and empowerment and community building. In the research on sustainable schools, it is probable that the founding leaders will have demonstrated some, if not all, of these dimensions of positive school leadership. These dimensions of positive school leadership can

serve to examine school leaders' practices, particularly in reference to the early years of their school's existence. Ultimately, as leaders adapt to the requirements of different leadership practices, one worthy consideration is the how a growth mindset may play a role in the leader's ability to remain agile and adapt to the changing needs of their school (Caliskan, 2020; Dweck, 2008; Dweck & Yeager, 2019; Schechter, 2021).

Growth Mindset and School Leadership

When starting a new private school, the founding school leader will likely need to be nimble, adaptable, and agile. These are traits that align closely with much of Dweck's work on the concept of growth mindset (Caliskan, 2020; Dweck, 2008; Dweck & Yeager, 2019; Schechter, 2021). Dweck (2008) defined a growth mindset as:

> based on the belief that your basic qualities are things you can cultivate through your efforts. Although people may differ in every which way – in their initial talents and aptitudes, interests, or temperaments – everyone can change and grow through application and experience. (p.7)

Furthermore, Dweck and Yeager (2019) stated "a growth mindset is the belief that human capacities are not fixed but can be developed over time, and mindset research examines the power of such beliefs to influence human behavior" (p. 481). As founding school leaders set into the formidable challenge of staring a new private school, their adherence to thinking that is in line with these definitions can certainly be an attribute.

When considering growth mindset and leadership, it is important to fully contextualize the role of mistakes, healthy failures, and the leader's confidence. In the context of management and leadership, Dweck (2008) asserted:

[Successful leaders] with the growth mindset kept on learning. Not worried about

measuring – or protecting – their fixed abilities, they looked directly at their mistakes, used

the feedback, and altered their strategies accordingly. They became better and better at

understanding how to deploy and motivate their workers and their productivity kept pace.

In fact, they ended up way more productive than those with the fixed mindset. What's

more, throughout this rather grueling task, they maintained a healthy sense of confidence.

(p.111)

Dweck (2008) argued about an important element pertaining to the founding of a new private

school. In particular, her argument connected to the inevitability that there will certainly be

failures along the way. Schechter (2021) further extended this thinking as he stated the

following:

Learning settings and school leaders are tolerant of "intelligent failures." This reframes

failure so that it is not perceived as a problematic deviation that should be avoided at all

costs but challenging, dynamic environments. Intelligent failures may have innovative

potential when analyzing, managing and learning from these "intelligent" experiences of

failure. (p. 534)

When creating something as complex as a new school system, there are countless

opportunities for mistakes, and leaders will be required to take the feedback from these setbacks

and realign their strategies (Kruse, 2018). Caliskan (2020) further asserted that "[school leaders]

may act as role models, to some extent in turning failures into learning experiences for both the

school and the larger educational system" (p. 424). The notion of confidence is required in the

mindset of founding school leaders; after all, if they are not confident they will not be able to

advance the vision for the school and recruitment of staff and students will be far more difficult.

Dweck and Yeager (2019) supported this claim as they stated that "effort may be seen as a tool in the process, and setbacks can more readily be seen as information about the learning process. When this happens, persistence can be sustained" (p. 483).

The attributes associated with a leader's ability to hold a growth mindset (Dweck, 2008; Dweck & Yeager, 2019; Caliskan, 2020; Schechter, 2021), such as learning from mistakes, perseverance, and confidence, can serve founding school leaders well as they work towards bringing their new schools from start-up to sustainability. Over the course of a school's growth, it is foreseeable that founding private school leaders will also be required to take on a systems thinking perspective as their leadership evolves and takes on new complexity (Dixon & Eddy-Spicer, 2018; Fullan, 2005; Gharajedaghi, 2011; Koral Kordova et al., 2018; Senge, 2006; Shaked et al., 2018).

Systems Thinking and School Leadership

Although a new private school begins as a vision from the founders, it quickly evolves into a complex organization that requires advanced thinking to fully conceptualize the breadth and intricacy of the system. Systems thinking (Dixon & Eddy-Spicer, 2018; Fullan, 2005; Gharajedaghi, 2011; Koral Kordova et al., 2018; Senge, 2006; Shaked et al., 2018) is a potential way of understanding how founding school leaders conceptualize and act upon the inevitable complexity that comes with founding a private school. Senge (2006) defined systems thinking as "a discipline for seeing wholes. It is a framework for seeing inter-relationships rather than things, for seeing patterns of change rather than static 'snapshots'" (p. 68). In essence, being the lead system thinker is the key role of the founding school leader once the school has moved past the earliest days of school inception.

Similarly, Shaked and Schechter (2018) defined systems thinking in the context of schools by stating that it "does not try to break systems down into parts in order to understand them but rather concentrates on how the parts function together in networks of interaction" (p. 54). Shaked and Schechter (2018) also provided the characteristics of school principals' system thinking: leading wholes, adopting a multidimensional view, influencing indirectly, and evaluating significance. According to Shaked and Schechter (2018), leading wholes refers to "a holistic point of view oriented toward seeing the big picture and not only individual parts" (p. 264).

Adopting a multidimensional view is seen as the ability to see an issue from different angles to better understand the complexity of the entire system. As stated by Shaked and Schechter (2018), influencing indirectly is "the leaders' ability to address the school's tasks and challenges circuitously. This strategy is based on their awareness that countless reciprocal influences are at play among various school elements, each of which is connected to others, affecting them and being affected by them" (p. 264). Finally, evaluating significance refers to a school leader's ability to determine the importance of any given issue when placed in the context of a multitude of all challenges.

Notably, and congruent with thinking on growth mindsets (Caliskan, 2020; Dweck, 2008; Dweck & Yeager, 2019; Schechter, 2021), Shaked and Schechter (2018) noted that, when leading wholes, school principals must have "the capacity to tolerate ambiguity and uncertainty, which derives from an ability to understand that a current situation's seemingly separate or confusing details are actually parts of one big picture" (p. 56). The role of founding school leader is to see the vision and develop the systems to support the big picture of the overall system as it continues to grow. In the development of a new private school the founding school leader may

be called upon to solve wicked problems (Kruse, 2018) and establish a school culture that embraces ongoing improvement (Dixon & Eddy-Spicer, 2018; Hopkins et al., 2015). Wicked problems (Kruse, 2018) are complex problems that require dynamic leadership to solve and can consist of organizational complexities that range from finance to human resources.

The founding school leader is ultimately responsible for finding solutions for each challenge the new school faces. To address these ongoing challenges, the leader can lean on systems thinking (Dixon & Eddy-Spicer, 2018; Fullan, 2005; Gharajedaghi, 2011; Koral Kordova et al, 2018; Senge, 2006; Shaked et al., 2018) to address and ultimately solve the wicked problems that present themselves (Kruse, 2018). Kruse (2018) introduced a soft systems approach, which entails principles that can be easily adapted to the specific nature of a wicked problem school leaders may face. Železnik et al. (2017), defined soft systems methodology as "a cyclical system which uses models of human activity to explore with the actors in real-world problem situations, their perceptions of that situation and their readiness to decide upon purposeful action which accommodates different actors' perceptions, judgements, and values" (p. 107). Kruse suggests that a soft systems approach should be adapted as "the problems that school leaders face are ill-defined, not easily quantified, and have multiple complex solutions" (p. 44).

The concept of soft systems relates to both the notion of systems thinking (Dixon & Eddy-Spicer, 2018; Fullan, 2005; Gharajedaghi, 2011; Koral Kordova et al, 2018; Senge, 2006; Shaked et al., 2018) and growth mindset (Caliskan, 2020; Dweck, 2008; Dweck & Yeager, 2019; Schechter, 2021) as the school leader must fully understand the complexity and interactions of the school system and have an agility of mind to adequately address and solve problems they are faced with.

Chen-Levi et al. (2021) also found that systems thinking can support senior management teams in schools in solving complex problems together. In their research they conclude that "the results revealed the importance of systems thinking as a competence that is based on the causal relationship between systems thinking and leadership/organizational performance" (p. 131). In short, systems thinking can improve not only problem solving, but also the nature of the team work that is required to solve the complex problems that schools face.

Finally, considering a private school's ongoing improvement is also an integral part of the founding school leader's role, overall systems thinking and the school's long term longevity (Hopkins et al., 2015). Dixon and Eddy-Spicer (2018) asserted: "Continuous improvement … consists of embedding quality improvement into the everyday work of individuals in a system, with a focus on system-wide outcomes" (p. 143). Nadav et al. (2021) also concluded that systems thinking "is advantageous to job satisfaction and organizational commitment … and adopting a multidimensional view that enhances organizational qualities" (p. 594). Furthermore, Gurr and Reed (2021) concluded that "the application of a systems thinking view of leadership and context seemed to help in understanding success of these schools" (p. 73). Private schools are sought after for their ability to offer strong and compelling curriculum, beyond what other systems can offer (Bosetti, 2004), and to reach this aim private schools are required to continually improve. As Dixon and Eddy-Spicer (2018) concluded: "Successful continuously improving districts similarly highlight the strategic importance of viewing systems as the unit of change, and ensuring that local improvement contribute to the overall district health" (p.147).

In summary, systems thinking (Dixon & Eddy-Spicer, 2018; Fullan, 2005; Gharajedaghi, 2011; Koral Kordova et al, 2018; Senge, 2006; Shaked et al., 2018) is a concept for founding school leaders to understand and leverage. The ability to see the big picture, solve wicked

problems, and pursue ongoing wicked school problems is required for not only the school leader's success, but also the longevity of the school and its overall sustainability.

Organizational Sustainability in the Context of Canadian Private Schools

Organizational sustainability, after the departure of a founding leader, is critical for the overall success of an organization (Collins & Porras, 1994). The concept of organizational sustainability is often linked to that of private industry and business. For decades, researchers (Collins, 2001; Collins & Porras, 2004) have been studying how to create sustainable business in the private sector. The key findings in these industries are that businesses should put their purpose first, start slowly and move ahead consistently, learn through experimentation, and develop their own leadership from within (Collins & Porras, 2004). Given that the term sustainability is not often coupled directly with schools, it is worthwhile to leverage this comprehensive research in the adjacent private business sector. However, before discussing sustainability of organizations, it is necessary to clarify what it means to be sustainable in the Canadian private school sector.

As noted in a personal communication with Patti Macdonald (November 26, 2019), the Executive Director of CAIS, there has not been an instance of a school ceasing to exist after they have achieved the distinction of CAIS Accreditation. For several decades, Canada's national private school organization has been providing accreditation services for schools who apply to be a part of their organization. The accreditation process is a rigorous and in-depth process that aims to examine all aspects of a school's operations. As stated by CAIS (CAIS, 2020b),

> The CAIS accreditation process is designed to achieve the dual purpose of accountability
> and school improvement – aligning their practices to the highest National Standards

while guiding them through a continuous whole school improvement process, which

combines both an internal self-evaluation and an external peer review. (p. 1)

Throughout the literature, there is much research on 'sustainable school improvement'

(Lambert, 2007; Lee & Seashore Louis, 2019) or 'sustainable schools' in relation to physical

environmental factors (Rickinson et al., 2016; Scott, 2013). However, there is a dearth of

information related to school sustainability, particularly in the area of private schools. Based on

the literature reviewed for this study, it appears as though the definition of sustainability in the

context of schools is highly subjective based on the researcher and the study's objective.

The term sustainability, particularly when coupled with the terms private school, can

pertain to several factors in schools. The sustainable factors may include, but are not exclusive

to: student enrollment, student retention, financial viability, and student success (Milke &

MacPherson, 2019; Our Kids, 2019a). For the purposes of this study, I have looked at

sustainability through the lens of a private school's ability to remain in operation for a duration

of greater than five years. As a secondary indicator of sustainability for private schools in

Canada, the CAIS Accreditation standards can be used as markers of sustainability. To achieve

CAIS Accreditation, a Canadian private school must fulfill the requirements of the CAIS

Accreditation Standards (CAIS, 2019d). The following sections provide more detail about the

process, standards, and how CAIS ensures schools will continue to improve throughout the

process.

CAIS Standards

The critical element of the CAIS Accreditation is that the process takes a comprehensive

look at school improvement through several lenses. For a school to achieve accreditation, the

candidate school must demonstrate a standard of competence in all standards that apply to the

school. In any area that a school does not demonstrate a proficiency, the school's leadership team are obligated to respond within two years of the accreditation and provide proof of improvement (CAIS, 2020c).

The CAIS Accreditation Standards take into account 12 areas of focus. To fulfill the expectations of a CAIS Accreditation, candidate schools must fully address all the standards that apply to them. Below is a brief description of each of the requisite areas for schools to follow (CAIS, 2020d). Of note, 11 of the 12 are required for all schools and the 'Boarding and Homestay Programs' standard is only required for those schools who have students who are not living at home while attending their school.

All CAIS member schools are required to complete an accreditation process (CAIS, 2020b) within a seven-year window. Upon initiating the accreditation, schools undertake a 12 to 18 month internal evaluation process. The internal evaluation requires schools to compile and organize all necessary documentation which will be reviewed during the on-site review. The compendium of information includes everything from policy documents to strategic plans to community survey data. The comprehensive report is provided to the visiting committee who will conduct the on-site review.

An onsite review takes place once a candidate school has completed their internal evaluation. The on-site review takes place over the course of four days and sees experts in all fields enter the school and do an internal audit. This audit seeks to confirm the contents of the internal report and to provide additional context and detail to inform the accreditation process. While visiting the school, the accreditation team interviews all employees and speaks to representative groups of parents, students, and board members.

Upon completing the onsite review, the accreditation team begins working on their final report. The final written report will address all applicable standards and will provide several recommendations, suggestions, and commendations. Recommendations are directives that must be addressed within two years of the completed report, suggestions are offered to the school to use at their discretion, and commendations are celebratory points that recognize excellence within the school. Once the report has been completed, the CAIS Board of Directors approves the finalized version and it is then handed back over to the candidate school's board chair and head of school (CAIS, 2020f).

As the candidate school works towards addressing the recommendations that have been provided by the CAIS report, they are also required to report the findings back to the school community. This reporting can be done in print or digital modes and aims to give the greater community a view to the work that needs to be done for the school to continue to improve. Once the recommendations have been addressed, the school is given the distinction of being a CAIS Accredited Member School and they are encouraged to celebrate this accomplishment within their communications amongst the broader community (CAIS, 2020c). In the coming sections, I will further explore the individual standards and how educational research applies to the importance of each of them.

Mission, Vision, and Values

The school's mission, vision, and values guide strategic planning and is clearly understood by all members of the learning community (CAIS, 2020d). The importance of a school having strong mission, vision, and values that are supported by school leadership is widely supported in the academic research (Alberta Education, 2020; Barber & Mourshed, 2007; Lambert & Bouchamma, 2019; Leithwood et al., 2004). In fact, Leithwood et al. (2004) stated,

"it seems critical that leaders in formal positions of authority retain responsibility for building a shared vision for their organizations" (p. 7). The CAIS (2020d) standard that supports a school having a strong and understood mission, vision, and values is imperative for a school's overall sustainability.

Co-curricular and Learning Environment

CAIS schools are required to demonstrate a commitment to providing a learning program that extends beyond the academic classroom, such as sports teams, performing arts, and character initiatives. The school's leaders need to demonstrate that they are attending to the academic, emotional, physical, and social aspects of learning for all students (CAIS, 2020d). In the literature, there appears to be a broad consensus that co-curricular engagement creates opportunities to be well (Hoelscher, et al., 2016), to be engaged in the community and to develop better communication skills (Ozturk, et al., 2015), team skills (Smither & Xihe, 2011), and ultimately success in post-secondary success (Keen & Hall, 2019). In addition to these benefits, Hallinger (2011) reported that co-curricular programs lead to improved grades. There is value in having students engaged in a broader experience as it helps them continue to develop into well rounded citizens capable of success in the 21st century (Harari, 2017).

Academic Program

The academic program is aligned with the school's mission, vision, values, and strategic plan. Schools are expected to continually seek out best practice and look for excellence in the area of teaching and learning (CAIS, 2020d). In the literature, academic programs and their impact on school success are often referred to academic program coherence (Hallinger, 2003). These impacts are seen as having positive correlation to overall student success and school success (Newman et al., 2001). Newman et al. (2001) concluded, "To improve student

achievement, school staffs and the external organizations that work with them should aim to strengthen instructional program coherence" (p. 316). Finally, although it is not always the driving factor for why individuals choose private school, those who attend private schools indicated that academic challenge is one considerations they take into account (Bosetti, 2004; Bosetti et al., 2017; Corcoran & Jennings, 2020; Jabbar & Lenhoff, 2020).

School Leadership

CAIS Accreditation evaluates the leadership constructs that are put in place and how these constructs support the mission, vision, values, and strategic planning of the overall organization. It is well established in academic research that school leadership has a sizable impact on school success (Hallinger, 2011; Hallinger & Heck, 1999; Waters et al., 2003) In fact, the first line of Hallinger's (2011) report stated the following: "Effective education leadership makes a difference in improving learning" (p. 3) and as he concluded the report he stated, "Of all the factors that contribute to what students learn at school, present evidence led us to the conclusion that leadership is second in strength only to classroom instruction" (Hallinger, 2011, p. 70).

Human Resources

The school's human resources should be strategically aligned with the stated mission, vision, values, and strategy of the school. Schools are required to have the necessary human resources in place to meet the organizations goals (CAIS, 2020d). With respect to human resources, Hallinger (2011) indicated that classroom instruction has the largest impact on student success. To this end, it is obvious that the teacher talent in our schools is critical for overall student and school success. Beyond the evidence provided by Hallinger (2011), there is much discourse in the literature about what makes a teacher effective. Qualities such as subject area

knowledge (Hill, 2016), strong relationship building (McKay & Macomber, 2021), and classroom practices (Stronge et al., 2011) are widely regarded as catalysts towards high quality teaching that have an impact on student success. Ultimately, the quality of the learning cannot exceed the quality of the teachers in a school, and this is the primary reason for why a strong human resources standard is so important for the sustainability of Canadian private schools (McKinsey & Company, 2007).

School and Community

Schools who seek CAIS Accreditation are required to demonstrate a connection between themselves and the greater communities they serve. Evidence of the school giving back and creating a harmonious relationship with multiple parties is an important part of achieving accreditation (CAIS, 2020d). In the research, it appears as though outreach between the school and community has impact in several areas. The areas that appear to benefit directly from the school and community engagement are curricular (Komoroske, et al., 2015; Moskal & Kosbar, 2011; Moskal & Skokan, 2011), and character (Eccles & Barber, 1999). In their study, Eccles and Barber (1999) noted that, "involvement in prosocial activities was linked to positive educational trajectories and low rates of involvement in risky behaviors" (p. 40). It is clear that there are countless benefits for students when their school experience extends beyond the classroom walls and into the community.

Enrolment Management

The enrolment management standard is focused primarily on admission and retention procedures that seek to support a student body that is aligned with the school's mission, vision, and values (CAIS, 2020d). Although enrolment management is a critical element of any private school's success and sustainability, there is scant evidence of its importance in academic

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literature. There is an abundance of information about the importance of enrolment management on The Enrollment Management Association's website (The Enrollment Management Association, 2020), but again there is little academic literature to indicate the significance of the role with respect to school sustainability. In fact, there are academic conversations in this area about the important topic of discrimination based on admission processes (Cumming & Mawdsley, 2013). However, it could be concluded that due to the requirement of having students in attend in order to maintain operations, that enrolment management is an integral part of a private school's operations and should be considered. The direct impact on a school's overall sustainability is an area worthy of further study.

Governance

The governance of a CAIS school must support their fiduciary, strategic, and generative obligations. The CAIS Accreditation reviews the board's membership, structure, and procedures to ensure they are following best practices in private school governance (CAIS, 2020d). Both CAIS (2019g) and NAIS (2020) have done extensive work on the importance of governance to a school's day to day operations as well as to the school's sustainability. Littleford (2020) stated, "healthy boards address long range strategic issues such as financial stability; facility needs; supporting the recruitment of talented faculty and staff; and finding and guiding fine leaders" (p. 1). The board of director's role in private schools is to oversee risk, fiduciary responsibility, and strategy; given this information it is easy to see the importance of this standard inside the CAIS Accreditation.

Finance

In the finance standard, schools are required to demonstrate that they are stewarding the school's finances by planning in both the short and long term. Finances are also evaluated to

ensure they are adhering to the overall strategic plan of the school (CAIS, 2020d). It has been the case with schools (The Star, 2014) where schools have failed due to mismanagement of school financial resources. Based on pure economic realities, it is easy to see the overall importance of a strong financial backbone for school sustainability. With this said, the question still remains about the overall impact of funding on student success and school improvement. Studies have shown, within limits, spending can improve things like class size and student achievement (Jackson et al., 2016).

Physical Plant, Health, and Safety

CAIS Accreditation requires schools to demonstrate that their facilities are compliant with all necessary occupational health and safety requirements and that the school's facilities support the stated mission, vision, and values of the school (2020d). It has long been established by architects (Mau & O'Donnel, 2011; Nair, 2007) and academics (Gislason, 2009; McLeod & Shareski, 2018; Woolner & Hall, 2010) that the elements of the learning environment, such as light, sound, air quality, and design, have a marked impact on student learning. However, what is interesting is that the quality of facilities does not appear in the reasons why people choose private schools (Bosetti, 2004; Milke & MacPherson, 2019; Our Kids, 2019a). Although the safety and basic learning conditions are required a successful educational experience, it is apparent that facility development and growth are an integral part of a Canadian private school's sustainability.

Commitment to School Improvement

CAIS requires schools to demonstrate that they are continuing to learn and improve as an organization. Schools demonstrate that they are committed to continued improvement though their professional development programs for their staff (CAIS, 2020d). Based on the McKinsey

(2007) findings that the quality of the teacher has the largest impact on student achievement, it is easy to see the value of teacher learning. Countless academic articles attribute student success to teacher professional learning (Hattie, 2009; Leithwood, et al., 2004; Murphy & Seashore Louis, 2018; Valiandes & Neophytou, 2018). To this end, it is critical that if schools are to remain sustainable and relevant, they need to continually strive to improve their own professional learning.

Boarding and Homestay Programs

Boarding and homestay programs are evaluated to ensure they are enriching the learning experience for students who attend schools that offer these services (CAIS, 2020d). As the 'Boarding and Homestay Programs' standard is optional and not a requirement for all private schools, it is not imperative that there is any academic grounding or evidence for these programs to be linked to sustainability.

In the history of CAIS, there has not been a private school that has achieved the CAIS Accreditation and has ceased operation (Macdonald, 2019). The broad definition of sustainability that comes with CAIS Accreditation allows for a holistic view of a private school's operations in the context of the objective of staying in operation and providing continuous education to students who choose this type of education. In the private school context, sustainability is ultimately hinged on the confidence of the parent/guardian and student who are making the choice to attend. The adult and child are often looking for the confidence that there is a high quality of learning, that there is congruence in family and school values, and that the school they are choosing is likely to remain in operation for the foreseeable future (Bosetti, 2004; Hunt, 2020).

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework can help guide the research process (Brown & Jacobsen, 2016). The purpose of the conceptual framework is to build a construct that frames the research that is conducted over the course of the dissertation process (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). The conceptual framework for this body of research, as seen in Figure 1, contextualizes the experience of a school leader from the beginning stages of founding a private school to the eventuality of finding overall sustainability for the school. In the initial stages of founding a private school, the founding parties need to recognize the societal implications that surround them as they begin their journey to creating a school. Inside this context, it is important to have an understanding of the macro-level and the meso-level contexts for school choice within the societal landscape of education. Upon understanding the societal context, the initial steps in starting a private school involve the articulation of the mission, vision, and values of the school as well as creating the founding governance for the organization (McConaghy, 2006).

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework for Founding a Sustainable a Private School in Canada
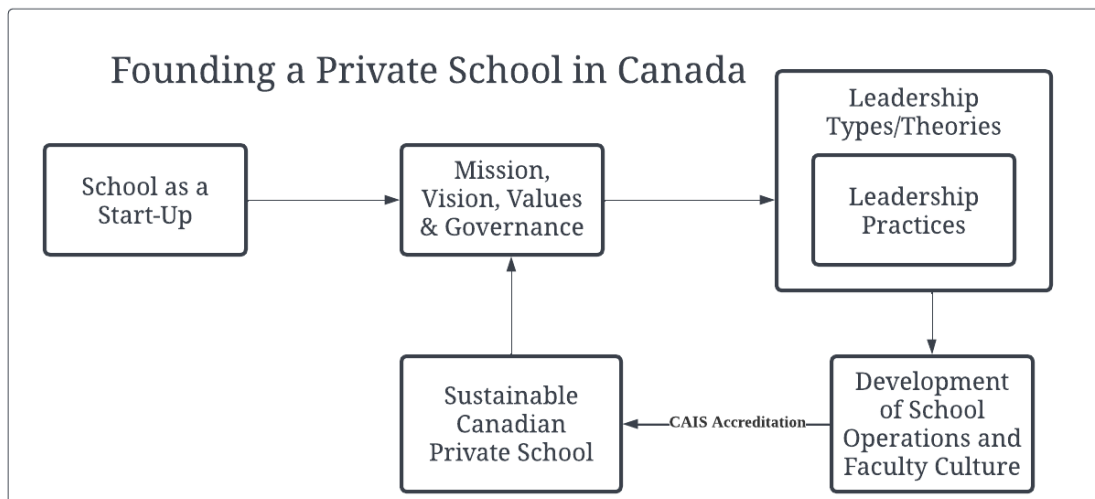
Once the establishment of the foundational elements of starting a school have been solidified, the next consideration is the leadership practices of the founding school leader. In an effort to create sustainable schools, school success is dependent ultimately on the leader establishing operational priorities and promoting a positive school culture (Sun & Leithwood, 2015; McFarlane, 2010; Lee & Seashore Louis, 2019). The outcomes of a positive school culture are linked to safe schools and improvement in student achievement. Following the formalization of school mission, vision, and values, governance policies, and procedures, and student success, Canadian private schools have the opportunity to receive accreditation through CAIS. As stated earlier, any school that has received this status has remained in operation to date. For this reason, CAIS accreditation is used in the present study as criteria for evidence of a sustainable Canadian private school.

Chapter Summary

This chapter has examined the research around the Canadian context for choice in education and a deep exploration of the nature of private schools in Canada. Furthermore, the topic of leadership and private school sustainability was addressed. The conceptual framework has provided a context and overview for the starting of a private school and how leadership practices and CAIS accreditation may have an impact on school sustainability.

In spite of the abundance of private school choice in Canada, there is a remarkable lack of research on private schools, and in particular, how to effectively start and lead schools in this segment of the educational landscape. It is also apparent that there is an ongoing focus on the private school option and these opportunities for private educational delivery are increasing in Canada as well as globally (A Class Apart, 2019, Bielmier, 2022; Bosetti et al., 2017; Bosetti & Gereluk, 2016; McConaghy, 2004; McShane, 2022a, Wohlstetter & Zeehandelaar, 2015). By

providing insight into what has worked for the selected founding school leaders as they started a

private school may create a deeper understanding of what others can do when they take on the

challenge of creating a private school. The conceptual framework (Figure 1) provides a pathway

from start-up to sustainability in the context of Canadian private schools. In Chapter 3, I describe

the methodology and methods used for conducting research around the relationship between

leadership practices and sustainable private schools.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

In Canada there are many school choices. I narrowed the focus of this study on the private education sector as there appears to be a trend towards more schools opening in this niche. It is apparent that private schools are a rarely researched segment of the educational market, and the present study provides some insight into the founding school leaders' early years of opening a new private school. Specifically, through my research, I aimed to learn about the leadership practices and perspectives of founding school leaders, and inform future school leaders about what worked and did not work for previous founding school leaders.

This section describes my research methodology and includes a rationale for the research decisions I made during my work. I include a description of the research participants, the parameters of the research context, and the specific methods that have been deployed. The process to analyze the qualitative data is also shared. Comments pertaining to ethical considerations, trustworthiness, and limitations are also included.

Rationale for Qualitative Research Design

As I considered which type of research to use to learn about the leadership practices of founding a new private school, I took the opportunity to evaluate qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches. There are aspects of all three types of research that appeal to me; however, I decided on qualitative research methodology because it embraces subjectivity and is often more focused on 'how' and 'what' research questions.

With respect to studying leadership experiences of founding school leaders, there is certainly an opportunity to further explore a rich narrative of each leader's experience as I delve into the 'how' and 'what' of their work. I believe that this approach gives a textured narrative of their experience as it applies to their own work and may provide opportunities for others to learn

from their leadership. Furthermore, the qualitative tradition provides the participant an opportunity to share their own experience with the researcher. This allows the researcher to consider participant perspectives while attempting to answer important questions pertaining to their own individual experience. To this end, the qualitative tradition also aligns with my epistemological leaning towards constructivism. Constructivism is the view that knowledge is constructed through shared experience and perspectives at a given point and time (Denzin & Lincoln, 2006). Using constructivism allows the researcher to view data as not items fixed in time and space and as "stable nuggets to be mined," (Brinkmann, 2018, p. 586) but as waypoints that can be used to build a narrative of experience.

My research about sustainable private schools is also supported by Merriam and Tisdell's (2016) essential characteristics of qualitative research. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) stated, "qualitative case studies share with other forms of qualitative research the search for meaning and understanding, the researcher as the primary instrument of data collection and analysis, an inductive investigative strategy, and the end product being richly descriptive" (p. 37). In the primary consideration of a search for meaning and understanding of the phenomenon of leading a new private school, there is little literature available about what leadership practices were utilized and why those may have had a positive effect on creating the conditions for a sustainable private school. Secondly, Merriam and Tisdell (2016) argued that the researcher is the central instrument of data collection and analysis. I believe that, through the experiences I have had in private schools that are considered to be sustainable, I have drawn out valuable reflections from former school leaders. In this research I used semi-structured interviews to collect the qualitative data. The semi-structured interviews allowed me to use guiding questions and be agile to seek more detail from participants when necessary. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) suggested that the

qualitative tradition involves coming to know, and often results in a richly descriptive study. I believe that the school leader's journey is one of great texture, nuance, and challenge, and the semi-structured interviews provided the qualitative data to support a richly descriptive account of their experiences.

Throughout my research, I used a constructivist epistemology to make meaning and inform my conclusions. The research has allowed me to look at the phenomena of starting a sustainable school through the multiple perspectives of school leaders from across Canada. After careful consideration, reflection, and study, I believe my personal view and case study research aligned well under the umbrella of qualitative research design underpinned by a constructivist epistemological frame.

Rationale for Case Study Methodology

Merriam and Tisdell's (2016) definition of case study is congruent with my work in conducting holistic research to create in depth understanding of a phenomenon of a real-world setting. In relation to the research questions, I aimed to gather a rich and in-depth description of leaders' practices when starting a sustainable private school. When considering a specific methodology for this study, it became apparent to me that a multiple site case study approach (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) would be suitable for this study.

One necessary criteria for a case study, as defined by Merriam and Tisdell (2016), is that the case is bounded. As they stated, "the case, then, could be a single person who is a case example of some phenomenon, a program, a group, an institution, a community or a specific policy" (p. 38). In the case of my study of school leaders, I looked at school leaders who lead Canadian Private Schools belonging to the national organization of CAIS that were started between 1980 and 2000. Furthermore, the case study is bounded by the requirement that the

school leader was involved with the school within two years of its incorporation of the private school and spent a minimum of five consecutive years there as the school leader. In the case of each leader, I used semi-structured interviews to identify and better understand the leadership practices they deployed over the course of their school leadership. The boundaries I set for the case study also met Merriam and Tisdell's (2016) criteria of a "limited number of people involved who could be interviewed" (p. 39); there are currently less than 100 CAIS schools and only a small fraction of these schools were established in the last few decades.

Finally, it was beneficial to consider this a multiple case study (Merriam & Merriam, 2009) in which "there are two stages of analysis – the within-case analysis and the cross-case analysis" (p. 204). There are commonalities that have been drawn out from each school leader's experience that may provide opportunities for transferability (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016) of practices that are advantageous in starting and sustaining a private school in Canada. This approach is similar to Collins' (2001) multiple case studies to determine what drove companies from being just average to being exceptional. The cases in my study provide insight into what leadership practices improve the opportunity that a new private school will become sustainable, and hence, how founding leaders can create schools that will support student learning for a predictable period of time.

Role of the Researcher

I have spent an extensive amount of time in the private school environment in Alberta and Canada. I currently work as a Head of School of one of the largest private schools in Canada, have actively participated in the provincial and national independent school associations, such as CAIS and AISCA, as a board member, and have been a member of the teaching faculty of the CAIS Leadership Institute. I have also had the opportunity to be at my current school for 21 of

its 35 years. This has allowed me to see, first hand, a school evolve from startup to sustainability. Furthermore, I have also participated in several CAIS accreditation processes as both a school leader seeking accreditation and as a visiting team member on an accreditation visit. My individual depth of knowledge comes with both advantages and drawbacks. The advantage of my background is that it provides me with insight and a perspective on the landscape and operations of private schools that other researchers might not have. A drawback of my background is that it may be a source of bias. I was aware of this limitation and constructed consistent interview protocols (Brinkmann, 2018; Brinkmann, 2013) and data analysis standards to guard against skewing the individual narratives that are shared by participants during my research.

Research Design and Methods

With any research project, there is a limitless variety of settings, subjects, and topics that can be explored and examined. On the onset of any research, it is the researcher's responsibility to narrow and define the designs and methods that will be deployed to garner an adequate answer to the proposed research questions. This first part of this section of the chapter aims to introduce the participants and research settings. The second part of this section will focus on data collection, management, and analysis.

Research Participants and Recruitment

The participants were in the school leader role in a private school in Canada. I interviewed four founding school leaders who met the following criteria:

- the individual became school leader within two years of the school's inception,

- the individual was school leader for a minimum of five consecutive years, and

- the individual is familiar with CAIS and the accreditation process.

In this research, I invited founding school leaders who come from different backgrounds and work in different regional contexts within Canada to participate in the study. The diversity of perspectives offered by the participants provide an opportunity to illuminate potentially transferable leadership practices that transcend learning contexts in private schools across Canada.

To identify appropriate potential participants, I engaged in a dialogue with CAIS's Executive Director and with CAIS's support I did a participant search. The CAIS Executive Director oversees all schools who are members of the organization. The role requires the director to understand the private school landscape in Canada and what is required for private schools to remain operational and effective. The CAIS Executive Director is active in networking schools and their leaders in an attempt to share best practices. Although the CAIS Executive Director does oversee all accreditations, they do not have any supervisory powers over any school leaders in Canada. However, to alleviate any concerns around power or influence, I worked with CAIS' communication team to send out a recruitment email from the organization. Attached to the recruitment email was a letter of invitation that included the participant criteria, assurance of confidentiality, research questions, and an invitation to connect with me directly.

A letter of introduction was emailed to all who qualified and indicated an interest in being a part of the study. The letter included important details about the research, such as the criteria, timeline, and process. As a result of the outlined process, I was able to identify four willing participants for this study. Selected school leaders were notified by email and were provided with a Letter of Invitation (see Appendix B). An Informed Consent form (Appendix C) was included in this email and the participants returned the signed document via email. Through email, in person interviews were organized with the participating school leaders. At least one

month prior to the interview, participants were provided with a list of guiding questions and prompts; this allowed them adequate time to reflect on their thoughts and to reference any source documents that they deemed as helpful. At the time of the interview, I encouraged the participants to provide me with the founding mission, vision, and values. The intention of these interviews was to better understand leadership practices that may have contributed to the development of sustainable Canadian private schools.

Research Setting

This research took place in the Canadian private school context. Specifically, the study sought to better understand the leadership practices that founding CAIS school leaders took during the early years of creating a sustainable school. The reasons for focusing on CAIS Accredited Schools are that CAIS is the only national accrediting body for private schools in Canada. CAIS's accreditation involves a rigorous process that requires schools to prepare, be observed, and make adjustments, and to date there has not been an instance of a school ceasing to exist once it has been accredited by CAIS (Macdonald, 2019).

Data Collection

According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), collecting data is a process of organizing the "bits and pieces of information found in the environment" (p. 105). There is no question that data collection and organization is a complex, intriguing, and messy process. In an attempt to organize and coordinate the effort, I created processes and procedures to guide my work. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) stated that "data collection is about asking, watching and reviewing" (p. 105), and to fully grasp the complexities inherent in leading a school from its founding to sustainability, I did just this. I conducted semi-structured interviews, listened carefully to the responses, and noted comments and questions as analytic memos. Whenever possible,

participants provided artifacts, such as historical and archived documents to support their responses. Much of the interview data was shared by participants in terms of memories, interpretations, feelings, and artifacts. Next, I will discuss the three forms of data collection used in this study: (a) interviews with the participants, (b) artifacts provided by the participants, and (c) analytic memos I maintained throughout the research.

Interviews

I conducted semi-structured interviews with the participating school leaders during the month of March 2021. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, in person interviews were not possible, and as such, I conducted interviews using Zoom. The rationale for selecting semi-structured interviews was that they would allow me to explore themes in leadership as opposed to specific operational actions or procedures such as governance policy, promotion, or facilities. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), a semi-structured interview "is guided by a list of questions or issues to be explored, and neither the exact wording nor the order of the questions is determined ahead of time" (p. 110). Given the nature of the leaders who engaged in the interviews, I assumed that the topics explored would be on the topic of their leadership practices in relation to starting a sustainable private school. A secondary advantage to semi-structured interviewing is that it allowed me to ask clarifying questions. On occasion, due to regional differences, it was necessary to seek clarification to best elicit responses related, for example, to the political and cultural contexts in which the founding school leaders worked.

As the interviews were conducted using Zoom, I asked the participants for permission to record the interview. All interviews are stored on a secure computer and all communication was conducted using the University of Calgary's email system. Upon the completion of the interviews, the recordings were transcribed with the assistance of the transcription software

integral to the Zoom software. I did a manual edit of all transcriptions to check for accuracy. In addition to the recording, I took field notes during the interviews in the case of a technical failure. Fortunately, there were no technical difficulties encountered before, during, or after the interviews. I completed the transcription within seven days of each interview, after which I validated and checked the information by emailing copies of both the interview transcript and the recording for participants' review and approval. The interviewees had 14 days to check the documents for accuracy, make any additions, corrections, and deletions they wished, and return the revised transcript to me via email. All participants were able to work within this timeframe, and each approved of their transcription.

The interview questions were constructed to address the four research questions I was seeking to answer (Table 1). Elements of each of these questions and the follow-up questions from the interviewer ultimately addressed multiple of the defined research objectives.

Table 1

Research Questions and Associated Interview Questions

Research Questions	Associated Interview Questions
Question #1 - How do founding school leaders describe the vision of the private school?	1. How would you describe your vision for the school when you started it? 2. What year did you begin working at the school as the school leader? 3. Under what circumstances did you become the school leader? 4. What was the niche your school was seeking to fulfill in the context of school choice?

	5. What would you say is a unique or distinguishing factor about your school?
Question #2 - How do founding school leaders describe their leadership practices enacted in the beginning phases of operating the private school?	1. When you started leading the school, what are some practices you remember undertaking? 2. When thinking back on the founding of your school, what are you proudest of?

Question #3 - How do founding school leaders describe how they perceive how their practices have changed over the course of their tenure at the private school?	1. Did you vision for the school change over your time leading it?
	
	2. What was the greatest success you had while leading your school?
	   a. In the first year?
	   b. In the first five years?
	   c. During your time at the school?
	
	3. What were the greatest challenges you faced:
	   a. In the first year?
	   b. In the first five years?
	   c. During your time at the school?

Question #4 - What leadership challenges do founding school leaders	1. What year did you leave your school? 2. Of these practices, which ones do you believe may have led to the school becoming sustainable?

describe from their early years of operating a private school and how did these challenges change over time?	3. At what point did you believe your school would become sustainable?
	4. What was an indication that your school had achieved sustainability?
	5. What was the founding mission, vision, and values of the school?
	a. Have these changed since the establishment of the school? If so, why did they change?
	6. During your tenure at your school, what did you do to create a sustainable leadership model? How did succession planning play a role?

Artifacts

Additionally, I leveraged artifact collection throughout the course of my research. The artifact collection included several early stage annual reports from the schools, press releases, magazine articles, and videos. Three of the four participants provided at least one artifact to support the interview data. Two participants provided several documents including news articles, school documents, and online references. In the instance of one of the schools, there has been a considerable effort taken to archive the history of the founding of the school and these online sources were also incorporated into the data analysis process. Of note, many of the artifacts that were examined were not written or produced by the founding school leader, and as result, have offered an opportunity to further triangulate the memory of the interview subjects.

Analytic Memos

Analytic memos were also maintained throughout the multiple site case study process and were reflected upon during and after the interviews. These memos allowed me to document trends and themes within individual interviews, and compare one interview to another. The analytical memos were largely comments, such as "[the leader] is joyful when considering the founding" and "they were clearly thinking deeply about their leadership." Another element to the analytic memos were questions that were being brought forward due to the responses, such as, "I wonder if the other school leaders experienced the same phenomena?" or "I wonder if they will discuss the stress associated with that change?" As the research progressed, the artifacts and analytic memos allowed me to deepen my understanding of each leader and their practices as they brought their schools from start-up to sustainability.

Data Management

Prior to initiating research, it is critical that the researcher has a plan for the management, organization, safety, and security of the data that will be collected. As such, I kept the digital recordings on my computer's hard drive in a password protected and encrypted folder. Furthermore, the transcribed documents were shared directly with the participating school leader securely through secure and encrypted emails. Once they were confirmed by the participant as accurate, they were stored on a local computer hard drive in a password protected and encrypted folder. The computer that was used for the creation and storage of these documents has been stored in a locked cabinet behind a locked office door, and only I have access to the cabinet.

With respect to protecting the privacy of the school leaders, the students, the employees, and the schools, I assigned non-identifying pseudonyms to the school leaders and their schools. This practice allowed the leaders to speak freely and helped minimizes the risk of implicating the

schools or those who still attend or work at them. Drawing from school leaders from across Canada also allowed me to better ensure anonymity of the school leader and the school they founded.

All participant information, including pseudonym information, will be kept for five years, at which time I will have all information destroyed in a manner that maintains all participant confidentiality. Identities were stripped from the data set and removed during the transcription process. Participants had the choice to withdraw from the study prior to May 1, 2021, but none opted to do so.

Data Analysis

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) stated that, in qualitative research, "collection and analysis should be a *simultaneous* process" (p. 195). Furthermore, Merriam and Tisdell (2016) noted that, in case study research, "the case study researcher can be seriously challenged in trying to make sense of the data. Attention to data management is particularly important under these circumstances" (p. 233). Due to the dynamic nature of data analysis in qualitative research, it is paramount that the researcher is prepared to start organizing and categorizing the information they are receiving in real time. To adequately do this, I used strategies suggested by Bogdan and Biklen (2007), namely narrowing my study, writing observer comments as I went, writing analytic memos to myself about what I was learning, and playing with metaphors, analogies, and key concepts. Examples of metaphors used are comparing the early growth of a school to that of a human's development and thinking about a leader's practices to that of the life-world philosophy (Sergiovanni, 2000). The dedication to these principles allowed me to make meaning of the information that emerged through the semi-structured interviews.

As the research began, a dedication to coding the data was required (Figure 2). As defined by Merriam and Tisdell (2016), "coding is nothing more than assigning some sort of short-hand designation to a various aspect of your data so that you can easily retrieve specific pieces of the data" (p. 199). To code the data, I used a manual coding approach. To assist in the manual coding, I utilized matrices, code frequency tables, content-analytic summary tables, as well as interval checks to ensure the consistency of the data collected, and the accuracy of my interpretation (Miles et al., 2014). In parallel with the coded transcripts, I also added to my analytic memos to record my thoughts, speculations, and hunches.

When coding the data, I undertook a process of holistic coding (Table 2) and magnitude coding, followed by a second round of provisional coding (Table 3). The provisional coding took place intermittently throughout the course of the analysis with the support of my supervisor. The coding process involved a continual revisiting of the transcripts. As Miles et al. (2020) stated, "it makes analysis an ongoing, lively enterprise that contributes to the energizing process of fieldwork" (p. 62). With each coding cycle, further light was shone on the eventual findings. Holistic coding is defined by Miles et al. (2020) as "[a] method that applies a single code to a large unit of data in the corpus, rather than detailed coding" (p. 69). The reason I opted to start with holistic coding was to better understand the broad themes that were emerging from the interview transcripts.

Magnitude coding, according to Miles et al. (2020), is creating "a category to indicate [a word or phrases] intensity, frequency, direction, presence or evaluative content" (p. 71). The magnitude coding further allowed me to understand repetitive themes as articulated by the participants. In the second round of coding, the provisional coding cycle allowed me to look at the data through the lens of my conceptual model and the CAIS accreditation standards. Over the

course of my provisional coding, it became apparent that there were additional codes that were required. As a result, I added codes for distributed, servant, and student-centered leadership.

Over the course of the coding process, I took time to look across the case study data and check for similarities in the prevalence of the specific codes. Where there were similarities, it strengthened my view of the importance of that topic or theme. When there were differences, it was helpful to look back at the analytic memos I collected throughout the process. These analytic memos allowed me to have a deeper understanding of why there may be a difference in the data that was collected. Furthermore, the differences in the multiple case study data allowed me to look more closely at the artifacts and determine if there were contextual reasons, such as school location, student population, or school philosophy, for the differences.

Figure 2

Data Analysis Process
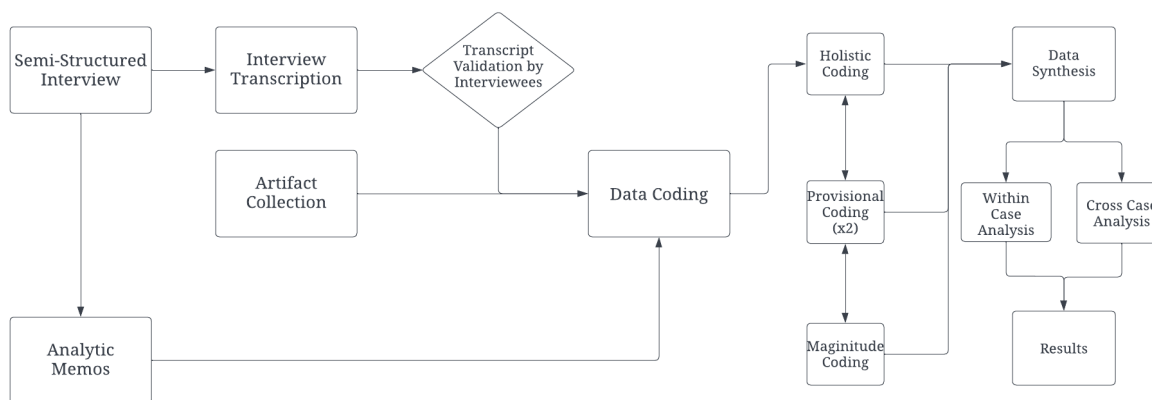
Table 2

Refined Categories for Holistic Coding According to the Question

Research Questions	Word utilized for holistic coding

	Vision
Question #1 - How do founding school leaders describe the vision of the private school?	
Question #2 - How do founding school leaders describe their leadership practices enacted in the beginning phases of operating the private school?	Practices
Question #3 - How do founding school leaders describe how they perceive how their practices have changed over the course of their tenure at the private school?	Change
Question #4 - What leadership challenges do founding school leaders describe from their early years of operating a private school and how did these challenges change over time?	Challenge

Table 3

Provisional Coding Categories

Code	Themes/Key Words
Founding Leaders	*founder, first, initial*
Visionary Leadership	*vision, the future, direction*
Sustainable Leadership	*sustainable, predictable, ongoing, legacy*
Succession Planning	*succession, incoming leader, search, hiring*
Set Direction	*shared vision, goals, high expectations*
Build Relationships	*school values, trusting relationships*
Support Desired Practices	*distributed leadership, collaboration, community*
Improve Instructional Program	*professional development, student learning*
Model the Way	*voice, shared values, set the example, modelling*
Inspire a Shared Vision	*vision, imagine, common purpose, illustrate*
Challenge the Process	*innovate, create, risk, growth*
Enable Others to Act	*distribute, collaborate, trust, relationship*
Encourage the Heart	*recognition, care, community, celebration*
Mission, Vision, and Values	*mission, vision, values, belief, statement*
Co-curricular and Learning Environment	*sports, drama, academics, clubs, arts, travel, volunteering*
Academic Program	*course, curriculum, Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate Program*
School Leadership	*department head, assistant principal, director, coordinator*

Human Resources	*salary, benefits, faculty, staff*
School and Community	*parents, partner organizations*
Enrolment Management	*admissions, recruitment, retention*
Governance	*board of directors, board chair, board meetings*
Finance	*surplus, deficit, advancement, cash reserves, debt*
Physical Plant, Health, and Safety	*facilities, renovation, acquisition, upkeep, maintenance*
Commitment to School Improvement	*professional learning, curriculum development, innovation*

Additional Codes	***Themes/Key Words (across all data)***
Distributed Leadership	*distributed, shared, responsibility, democratic*
Servant Leadership	*serving, leading by example, listening, empathy, awareness*
Student-centered leadership	*student body, personalized, individualized*
Growth Mindset	
	perseverance, persevere, grit, learning, confidence, failure, embrace challenge, learn
Systems Leadership	*from others*
	big picture, systems, school improvement

To complete the magnitude coding for the data, I systematically selected words that were used inside each transcript and conducted a search and count for each of them. Words that were

identified as being most prevalent were then compared with the same word in other cases, allowing for a cross-case analysis. As Elliott (2018) stated, "[when magnitude coding] it is not necessarily the number of times a code appears in the data, but how widespread it is among the data which may be significant" (p. 2857). Furthermore, the prevalence of the most popular words were also considered when looking back at the prevalence and the holistic coding categories to help determine the overall impact of the usage rates of the words by the participants.

Ethical Considerations

As a researcher, it was my duty to conduct and report my research in a manner that minimizes harm to the participants who are taking part (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). The following sections examine the ethical considerations faced when considering the breadth of this study.

Researcher Position

Upon entering into the research, it is essential that the researcher consider their positionality in relation to the participants and what impact that may have on the overall research that is being conducted. In the context of the research on the practices of founding heads of private schools, I did not have any authority over any of the participants. In addition, I did not sit on any boards that have authority over the schools to which any of the study's data is related. The considerations of the researcher position was discussed prior to any interviews being conducted, and the participants were made aware that I was approaching this work neither to provide evaluative information to authorities nor to gain any monetary profit from my learnings.

Furthermore, I was also aware of my own biases as I entered into the research. In particular, I was educated in a public system and raised by parents who worked in public education. Furthermore, I have been a teacher and leader of a western Canadian private school

that services both students with special and without special needs. Although I have background in public and private education, there are several parts of the educational landscape I have little to no experience in, such as boarding schools, International Baccalaureate programs, or gender specific educational contexts. As a result, I have biases as I have a deep appreciation for the value of public school education and a view towards the value of private school education.

Recruitment Procedures

Participation in this study was strictly voluntary. An email was sent out to all candidates for the study with a Letter of Invitation that outlined my research purpose and process. I made myself available to all potential candidates for a consultation via telephone or Zoom whenever necessary prior to engaging in the study. Upon expression of interest, I confirmed that the individuals met the criteria of the study. Finally, a confirmation letter and a proposed timeline for the semi-structured interviews was sent to all participants.

Informed Consent

An informed consent form (Appendix C.) was shared with each participant. The document outlined the purpose of the research and the value of their involvement. Finally, the informed consent detailed the fact that the participants have the right to withdraw from the study at any time prior to one month after the transcript has been verified and reviewed by the participant. All participants signed and returned the form prior to their interview.

Privacy and Confidentiality

As a researcher, I took every opportunity to protect the privacy and confidentiality of the participants of this study. Measures such as the use of pseudonyms in any reports or presentations, and secure physical and digital file storage and encryption were taken to ensure the comfort of the participants.

Potential Risk and Benefit for Participants

This was a minimal risk study. There was little risk to the participants as they were sharing their own experiences about a program they started over two decades ago. Physical risks such as discomfort or fatigue during the interview were considered. Participants were instructed that if at any point they would like to take a break or stop the interview due to any circumstance, they were within their rights to do so. Prior to starting the interview, I ensured the participants were in a safe place and had support if necessary by asking them specifically about their surroundings and their support systems. Furthermore, each of the schools, referred to by the founding heads of private schools who were part of the study, have reached a point of sustainability. The benefits to the participants may be that they gleaned some insight into their own leadership practices and these insights may go forward to allow them to advise others on what they learned. All participants were offered a copy of the final report for their own collections. Additionally, other individuals who are endeavoring to start a private school may learn from the contributions of the study participants. It is my hope that these learnings will go on to increase the possibility that new school startups will reach sustainability for the benefit of the students who attend these schools.

Ethics Approval

This research was subject to the approval of the University of Calgary's Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board approval process. I submitted the ethics application immediately following the completion of my candidacy exam, and it was approved in February of 2021. The Research Ethics Board number is #REB20-2258.

Trustworthiness

In this research, it was important to maintain a level of trustworthiness to ensure the results are of significance and value (Bloomberge & Volpe, 2016). What is essential is that, as researcher, I was able to balance the data that was collected with a fair and accurate depiction in the writing and reporting. With a fair and accurate depiction, came credibility, dependability, and potential transferability (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Credibility

As articulated in Bloomberg and Volpe (2016), credibility is elevated as the researcher considers and acts upon such items as researcher bias, involvement, and engagement with the participants, and triangulation of data of interviews, historical records of the schools, and the validation process (Merriam, 1998). This triangulation took place through the consideration of artifacts in relation to the information shared in the transcripts. Furthermore, by completing several rounds of coding and by having my supervisor periodically reviewing my coding process allowed for further credibility. I was the primary investigator in this study and my supervisory committee provided ongoing support as I reviewed the data. I followed these recommendations closely as I conducted, analyzed, and continue to present my research and findings.

A multiple site case-study methodology was employed to provide several sources of data to inform my findings. I selected participants from across Canada in an attempt to ensure a more comprehensive understanding of leadership practices used while being the founding leader of a private school. In addition, semi-structured interviews enabled me to create commonality in the collection of interview data. Upon the completion of these interviews, I used member checks and this helped avoid my bias and ensured the responses were reflective of the participants experiences.

Dependability

In this research, I approached dependability by creating a substantive research audit trail and by having portions of my work checked by my supervisor. Periodically throughout the process, I asked my doctoral supervisor to independently code sections of my interview transcripts and to check my analytic memos to ensure congruence and, therefore, dependability of my coding and findings. Each time we coded a source document, I followed up with a phone conversation to consider where there is convergence and divergence in our findings. We also used this time to fully flesh out researcher bias in an attempt to produce a dependable research finding. Finally, dependability is enabled through the transparency of describing the research steps from the onset to the conclusion of the work. Through the process of having regular supervisory meetings and dialogue with participants, I have maintained transparency with my committee and participants throughout the duration of this research.

Transferability

Through a rich description of the leader's practices at the time of a school's start, I anticipated the findings of this research could be transferable to the startup of new private schools in Canada and beyond. However, with this said, the nature of qualitative research does not necessarily create specific transferability across schools or leadership practices. I hope that, at a minimum, the findings may compel those who are thinking about starting a school to be mindful of their initial practices as these practices may have a material impact on the community they seek to lead. It may be the case that others can use this information to inform their recruitment and hiring of the founding school leaders as they enter the journey of starting a new private school in Canada. Finally, the approach used in this research may be transferrable and may garner further insights by studying the accounts of other founding leaders of schools.

Limitations

As Bloomberg and Volpe (2016) indicated that limitations serve to expose the conditions which may weaken the study. In the case of this research, there are several limitations that can be identified. The first limitation is that I am studying only Canadian private schools. As indicated in my literature review, there are several manifestations of schooling styles, and private schools are just one small subsection of these. Furthermore, schools exist in all parts of the world, and that this study is only taking place in Canada and this restricts the transferability of the findings to a very small segment of the global population. Another limitation is that there are only a small number of potential participants who were founding school leaders from 1980 on. I approximated that of the roughly 100 schools that qualify, 25% of them were founded between 1980-2000. Finally, many founding school leaders who meet the necessary criteria may have retired and were not available for an interview about the private school they started. In addition, a limitation may be the accuracy of the founding school leaders' memories about the initial days of their school (Thomsen & Brinkmann, 2019). As Thomsen and Brinkmann (2019) stated, "when an interviewee shares specific memories during an interview, these are not representative of their original experience" (p. 16). To overcome these challenges, interview techniques, as suggested by Thomsen and Birkmann (2019) were leveraged. These strategies included addressing changes in emotions, allowing time for recall, using concrete cues, and asking for specific memories. Lastly, there was a limited amount of records kept by some of these individuals, and this may have an impact on the accuracy of their contributions.

Delimitations

As defined by Bloomberg and Volpe (2016), "delimitations refer to the initial choices made about the broader, overall design of your study" (p.165). In the case of the present

research, there are several delimiting factors to consider. First, I chose to limit school participation to CAIS Accredited schools. This factor created a strong subset of schools that can be defined as sustainable by virtue of the fact that, at the time of writing, no accredited school has ceased to operate. A second delimiting factor is that the private schools were started between 1980 to 2000.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter of the dissertation, I articulated the thinking behind my selection of methodology and methods. The study and research questions fit the qualitative tradition using a multiple case study methodology. It was also integral to locate myself as a researcher to fully understand my positionality and biases in the research that was conducted. Participants were successfully recruited and interviewed remotely using Zoom technology. Due to the COVID-19 global pandemic, the mass introduction of Zoom made for seamless connection from across Canada and further assisted in the review and transcription of the interview. Furthermore, through an account of the coding process, I have provided a detailed overview of how I approached the data pertaining to these interviews in the context of school start-ups and the leadership practices that may have brought them to sustainability. Finally, I have reflected on the credibility, dependability, ethical considerations, and transferability of the findings of my study.

In the coming chapter, I will systematically consider the findings of the semi-structured interviews. The chapter opens with a summary of specific information about each school and the founding school leader. Next, there is a cross-case comparison done of each school and founding school leader. Finally, I explore how this data relates to each of the research questions in this study.

<div align="center">**CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS**</div>

Introduction

This qualitative multiple case study investigated the leadership practices of founding school leaders in Canadian private schools. The study sought to understand the leadership practices that founding school leaders perceived to make the school sustainable. In considering these factors, this study aimed to inform founding school leaders about how to lead upstart private schools towards sustainability.

The findings of this chapter are based on data gathered from semi-structured, individual interviews with four founding school leaders of private schools, as well as researcher analytic memos, and artifacts that were provided by the participants, such as historical documents from the schools. The following research questions guided the study:

1. How do founding school leaders describe the vision of the private school?

2. How do founding school leaders describe their leadership practices enacted in the beginning phases of operating the private school?

3. How do founding school leaders describe how they perceive how their practices have changed over the course of their tenure at the private school?

4. What leadership challenges do founding school leaders describe from their early years of operating a private school and how did these challenges change over time?

This chapter is divided into two sections. The first section examines each site including the school profile, the location, facilities, and finances, and the founding school leader's profile, school governance, school leadership, and leadership succession. In the second section, the research questions are discussed with relevant findings from a cross-case analysis, and, then, a synthesis across all four case studies is presented.

Background

   The founding school leaders of four Canadian private schools agreed to participate in an interview and share relevant artifacts as a part of my study. The sites represent schools from across Canada and each have a unique focus and value proposition. All names have been changed in order to protect the confidentiality of the school sites and individuals who worked at these institutions (see Table 4). In this chapter "school leader" followed by numbers 1-4 are used to denote the founding school leaders of four different private schools in Canada.

Table 4

School Leader and School Identifiers

Pseudonym	Abbreviation
School Leader 1	L1
School Leader 2	L2
School Leader 3	L3
School Leader 4	L4
School 1	S1
School 2	S2
School 3	S3
School 4	S4

School Summaries

In this section, school summaries are provided for each of the four sites. The summaries include a school profile, date of establishment, years in operation, original grades, opening student population, and current student populations.

School 1 (S1)

Table 5

S1 Profile Information

Date of Establishment	Years in Operation	Original Grades	Opening Student Population	Current Student Population
1965	55	Pre-kindergarten and kindergarten	36	700

School Profile

Founded in 1965, S1 is a day school that offers a co-educational program. S1 is the creation of a group of university professors. The professors came together and agreed upon the tenants of the program and set to creating a board of directors and searching for a founding school leader. The original board of directors consisted of six parents who had opted to move their children to this new school due to a lack of confidence in their current school placement. The basis of the search for the initial leader was a word-of-mouth referral. In the founding school leader's words, the planning for the school happened over the course of "only a few months."

The school's initial niche included both a Montessori style of education and the implementation of the International Baccalaureate (IB) program. The decisions about which unique program elements would be provided were jointly made with input from the founding group of professors, the board of directors, and the founding school leader. When the school opened it was a pre-kindergarten and kindergarten program only and had a total of 36 students. In the early years, the thrust of the marketing was primarily by word-of-mouth from one enrolled family to another. S1 is currently a kindergarten to Grade 12 program with over 700 students. The class size has been consistent over the years at about 18 students per class.

Location, Facilities, and Finances

Although the school is located in an urban setting, when S1 first opened it offered a unique style of education in the immediate geographical location. Over the course of the school's history, it has moved several times and each of the moves has been to non-educational purpose-built spaces which have required significant renovations to convert them to be operational for a school's use. Initially, the school leased their spaces and eventually was able to purchase their current locations. S1, from its inception, has relied on sharing athletic facilities with local groups and organizations so their students can have a broad range of experiences. The school has also had several iterations where the school was operating on multiple sites at the same time. S1 has relied on a strong relationship with the bank, consistent tuition payments, and fundraising to stay financially viable. As of this writing, S1 has not yet considered an endowment fund.

Leader 1 (L1)

Table 6

L1 Profile Information

Years as Leader of School	Age When L1 Became Leader of School	# of Leaders in the History of the S1	Leadership Practices of L1
41	28	4	Setting Direction
			Stimulate growth in professional capacities of staff
			Build trusting relationships with and among staff, students, and parents
			Improve the instructional program

Leader Profile

As shown in Table 6, the leader of school of S1, L1, was 28 years old when they were appointed, and they served for 41 consecutive years. Although the vast majority of their tenure at the school was in the most senior leadership role, early on they taught classes due to human resource constraints. L1 also built the early leadership team through a process of hiring educators and leaders who were previously professionally connected to the founding school leader. The second most senior leader at the school remained at the school for the duration of L1's time as leader of the school.

School Governance

When asked about the board's role in operations, L1 indicated that the board helped in the early years in aspects for which there was no internal capacity, such as finance. As S1 became big enough to have the capacity to deal with all business-related matters, the board shifted to an advisory model of governance. S1 is actively involved in the Canadian Accredited Independent Schools (CAIS) community, and when asked about the value of membership, L1 stated that the real value came in the networking, governance handbooks, and professional development for school leaders. Finally, when asked about when L1 thought the S1 would be sustainable, they stated, "I never doubted that it would succeed."

School Leadership

When speaking of leadership practices, L1 indicated that both servant leadership and instructional leadership were important in their practice. These leadership practices were accentuated as L1 was actively involved in teaching classes for the first three years. After leaving the classroom, L1 remained active in curriculum development and implementation throughout their tenure as school leader. When speaking of their direct involvement in curriculum development, L1 stated, "I often also sat down with the subject areas [leaders] to discuss any changes in the curriculum, as well, so I knew what was happening. I was sitting at the table and I wasn't necessarily leading those discussions."

Another leadership practice that L1 deployed was leading by being present and walking around while the school was in operation. L1 stated, "I was always walking around, and in the classrooms… I didn't stay in my office, that was my style, I think it really worked." L1 also indicated that distributed leadership was a style of leadership they were aware of and embraced. Whenever possible, L1 readily shared leadership roles and responsibilities with their staff. In

particular, the leadership distribution was shared with the earliest members of the staff, who also ended up being the longest serving employees.

When making decisions, L1 shared that they liked to develop consensus among their staff before finalizing any decision that would have a significant impact on the school operations, students, or parents. Of note, one impactful practice that L1 deployed was completing an annual review of every staff member, every year. Sitting down with each staff member to connect about what is important to them, and as a result building strong personal relationships, was highly valued by both the leader and the staff and was believed to be effective. L1 also indicated that they were responsible for learning what was necessary, when it was necessary. The emphasis on a culture of learning was evident as L1 stated, "I had to teach myself." Lastly, when asked about how their leadership changed over the course of their experience, L1 suggested that early on they did everything, but as the years passed they were able to move into more of an oversight role. This step back was enabled and supported by the foundational work that had been done previously in distributing the leadership amongst their staff.

Leadership Succession

Upon leaving the school, L1 was not a part of the hiring of the incoming school leader. The immediate successor was selected by the board of directors and was an internal candidate. L1 indicated that the initial succession planning was "just a disaster," as S1 had two school leaders come and go within a short period of time. Furthermore, L1 was not invited back to the school for over a decade after their departure and their insight was not sought after. This has changed recently but it still remains a point of frustration for L1. Several years after L1 had left the school, a different school leader invited them back to the community and that was welcomed by L1.

Challenges

The creation of S1 did not happen without both expected and unexpected challenges. These obstacles came in the form of lack of human resources, facility acquisition, enrollment management and employee recruitment, and retention. L1 indicated, "[in the early development of the school] I was doing everything. I was washing the dishes." They overcame this by having parents volunteer and help out where they could. L1 stated, "I always had parents involved." Lastly, L1 indicated that to overcome the challenging aspects of the start of the school, they increased the size of the leadership team. They acknowledged, "it was important, all of a sudden, to have leadership as I couldn't do it all, and so, I created [additional leadership roles]."

Summary

As school leader for over four decades, L1 clearly embodied the spirit of S1. L1's fingerprints are on every element of the school's design and functioning. L1 took the idea of a school and brought it to sustainability. Factors such as leadership practices, curriculum, location, and governance played instrumental roles in seeing this school find success. Over the course of the founding of the school, there were setbacks and challenges. As may be expected, the succession planning for a leader with such longevity did not take place without some challenges. However, with this said, L1 and S1 are currently finding ways to honour the contributions made in bringing S1 to sustainability.

School 2 (S2)

Table 7

S2 Profile Information

Date of Establishment	Years in Operation	Original Grades	Opening Student Population	Current Student Population
2006	15	Pre-kindergarten - Grade 4	70	700

School Profile

Founded in 2006, S2 is a day school that offers a co-educational program. S2 is the creation of a group of parents who became frustrated with the perceived quality of education their children were receiving. The original board of directors consisted of nine parents. The founding school leader was 40 years old when they were appointed to be the leader of the school, and they are still leading the program after 15 years. The founding board of directors conducted a nationwide search to identify the successful candidate. According to the school leader, the planning for the program happened "overnight." When describing the rapid development of the school, L2 spoke of quickly conceiving of the broad vision and mission of the school.

S2's niche is that they are an academically enriched, family-based, community school. The school leader emphatically stated, "This isn't a school, it is a movement." When the school was opened it had 70 students and a pre-kindergarten to Grade 4 program. In the early years, marketing consisted of word of mouth, recruitment of siblings, radio, and newspaper advertisements. S2 currently has 700 students enrolled and offers a kindergarten to Grade 12

program. The class size at S2 has remained consistent at 16-20 students for the entire history of the program.

Location, Facilities, and Finances

S2 was gifted with some exceptional property. The property was exceptional due to its size and location. In fact, the school leader stated, "the land we have owned has become a major part of our vision." However, while the land where the school currently resides was being developed into a purpose-built school, they leased a community building for the first two years. As a result, S2 has moved twice over the 15 years in operation. On their current site, they have five buildings and will add additional buildings in the coming years. The school leader indicated that they have six phases of development in their master plan and they are currently moving into the sixth and final stage. The school has done some fundraising to support facility development, however, the bulk of the funding has come from bank financing. The school leader reports that "a well-run school is an excellent customer for the bank." In saying this, the school leader is making comments about the consistent enrolment growth over time and the quality of the overall educational programming being offered.

With a clear vision for S2 and the opportunity provided by a generous gift of property, the school had the opportunity to start on a positive footing. The school leader's practices and the school's governance together served to take full advantage of the opportunities that were presented at the onset of the founding of S2.

Leader 2 (L2)

Table 8

L2 Profile Information

Years as Leader of School	Age When L2 Became Leader of School	# of Leaders in the History of the S2	Leadership Practices of L2
15	40	1	Build a shared vision
			Challenge the process –
			Learn from experience
			Build collaborative culture
			and distribute leadership
			Connect the school to its
			wider environment

Leader Profile

L2 was 40 years old when they were appointed school leader, and fifteen years later they remain in their role. The entirety of L2's career at this school has been in the most senior leadership role, however, in the early years, they taught classes. In the context of playing multiple roles in the school, L2 stated on multiple occasions, "you have to do it all." Early in their leadership, L2 hired a small group of trusted leaders to join the senior leadership team and the entire team of senior leaders is still currently in their roles at the school. When asked about what L2 was looking for when they hired this initial team of senior leaders, they stated, "I was looking for dedication, not pedigree."

School Governance

With respect to the board of directors, L2 indicated that their role has changed over the time the school has been open. L2 stated, "[the school] had a board of directors that was visionary and supportive." In the initial days of the school's history, due to a lack of professional skills within the school administrative team, such as finance, the board of directors leaned towards being more operational than strategic. However, as more professional talent was added to the administration, the board of directors at S2 transitioned from an operational board to a strategic board over the course of the school's operations. L2 attributes the transition of the board from operational to strategic to a strong and trusting relationship between school administration and the governors of the board.

School Leadership

L2 noted that their leadership practices changed over the course of their tenure at the S2. Initially, due to resource constraints, they were obligated to take on all aspects of the school operations. L2 stated, "I did it all, one hundred percent of everything, for the first 10 years." L2's description of their work contained several characteristics that may align closely with servant leadership. L2 exemplified servant leadership by taking on teaching roles and continuing in these roles throughout their work at the school. As more employees were hired, and the organization developed more capacity, L2 indicated they had adopted a more distributed model of leadership.

With respect to distributed leadership, L2 stated that in their leadership they, "structured effectively, hire the right people, give them their space, give them the autonomy they require to do their own thing, make a special effort not to alter or undermine what they're trying to do, but at the same time, jump in there if you think things might be going in the wrong direction." L2 also took the opportunity to engage the wider community and expose their staff to the

perspectives of other schools and industries. It was not uncommon for L2 to travel with a team of staff to learn from companies inside and outside the educational field. Finally, with respect to decision making, L2 stated, "I'm a consensus-building leader." Over the course of their leadership, these practices remained consistent.

Challenges

With respect to the challenges L2 faced, they indicated that they came in the form of creating a small, yet strong, senior leadership team and to solidify the school's reputation as an institution of choice. As L2 stated, "initially it was all about creating a small management team that was very competent." Furthermore, in the area, there was a history of private schools failing. L2 recounted, "the first few years it was about creating stability… we also had a prior school that went bankrupt in [in our region]… and that was tricky so we had to deal with a little bit of residue for a year or two of that operation going bankrupt." L2 overcame this challenge by "identifying a clear vision and articulating the vision with the different constituents."

Summary

In the case of S2 and L2, they were given the opportunity to enter an educational market that had little competition for private education and take advantage of strong leadership and locational opportunity to bring their school to a sustainable place. L2's ability to develop a vision and demonstrate strong leadership has seen S2 grow to a place of prominence in the community, both in terms of academic results and sheer school size. Furthermore, the importance of faculty culture and a cohesive and long serving senior leadership team is accentuated in this case study.

School 3 (S3)

Table 9

S3 Profile Information

Date of Establishment	Years in Operation	Original Grades	Opening Student Population	Current Student Population
1989	32	Grade 1 - Grade 4	50	350

School Profile

School Three (S3) is a day school that is a co-educational program. Similar to S2, S3 was founded by a group of disgruntled parents who believed a new private school may be able to better serve their children's educational needs. The original board of directors consisted of 12 parents. The founding school leader was 32 years old when the school opened, and they served as school leader for seven years. The search for this school leader was done informally and centered around a word-of-mouth referral process. When discussing the original planning for the school, the founding leader of the school stated, "[they and another school employee] went out for dinner one night and we sat at this bar… and in the whole evening we planned the entire school." The school was first envisioned in April, and by September of that year it was open. The founding school leader reflected on the process and said of the days leading up to the opening were typified as having, "reckless abandon. You know what they say is the greatest thing about planning? The best advantage of planning is you never have to do anything because you're always planning … [starting the school] was ready, fire, aim."

Location, Facilities, and Finances

According to the founding leader of school, S3's niche is that they are in an advantageous physical location and the program offered academic rigour that local public schools were not able to offer. The location of the school was typified as being in an affluent area of the

community where there was plenty of access to local shared spaces and there were no private schools in the proximity. As the school developed, the program has come to be known for a traditional university preparatory program and for placing value on critical thinking. In addition to the academic program, the school also offered a Christian component to the education. Finally, the founding leader of school was promoting entrepreneurial spirit and joy to parents who were initially signing up.

When asked what their pitch to the first parents was, the founding leader of school said, "It's going to be fun." In the beginning, all marketing was by word of mouth. When S3 opened its doors for the first time there were 50 students enrolled in Grade 1 to Grade 4. The school currently has Grade 1 to Grade 10, with a student enrollment of 350 students. Class sizes have remained constant at 18 to 20 students over the course of the past 32 years.

When the school was established, it was located in a leased portion of a church. Within the first five years, the school moved to its own location and has since made four major additions to keep pace with the school's growth. The school's move from the leased church to its current location is the only move it has made. From the beginning, S3 has been able to do most of the capital development through fundraising. The founding leader of school stated that in their experience, "the biggest reason people don't give is, they weren't asked," and "people give to people, not causes."

In summary, S3 came together from a group of motivated parents who wanted something better for their children. The founders of S3 were fortunate to find an appropriate leader for the school and a suitable location for the program. Once the foundation of the S3 was established, the impact of school leadership played an important role in bringing the school to sustainability.

Leader 3 (L3)

Table 10

L3 Profile Information

Years as Leader of School	Age When L3 Became Leader of School	# of Leaders in the History of the S3	Leadership Practices of L3
7	32	4	Build a shared vision
			Provide support and demonstrate consideration for individual staff members
			Encourage the heart
			Be personally involved

Leader Profile

L3 was 32 years old when they took on the role, and they served for seven years. Early in L3's leadership, they took on teaching roles due to a lack of human resources. Within a few years, L3 had moved out of the classroom, however, they remained very engaged in school supervision. One example L3 provided about how they remained connected to their staff and students is "[they] did lunch duty, every day, for seven years in a row." L3's initial hire for the senior leadership team was someone they had worked with before, and they ended up staying at S3 for the entire time L3 served as leader. When reflecting on the other senior leader, L3 stated, "I didn't know how close we would become… [the other leader] was there until I left."

School Governance

Early in the history of S3, the board of directors served as an operational board. As there became more internal expertise, L3 reflected that the board become more strategically oriented. When speaking of the importance of strong governance, L3 stated, "Number 1, recognize the value of governance. Treat it with respect. Number 2, the most effective leaders manage their boards, of course without their boards ever realizing they're being managed." As L3 reflected on the leadership behaviours required to manage the board, they said, "[Managing the board] requires a calmness, you've got to be humble, you've got to learn to shut up, you've got to say, okay." Finally, when L3 reflected on the relationship with the board chair, they indicated, "understanding that the cultivation of a relationship with the chair is a very magical thing, not to be at the expense of cultivating a relationship with your senior management."

School Leadership

When speaking of leadership practices, L3 stated they would typify the early leadership style as being "youthful, enthusiastic, reckless, ambitious, but controlled ambition, with the invincibility that you have from the age of 25 to 35," and that "naivety and ignorance was a big friend." L3 goes further and indicated they had "an unwavering confidence that [the board and new head] will get [a school open and running] done." L3 also identified that they built strong relationships and this was central to their success in leadership. When speaking of relationship building, L3 said, "I'm a relational teacher and a relational [person]. I was now running a school and there were 50 kids, so, of course, I knew everybody, and everybody's brother and sister and parent." In a similar vein as the lunch duty example, L3 indicated they believed in being a servant leader. When speaking of how L3 viewed this in their leadership, they said "I used to always be the first one at [our school] and made the coffee every morning, for everybody," "you

have to have a belief in servant leadership," and "you really had to convey to everybody that you were there to serve them, 'what can I do to make things better?' You could never ask anyone to do anything that you weren't prepared to do twice as much yourself."

Leadership Succession

At the conclusion of L3's tenure at S3, they were not involved in the succession planning or hiring for their replacement. When asked about the lack of participation, L3 indicated that they believed the outgoing leader should not have any role to play. Since L3's departure, there have been three school leaders, the first two have served for short periods and the third has been in place for over 10 years.

Challenges

In the case of S3, L3 stated that the greatest challenge came in the community's perception of the school's ability to achieve sustainability. L3 stated, "the biggest challenge was whether we were going to survive, or not, and a lot of people said 'no, there's no way.'" However, L3's optimism would not let them stop forging ahead. On the theme of optimism and fortitude, L3 stated, "I didn't have anything to lose." Beyond the initial perception challenge, the next challenge L3 and S3 faced was financial. In the case of S3, L3 was able to resolve the financial challenge through being flexible and agile. L3 leveraged school fees, tuition, giving, and bank financing to bring the school to a place of economic stability. Lastly, L3 indicated that there were two other pressing challenges in the early years, "enrollment and staffing." L3 took on these with a strong word-of-mouth presence and through local media such as radio advertisements and articles in papers and magazines.

Summary

Although L3's tenure was significantly shorter than other school leaders in these case studies, their impact was no less important. L3 embodied the vision, mission, and values of S3 and brought confidence to the school community. A strong commitment to the faculty culture and developing a strong leadership team resulted in a dynamic and sustainable school program.

School 4 (S4)

Table 11

S4 Profile Information

Date of Establishment	Years in Operation	Original Grades	Opening Student Population	Current Student Population
2000	21	kindergarten - Grade 5	40	540

School Profile

S4 was founded in 2000 and is a co-educational day school. The school was initially founded by two parents who desired to create a school for their children to attend. As the founding leader of school stated "They were just committed to doing something for their kids." The original board of directors was five current parents, including the two founders. The founders did a very informal search for a founding school leader and it centred around word-of-mouth in the educational community. The school was first conceived in October and was opened the following September.

S4's niche is being student-centred, having an IB Program, and being in an advantageous location. The founding leader of school felt as though the school offered a more "casual private

school experience" than other traditional schools that existed in the market. Furthermore, there were no private schools in close proximity to their initial location. Finally, there were no schools in the region that were offering the IB Program to students. According to the founding leader of school, the program aimed to be the "leading IB school in [the region]." During the first few years of the school, marketing was done by newspaper advertisements, word-of-mouth and in-person information sessions. S4 started as a kindergarten to Grade 5 program with an enrollment of 40 students and is now a kindergarten to Grade 12 program with 540 students. The class size has remained at 20 students per class for the entire existence of the program.

Location, Facilities, and Finance

When S4 opened, it took advantage of a lease offered by a local community centre. Although the first space was not purpose-built as a school, the staff, and students adapted to make the best of the environment. Within the first few years, the school had purchased a permanent location and continued to acquire buildings as it added student population. L4 stated, "it was advantageous to build as [the school] needed, as opposed to having to build a big building right off the top and then having it empty." S4 has had to move twice during its 21 years in operation. The school managed to balance prudence, fundraising, and financing to afford to operate. The founding leader of school stated, "To be sustainable, [the organization] had to break even. [The organization] had to be able to be sensitive about what expenses were."

S4 took advantage of a location where there were few private school competitors and an absence of a specific academic program. Furthermore, by demonstrating agility and flexibility in their facility acquisition and usage, S4 was able to quickly scale the program to meet the needs of many students in the area.

Leader 4 (L4)

Table 12

L4 Profile Information

Years as Leader of School	Age When L4 Became Leader of School	# of Leaders in the History of the S4	Leadership Practices of L4
15	40	4	Building a shared vision
			Model the school's values and practices
			Stimulate growth in the professional capacities of staff

Leader Profile

S4's founding leader was 40 years old when they took the lead and they served for 15 years. During their tenure, L4 found pockets of time to teach classes. When speaking of how they make teaching work, L4 stated, "role modelling in a place of strength was effective, so I would teach middle years math and science." Over time, L4 taught less and less as they quickly realized, "I found myself shortchanging the kids because I wasn't prepping as well as I thought I should." In S4's leadership, there was little mention of the role of the senior leadership team or their longevity within the school, however, there was an indication that S4 opted to widely distribute the leadership amongst their teachers. With respect to the distribution of leadership, L4

stated, "part of my leadership… I really like to distribute the leadership… I wanted to create a way where as many teachers as possible took on responsible roles."

School Governance

As S4 contemplated the role of the board of directors, it was clear that they were primarily a strategic board from the onset. The board was focused on topics such as facilities, finance, and risk management, and had very little insight and input into the day-to-day operational items. Upon taking on the leadership role, it is evident that L4 had many of the business-oriented competencies within himself or amongst his team.

School Leadership

On the topic of school leadership, S4 indicated that they were a "high school [person]" and they attributed this to their ability to understand the full scope and sequence of a kindergarten to Grade 12 school. L4 has also done extensive academic studying on educational leadership and often referred to Sergiovanni's (2000) life-world point of view. On the topic of Sergiovanni's (2000) theory, L4 stated, "I wanted to make sure that I was clear on the unintended consequences of things that you might do and think five years ahead… Something as simple as bells. For example, [the school] never, in all the time I was there, had bells. It is a very small systems world thing, but it can actually drive a whole lot of behaviours that sometimes you don't want." L4 also commented on the importance of having passion for understanding school leadership in the context of curriculum. L4 stated, "I think you have to have the passion about the pedagogical piece, but you have to have that kind of analytical understanding of how the place works and how you can resource it properly." Furthermore, L4 emphasized the importance of developing staff to be the best teachers they could be, to this end, they stated, "we were able to create this culture of learning."

Leadership Succession

At the conclusion of their time at S4, L4 was not involved in the recruitment or interview process for their successor. As L4 left, they stated, "I was very intentional not to be connected. … I moved out of town." L4 shared that the incoming school leader was "very different than me." Upon L4's departure, there were a couple of rapid leadership transitions. On the topic of the school leaders who followed, L4 shared, "[S4] has had three [school leaders] since I've left, one was two years and then the second [leader] was a caretaker. … Now I'm involved back at this distant society level." In this instance, L4's definition of a caretaker was an interim leader not intended to stay for the long-term, but to help with the transition while a search for a new head was undertaken. Currently, L4 sits as a governor on one of S4's boards. When speaking of professional distance from the current school leader, L4 said, "I make it very, very clear I want nothing to do with the [leader] of school. The board does the board's work. All [the board] are doing is getting the right board in place, then that's it." In conclusion, on the topic of succession, L4 emphasized, "I did not play a role. In my opinion, the succession planning was horrible."

Challenges

When considering the challenges L4 faced when starting S4, they indicated that staffing, student recruitment, and the complexity of running a large system were paramount. With respect to hiring strong staff, L4 built a strong relationship with a university with a strong education program. L4 indicated that they reached directly to the president of the program and said, "can you let me know your best [student teachers] and have them get in touch with me." When it came to student recruitment, L4 stated that recruiting students was challenging due to having, "very limited resources and not being a marketer myself… it wasn't like you were selling cars, you were selling something bigger than that, and more expensive than [cars]." L4 was able to

overcome the challenges relating to student recruitment by being persistent, learning as they went, and through a strong word-of-mouth campaign. Finally, L4 identified the complexity of running a large system as a primary challenge. To succeed, in spite of the complexity of a large system, L4 stated, "Part of my leadership… is I really like to distribute the leadership… I wanted to create a way where as many teachers as possible took on responsible roles."

Summary

L4 served for 15 years as the school leader and clearly lived the mission, visions, and values of the program. Over the course of S4's growth and development, the school and the leadership remained agile with respect to school location and program offerings. The overall quality of the program was hinged on strong staff hiring, development, and responsive school leadership. L4 managed to evolve with the S4's growth and adapted to the needs that were required of them as a leader.

Case Study Comparisons

To get a full picture of how these four cases are similar and different, the next section of this chapter will aim to make meaningful comparisons between leaders and their contexts. As shown in Table 13, there are several similarities, such as limited starting grade offerings, specific value program offering, and the age of the founding school leader. However, there are also several notable differences between the schools, such as length of the school leader's tenure and the size of the boards of directors.

Table 13

Case Study Comparisons

	S1	S2	S3	S4

Date of Establishment	1965	2006	1989	2000
Years in Operation	55	15	32	21
Original Grades	Pre-kindergarten - Kindergarten	Pre-kindergarten - Grade 4	Grade 1 - Grade 4	Kindergarten - Grade 5
Opening Population	36	70	50	40
Current Grades	Pre-kindergarten – Grade 12	Pre-Kindergarten – Grade 12	Pre-Kindergarten – Grade 9	Kindergarten – Grade 12
2020 School Population	700	700	350	540
Tenure of Founding Leader	41	15+	7	15
Age of the Founding Leader when appointed	28	40	32	40

Number of school leaders in the history of the school	4	1	4	4
Founding Leader Succession was an internal hire	Yes	NA	No	No
Founding Leader's was involved in their successor's hire	No	NA	No	No
Number of times the school has moved locations	5	2	2	2
Class Size	18	18-20	18-20	20
Academic differentiator	Montessori and IB	Academic Enrichment	Traditional University Preparatory Program	IB

The original number of governors	6	9	12	5
Founding leader taught upon the school opening	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Founding leaders taught for the duration of their leadership	No	No	No	No

In summary, it is worthwhile to consider the similarities and differences in the objective data about these four schools in this cross-case comparison. In the cases of these sustainable private schools, the founding leader started their work at 40 years old or younger, they stayed in their position for over seven years, they all taught in the program, and they were champions of a specific type of education. Of note, the programs all moved locations during their operations, all leaders stopped teaching at one point, and the class size of the school was always less than 20 students. The primary difference in the data presented in Table 13 is that each school had a different program differentiator and there is little consistency in the size and makeup of their boards of directors. In the next section, I will take a deeper look at how the data from the interviews, artifacts, and analytic memos served to answer my research questions.

Research Questions

In this section, five key findings are presented according to the research questions that guided the study.

Table 14

Findings Summary

Research Question	Thematic Findings
How do founding school leaders describe the vision of the private school?	Finding 1.1 Founding school leaders in the context of this study typically defined the vision for their private school in the terms of: • their program's unique value proposition, • the profile of their graduates, and • the school's faculty culture.
How do founding school leaders describe their leadership practices enacted in the beginning phases of operating the private school?	Finding 2.1 Founding school leaders identified a range of leadership practices they enacted during the start-up and beginning phases of operating a private school. Leaders in this study identified the importance of the following leadership practices: • communicating their vision, • creating opportunities for staff to build capacity,

	- modelling the behaviours and actions they wish to see in staff and students, and
	- building a collaborative culture.
How do founding school leaders describe how they perceive how their practices have changed over the course of their tenure at the private school?	Finding 3.1 Founding school leaders in this study indicated that their practices have shifted over the course of their leadership. In particular, as they built capacity in their organization, they were able to move from an operational stance to a strategic stance. This same shift was recognized in the governance structures of their schools.
What leadership challenges do founding school leaders describe from their early years of operating a private school and how did these challenges change over time?	Finding 4.1 The challenges that founding school leaders faced inevitably evolved over time. Central to their overall success was a culture of learning, for themselves and for their school. In three of the four instances, the final challenge the leaders faced was that of succession planning.

Research Question 1

When considering the question, "How do founding leaders describe the vision of the private school," founding school leaders in the context of this study typically defined the vision for their private school in the terms of: (a) their program's unique value proposition, (b) the profile of their graduates, and (c) the school's faculty culture. It is clear that all founding leaders

held a strong and consistent vision for their schools. These visions were articulated to all members of their communities: their parents, their boards of directors, and their students. Throughout the case studies, leaders continuously came back to the articulation of the vision for their school though the lenses of a specific market niche, through the profile of their graduates, and through the richness of the school's faculty culture.

A Program's Value Proposition

When founding leaders of schools spoke about their market niche, each leader came back to two specific differentiators: location and program of studies. Prior to opening their school, each leader had done formal and informal market research on where the location and program gaps existed within the communities they were a part of. Identifying these market opportunities and seizing upon them may have been an integral part of their program's overall success and sustainability. The value proposition presented by each leader was integral in starting and sustaining their private schools.

In each instance, the school leader addressed the importance of the location of their school in their early success. L1 noted that starting the school in a major urban center was advantageous as they were able to share sports facilities and not have to immediately build expensive buildings and structures. L2 cited the fact their school had been gifted property and this would serve as the home of their future schools. In the case of L3, they were cognizant of the proximity to an abundance green spaces, the lack of other private schools, and the affluent socio-economic status of the surrounding residents. L4's decision on the S4's location hinged on the distance to other private schools and the lack of opportunity for students to be engaged in the IB program in the area.

Beyond location, each school leader also identified a program niche that would set them apart from other private schools in the surrounding area. L1 and L4 spoke the importance of IB programming. In the case of LI the IB program was coupled with a Montessori approach. L2 took a bit of a different approach and appealed to a broader educational opportunity by defining S2's program as "a movement." S4 entered the market as a traditional university preparatory school which coupled "spirituality," "critical thinking," and "fun." Whether it was a structured curriculum, such as IB, or a feeling, such as joy, each school leader identified a specific gap in the market they wished to fill.

Profile of the Graduate

Throughout the case studies, it was common to hear founding leaders speak about the importance of understanding the profile of their graduates. Interestingly, some schools went nearly a decade without graduating a single student; however, according to the leaders, the profile of their graduates was always a part of their vision for the school.

In all instances, the leaders of the schools identified post-secondary opportunities as being an integral part of their graduate's profile. L1 stated that they believed having the IB program would open doors to "go to an American university, … they had a very good chance." L2 stated directly, "our expectation was that we were a university preparatory school in that we were preparing our students to excel at university." In addition to university preparatory programming, all leaders agreed that their programs offered strong and enhanced academics compared to other school choices in their areas. L4 made the statement, "I wanted them to have done well academically, to their level, so that they would be standing on that stage ready for the next piece." L2 echoed this sentiment when they said, "we do have an enriched program."

Finally, each private school worked their student's overall character into their niche. In the instance of L3, faith was a main pillar of S3's values. In the instance of L1 and L4, starting with a foundation of IB education was important and a core component of this type of education is to become open-minded and caring learners. When speaking about the profile of their graduate, L4's final statement was, "I want them to be good people."

Faculty Culture

Each school leader spoke about the importance of having a strong faculty culture. Having the right people, doing the right jobs at the right times was an important element of their school's success. They developed this culture through hiring practices, school life, and leadership practices.

When speaking about hiring practices, L1 stated, "although I didn't know about the concept of faculty culture, what I was really learning was that it wasn't about hiring the best people or all that. It was about creating a mechanism, and all this where we're just going to allow people to really flourish." Given S1 was aiming to develop well rounded students, L1's hiring practices followed suit. With respect to hiring for culture, L1 stated, "I was looking for a very well-rounded person." L3 further supported the importance of culture when hiring staff. They stated, "we're all on the same page and we just have the same values and ideas." L4 also spoke about the importance of hiring for culture. When speaking about their leadership practices, L4 shared, "I look for people who were ready to be adventuresome and were comfortable in their own skin… So my leadership was really based on hiring the best people I could… creating a culture I really wanted." To conclude, when asked about what is important for their school's success, L2 stated, "we really focus on the staff here." This serves as a strong theme throughout all interviews with founding leaders.

In these schools, faculty culture was embedded into school life; the everyday activities of the staff and leadership. L3 emphasized how important it is to live a strong faculty culture in all actions when they state,

> "you have to believe in servant leadership… so you really had to convey to everybody that you were there to serve them. What can I do to make things better? You could never ask anyone to do anything that you weren't prepared to do twice as much yourself. I knew darn well that if I wanted litter to be a thing, everybody just had to see me picking up litter, and I didn't have to say a word and eventually everybody would start picking [litter] up."

L4 concurred with the importance of the culture of schools and articulated, "I just think that the [school leader's] biggest job is to develop and nurture the right culture in the school."

L2 spoke about the importance of the physical school design and its overall impact on faculty behaviours and culture. When speaking of how S2 determined the best overall design for their facility, L2 stated, "We toured Disney and we toured Pixar and looked at the design of their campus and how they created these collisions and what they provided for young staff at the time. So we had a certain degree of success mimicking that in our campus, but it was very intentional."

When thinking about servant leadership as a driver for strong faculty culture, L3 tied this leadership style to faculty culture by stating, "You are at the ground floor, you are looking at the school now and you were there at the beginning, I mean, so if everybody buys into that it is on the same page and just where you have this feeling that we're all going to do it together, that's culture." L1 supported this idea of servant leadership as they stated, "you have to be among your staff." In response to distributed leadership and their style, L2 liked their work to a team in saying, "I really like to pass everything on that I can. That's part of my leadership style too, understand that it's a team behind everything."

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Overall, faculty culture seems to be of paramount importance for these founding school leaders. When reflecting on how imperative faculty culture is, L3 emphatically stated, "I say categorically, [faculty culture] is the solution to every problem in school, without a doubt, and if you don't focus on it, it really interferes with the solution of everything else, you can't do without faculty culture being number 1." When asked what L1 was most proud about when thinking of their school, they stated, "you should be leading together… and believe in people that are there, because that rubs off in terms of how they treat each other." Furthermore, when reflecting on the success of the school, L3 went onto say, "There's never been a culture like that in any place that I worked at, that we are all creating something you realize that this is [how] things work, we are all like superheroes for God's sakes, we did it." With respect to their school, L4 said, "I think I'm most proud of the culture that we developed at the school."

Research Question 2

When considering the question, "How do founding leaders describe their leadership practices enacted in the beginning phases of operating a private school," it was common for leaders in these case studies to discuss similar leadership practices as they reflected on their journey through leadership in their school. As founding leaders spoke about the specific leadership practices they embodied during the beginning phases of their school's inception, they most often spoke of (a) communicating their vision, (b) creating opportunities for staff to build capacity, (c) modeling the behaviours and actions they wish to see in staff and students, and (d) building a collaborative culture.

Leadership Practices

The leadership practices that founding leaders deployed in the beginning phases of their school are consistent among the four cases. All leaders identified the importance of

communicating their vision, building capacity in their staff, modelling behaviours, and actions they wish to see in their staff and students and building a collaborative culture.

Communicating a consistent vision was brought up over 50 times in the course of the interviews. Founding leaders see this as a central element to establishing a sustainable school. L1 indicated that a practice they undertook to establish a strong vision was, "we had lots of staff retreats to bring school and leadership forward." L2 identified vision as one of the foundational elements of their school's success, they stated, "so stability first, identify a clear vision and articulating that vision with the different constituents." Often times, this vision is linked to the portrait of the graduate. L4 spoke about the vision of the school and the portrait of the graduate when they stated, "I always had this vision of the student on the stage at graduation, and I wanted the kids to be confident, I wanted them to be good people, I wanted them to have done well academically, to their level, so that they would be standing on a stage ready for the next piece."

Another practice the leaders in this study commonly discussed was providing opportunities for their staff to build capacity. This can be easily linked to distributed leadership and seen as a necessary practice as a school continues to scale in size and require capacity building. L2 identified having a strong team that has the flexibility to do what they need to in order to find success. When speaking about the leadership team at S2 and what made them successful, L2 stated, "the autonomy to manage and govern accordingly within the school." Furthermore, when speaking about how to develop a strong faculty, they stated, "we want [the teachers] to grow into the top professionals." L4 identified that hiring younger staff and moulding them as members of the school team was advantageous. With respect to hiring, L4 stated, "I would rather hire young teachers that I could mould … I realized my most important job as the [school leader] is to hire the right people."

A leadership practice shared by all was modeling the school's values and practices. L1 modelled what they hoped they would see in their staff by saying, "I worked six days a week." L3 knew that showing a commitment for organization in the school was important and lived this, they articulated it in by stating, "I remember I would straighten the hallways and making sure that you that was sort of my 6:30 to 7:30 [AM]routine." As mentioned earlier, all founding school leaders also engaged in teaching a variety of classes as their schools started. Finally, L1 shared that they had instituted a 'fire side' chat with every staff member, once every year. They indicated that listening was important as a part of their school's culture and they wanted to live this in their individual practices.

Building a collaborative culture was articulated consistently through the ideas of positive faculty culture and consensus building. With respect to consensus building, L1 stated, "I led by consensus … we would sit down and unusually once a week to talk about the development of curriculum." L2 echoed the sentiment regarding consensus in their leadership when they said, "I'm a consensus building leader…. I do have the authority and opportunity to make a decision that may not be consensus driven decision, but I've literally probably made two of those in my whole time here." L3 emphasized the importance of collaboration with respect to faculty culture in the statement, "you have this feeling that we're all going to do it together, that's culture."

It is clear that there are a variety of leadership practices used by founding school leaders who participated in this study and discussed their practices used when starting a school. The leaders in the four cases utilized their leadership abilities to bring out the best in their schools, and ultimately to bring their programs from start-up to sustainability. As the founding school leaders transitioned from the first few years of operations, many of their leadership practices

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evolved with the changes that were happening in their environments as discussed in the next section.

Research Question 3

When considering the question, "How do founding school leaders describe how they perceived how their practices have changed over the course of their tenure at the private school," all four leaders in this study indicated that their practices have shifted over the course of their leadership. In particular, as they built capacity in their organization, they were able to move from an operational stance to a strategic stance. This same shift from operational to strategic was recognized in the governance structures of their schools.

Operational Leadership

In the context of these case studies, a common theme across founding school leaders was that they were initially involved in all aspects of running the school, from ordering supplies to teaching classes. L1 indicated, "every Monday I brought out all the materials, set them up and on Friday, put them away because there was Sunday school classes. I ordered [all the required school supplies]."

The leaders' operational involvement also extended well beyond that of educational competencies. Founding school leaders were expected to assist in finding and acquiring facilities for their programs, they were required to build relationships with banks and donors, and they were required to be the lead marketers for their programs. L3 found themselves in a complicated lease agreement where they were having to balance the relationship of two organizations leasing the same space and L4 reported that they "looked at about 100 places" where their school could operate. L1 noted that much of their success was attributed to "a very friendly bank manager," and L2 indicated that they preferred working with the banks as opposed to donors because the

bank was "more predictable." However, working in the area of advancement was required for all founding school leaders and they needed to find ways to raise money to realize their dreams of reaching school sustainability. L2 indicated that they are involved in "constant fundraising" to be able to reach sustainability.

Strategic Leadership

In the context of strategic leadership, instead of leaders asking themselves what do we need to do today, they are considering where could we be tomorrow? For the schools in this case study, this thinking manifested in leaders finding a long-term physical home for the school, managing debt, settling on what grades would be offered, and dedicating their time to exclusively to administrative related tasks. All schools in the study have moved from where they originated into a more permanent location. Furthermore, all schools moved from a leasing arrangement to an ownership position. With ownership came mortgages and school debt. Schools and their boards worked to compensate for the debt servicing all the while working to build cash reserves to allow their schools to maintain operations while revenue may fluctuate due to enrollment and expense adjustments.

Founding school leaders also saw their schools start small and eventually find a capacity for the number of students and grades in their schools. Managing growth with maintaining culture was a consistent focus for leaders in the study. Lastly, the one thing all leaders had in common was they all were required to leave the classroom in order to focus on managing school operations full time. All the founding school leaders in this study found time to be involved in the school life, through reading to students or teaching a specific lesson, but none of the leaders who were interviewed reported that they retained a constant teaching schedule. Of note, three of the four founding school leaders also indicated that their boards of directors also shifted from

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operational to strategic during the shift from start-up to sustainability. This shift saw individual directors become less hands on in day-to-day operations and begin to exercise their duties a more visionary level.

Research Question 4

When determining "what leadership challenges do founding leaders describe from their early years of operating a private school and how did these challenges change over time," the challenges that founding school leaders faced inevitably evolved as time progressed. These challenges started with enrollment, moved to hiring quality staff, then to facilities development, and curriculum creation. Throughout each leader's journey, they were continually being faced with new and complex challenges that required to be agile in their thinking. In three of the four instances, the final challenge the leaders faced was that of succession planning.

Succession Planning

In the case of three of the four leaders studied, they were faced with considering succession planning after their tenure at the school. In all three experiences, their successor's term was shorter than theirs and the founding leader looked at the succession process with questions, and on occasion, contempt. The three phases of succession planning in the case of these schools were recruitment, induction, and ongoing connection with the founding leader. Each experience was markedly different, however they all resulted in a similar outcome.

With respect to recruiting the succeeding school leaders, a relatively standard approach was undertaken by the boards of directors when searching for a successor to the founding leader. In all instances, the founding leader was not involved in the search and the board of directors engaged external search firms to complete the task of selecting the new school leader. Founding

leaders acknowledged that they were consulted during the process, however they had little to no say in the final selection.

In the case of all three schools, there was no report of transition planning from the founding leader to the succeeding leader. In nearly all cases, it seemed that the hand off was limited or non-existent. On two of the three occasions, the succeeding school leader was an external candidate and in once case it was an internal candidate.

Finally, all three founding leaders did not return in a leadership capacity after leaving their formal role as school leader. L1 and L4 moved away from formal school leadership and into contractor type positions. In fact, L4 moved out of the city and to another location all together, the intention of this move was to give the school and the community some space. In the case of L3, they moved immediately into another formal school leadership role in another private school. All three founding school leaders noted that they waited for formal invitations to return to their schools. In the instance of L1, this invitation did not arrive until their successor had left the program and there was another leader in place.

Chapter Summary

As a result of the cross-case analysis in this study, there were four key findings. The first finding is that the leaders developed and defined a key vision for their schools in the context of the school's value proposition, the profile of their graduates, and the importance of faculty culture. The second finding pertains to the most common and shared leadership practices. They shared the practices that involved communicating their vision, creating opportunities for staff to build capacity, modelling the behaviours and actions they wish to see in staff and students, and building a collaborative culture. The third finding is that leaders needed to demonstrate agility in their leadership focus. School leaders were required to excel in academic, facility, advancement,

and faculty leadership, all at different times and at different intensities. Finally, the fourth finding is that the challenges leaders faced evolved over the course of their school's development, and as such, their leadership focus was required to evolve to address these emerging challenges.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

Introduction

The aim of this research was to develop a deeper understanding of the leadership practices used by founding school leaders of private schools that contributed to sustainability. Undertaking a qualitative multiple case study was integral to the process of creating knowledge that may assist other school founders in finding success from start-up to sustainability. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), the nature of qualitative research is in "understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences" (p. 6). By interviewing four individuals who were founding school leaders and had first-hand experience in bringing a new private school to sustainability, I was better able to understand their practices. Furthermore, by using a multiple case study, I was able to better understand commonalities and move beyond conclusions that may be drawn from a single case (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

A conceptual framework (Figure 1) was developed to guide my understanding of the developmental phases of a new private school. The conceptual framework aimed to demonstrate a sequential and cyclical process that is involved in starting a private school and sustaining continual growth and improvement over time. The framework identified the following items in the sequential process of establishing a private school: (1) the school as a start-up, (2) setting the mission, vision, values, and governance, (3) leadership practices/leadership types and theories,

(4) the development of school operations and faculty culture (5) CAIS Accreditation, and (6) a sustainable Canadian private school. The study was guided by four research questions:

1. How do founding school leaders describe the vision of the private school?

2. How do founding school leaders describe their leadership practices enacted in the beginning phases of operating the private school?

3. How do founding school leaders describe how they perceive how their practices have changed over the course of their tenure at the private school?

4. What leadership challenges do founding school leaders describe from their early years of operating a private school and how did these challenges change over time?

Chapter 5 will further explore the findings reported in Chapter 4 and provide a synthesis of the leadership theories and practices from the literature discussed in Chapter 2. Much of the data that was collected during this research aligned with and supports previous literature presented in Chapter 2. In addition, the collection and analysis of the interview data, artifacts, and analytic memos also illuminated a deeper understanding of the practices founding school leaders of private schools may need to deploy to bring their school from start-up to sustainability. In addition, as a result of the findings, an updated conceptual framework is presented in an attempt to more clearly articulate the leadership practices deployed by the founding school leaders (Figure 2) and how additional leadership theories are related to the leadership practices which these leaders demonstrated.

Cross-Case Analysis Findings

In the cases I studied, it is apparent that there are several similarities in leaders' practices and their organizational journeys. In the context of my research and the following findings, I

have organized the similarities into four categories: school leadership practices, leadership theories, systems thinking, and a growth mindset. As demonstrated in earlier chapters, and as a primary focus of this research, school leadership practices are a vital consideration in student success (Leithwood et al., 2020), and organizational sustainability (Fullan, 2005).

However, over the course of my study of the founding school leaders, it became apparent that the nature of founding a private school in Canada also requires founding school leaders to use leadership practices which are supported by underlying leadership theories (Barett-Baxendale, 2009; Collins, 2001; Leithwood et al., 2020; Loughead, 2009; Lynch, 2012; Paris & Peachy, 2013). Founding school leaders demonstrated a tendency to a adhere to systems thinking approach (Senge, 2006; Koral Kordova et al., 2018; Norqvist & Ärlestig, 2020) and a growth mindset (Dweck, 2008; Dweck & Yeager, 2019; Caliskan, 2020; Schechter, 2021).

In this chapter, as represented in Figure 3, I will first look at the most pertinent leadership practices and theories that appeared in my analysis of the data collected through my interviews with four founding school leaders. I will then more deeply explore the elements of leadership theories and systems thinking (Senge, 2006; Shaked et al., 2018; Dixon & Eddy-Spicer, 2018; Gharajedaghi, 2011) that were observed across all the founding school leaders who participated in the study. Finally, I will share observations about similarities connected to a growth mindset (Dweck, 2008; Dweck & Yeager, 2019; Caliskan, 2020; Schechter, 2021) of the founding school leaders.

Figure 3

A revised conceptual framework: Leadership practices of founding school leaders
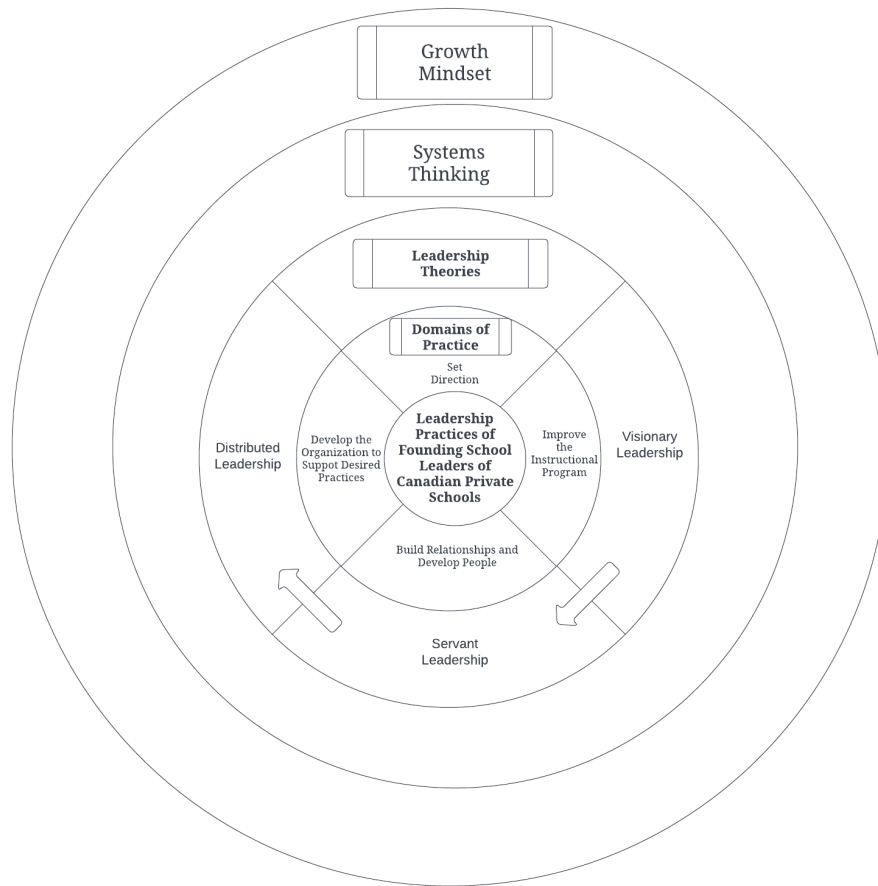
School Leadership

In the case of the four founding school leaders who were part of this study, it was apparent that their practices aligned closely with Leithwood et al.'s (2020) assessment of successful school leadership as shown in Table 15. The cross-case analysis in this research indicates that the four domains of practice for successful school leadership are: (a) setting direction, (b) building relationships and developing people, (c) developing the organization to support desired practices, and (d) improving the instructional programs.

Table 15

Leadership Practice: Domains of Practice (Leithwood et al., 2020)

Domain of Practice	Founding School Leaders' Aligned Practices

Set Direction	• student acceptance profile
	• starting grade levels
	• subjects being offered
	• curriculum to be followed and philosophy of education
	• establishing mission, vision, and values
	• establishing first school facility
Build Relationships and Develop People	• building a strong and cohesive board of directors
	• establishing a strong and trusted senior leadership team
	• hiring to compliment the senior leadership team's strengths and weaknesses
	• aligning with parent expectations
Develop the Organization to Support Desired Practices	• supporting faculty to take ownership of their own programs within the school
	• distributing leadership tasks widely among staff

	• setting tuition and fees at a level that would support the aspirations and expectations of the program
	• developing and delivering budgets that demonstrated resourcefulness and frugality
	• taking on tasks that were not typical 'leadership tasks' in an effort to demonstrate the servant nature of the work
Improve the Instructional Program	• exploring learning opportunities from within as well as from outside of the educational context
	• focusing on a manageable number of grades and curriculum to allow the organization to build excellence slowly
	• allowing staff to dedicate their time, energy, and effort to teaching and not dealing with governance, finance or facilities

Set Direction

Upon being hired to be the founding school leader, each of the leaders studied in these case studies first set upon setting the direction (Leithwood et al., 2020) or modelling the way (Kouzes & Posner, 2017). This direction was set by determining the primary focus of the school, setting the mission, visions, and values, and finding the first physical location for the school program.

In the spirit of determining the primary focus of the school, the founding school leader had important demographic decisions to make about the student body. In all instances, the founding school leader opted to start with a limited number of grades. This focus allowed the school founders to limit the number of subjects and curricula that were going to be offered. Secondly, founding school leaders also opted to buy into a previously established programs of study, such as IB or Montessori education or took on a familiar value proposition such as being a university prep program. These decisions brought early credence to the educational offerings and brought confidence for the first parents who opted into the new school.

After setting the direction for the school, it was evident that each school leader worked to set a shared vision by establishing their school's mission, vision, and values. The formation of the foundational mission, vision, and values was often done in complete isolation from the broader school community and in a rapid fashion. Founding school leaders worried less about the exact content and more about having something that would allow their parents, students, and broader community to build a shared vision around. In all cases, the school still maintains a variation of the initial statements remain with their school community at the moment of this research. This was a critical step as the mission, vision, and values were used extensively in the early communication to prospective parents and students.

Finally, in the area of setting direction, founding school leaders were quick to find a physical location for their school. In all instances, the founding leader did two things: (1) found a leased/shared property for the school to open in and (2) created the school in a space where there was no direct competition. With respect to having a leased or shared property, all schools eventually transitioned to a permanent and owned site but in their first years, they operated out of whatever space they could quickly and affordably acquire. According to all founding school leaders in this study, the actual space was less important than the location of the space. The location of the school was required to be in a catchment area that was free of competition from other private schools. Having their school in a space that was not already saturated with private school competition allowed the founding school leaders to more easily advertise and recruit the first parents and students to their school. This notion is supported by the findings of Corcoran and Jennings (2020) as they state, "the number of proximate options likely plays a part" (p.376).

A strong sense of setting a direction through visionary leadership was required from each of the founding school leaders at this time of the evolution of their private school. The school leaders in this study clearly understood the future direction of their school and were able to articulate it in the words that made up the founding mission, vision, and values. As noted by Collins (2001), visionary leaders set a clear vision and allow others to vividly see the future of their organization. In each of the instances of these new private schools, the founding leaders embodied a strong sense of visionary leadership during the initial phase of their school's development.

Building Relationships and Developing People

In the case of the founding school leader, building strong relationships and developing people was a critical element to the sustainability of their private schools (Leithwood et al.,

2020). Sequentially, it was observed that founding school leaders first established a strong relationship with their founding board of directors, next built a trusted senior leadership team, and finally hired talented teaching staff who were agile and able to be versatile in their teaching.

In line with the research that informed this study (Ball & Lund, 2011; Bosetti, 2004; Johnson, 2007; McConaghy, 2006), the founders of the private schools were parents who are looking for a specific school experience for their children. These parents universally became the founding board members of the private schools in this study. In all instances, the founding board of directors hired the founding school leader and allowed them the opportunity to build the school's philosophy and curriculum. However, it was clear that each of the school leaders in this study had deep respect and reverence for the founding board of directors. This respect manifested itself in founding school leaders accepting support from the founding board of directors in operational matters that required specific expertise, such as finance or legal.

Once the founding school leader was hired and the direction for the school was set, the next step each founding school leader took was to hire their initial senior leadership team. In the interviews, it was apparent that the founding school leaders were deeply aware of their personal strengths and weaknesses and their first hires were strategically hired to offset the leadership deficits that the founding leader may have had. Of particular note, all school leaders in this study had a long-term relationship with their founding senior leadership team and many of these team members remained at the school longer than the founding school leader. However, of equal interest, none of the founding senior leadership team members ever successfully succeeded the founding school leader.

Lastly, the founding school leaders built relationships with potential parents and students of their program. This is supported in the research of Hamlin and Cheng (2020), as they found that "when parents enroll their children in an alternative to their assigned public schools, they may locate a school that aligns with their values and preferences, allowing parents to feel more empowered by and satisfied with a school of choice" (p. 662). Each leader spoke directly to the fact that they were the primary communications and admissions director for the new school. The limited human resources created the conditions where the founding school leader was required to be the spokesperson at open houses and on radio advertisements. The founding school leader's deep belief in the promise of the program appeared to build strong and lasting relationships with parents who were looking for an educational alternative for their children

Develop the Organization to Support the Desired Practices

After setting the foundational elements in place, the founding school leader quickly turned their attention to developing the organization to support the development of the new school's mission, vision, and values (Leithwood et al., 2020), and to enabling others to act (Kouzes & Posner, 2017). In particular, the founding school leader provided staff with opportunities to take ownership of their own programs, managed the school budget to allow for adequate resources to support the school program, and set a clear example of the expected actions and behaviors of students and staff.

In the cases studied in this research, there was great variation in the founding school leader's confidence in directing the curriculum and learning. Whereas some founding school leaders viewed themselves as experts in the area of curricula and learning, others acknowledged that they required support from their senior leadership team to fully release the potential of the academic program. However, what was consistent across all cases was the founding school

leader's desire to effectively distribute the leadership to allow others to support the broader school community. Due to the complex nature of founding a private school, the founding school leader's time and energy were often consumed by business operations, and the balance of the senior leadership team was left to steward the academic program.

Lastly, the financial component of starting a private school was critical in developing the organization to support best practices. All school leaders studied in this research struck a balance between affordable tuition, bank debt, and fundraising income. Each founding school leader recognized that in order for their new school to be sustainable, they needed to exercise frugality and resourcefulness. The financial prudence was evident in the facilities they initially inhabited and the dynamic nature of their initial school timetables which made use of all spaces in their schools, no matter how unique they were. In fact, all founding school leaders carried a substantial teaching load during the first years of school operation. Although the founding leaders took on teaching assignments, rarely did they see themselves as the teacher with the greatest acumen for teaching and learning.

Improve the Instructional Program

According to the interview data and the artifacts in these cases, school improvement and growth was always in the mind's eye of the founding school leader. The founding school leaders valued professional development for their staff, constantly looked for indicators of community confidence in their program, and carried the balance of the business and governance work to allow their staff to be able to focus on the students in their care.

Founding school leaders each brought a background of exposure to educational excellence to their new schools. Each participant had experienced success as a teacher and learner in a variety of environments prior to leading their new school. As a result of this

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experience, each founding school leader brought knowledge of a specific educational philosophy to the beginning of their school. Many of their first hires shared the same philosophical views as the founding leaders had brought to their institution. In the instance that a teacher did not have the required knowledge of the school's founding philosophy, there was a concerted effort to have the staff's education upgraded. The professional development often happened through the mentorship of the senior leadership team and was always supported by funds for additional learning experiences.

Although there was an absence of evidence supporting a formalized evaluation of student learning, founding school leaders were abundantly aware of the perception of the school's improvement and progress by community feedback. All founding school leaders indicated that the primary promotional lever was word-of-mouth advertising. Furthermore, all new schools started with a limited scope of grade offerings and their survival was incumbent upon their ability to retain their current students and recruit new students. It is due to the critical nature of enrollment management that the founding school leader's primary indicator of school improvement was the overall admission numbers from year to year. The steady growth of the programs was the first indicator of success for all founding school leaders. As each of the schools came into level of sustainable student enrollment, school leaders turned their attention to their individual definitions of the portrait of a graduate and to post-secondary admission indicators.

Founding school leaders were very conscious of their efforts to buffer staff from distractions to their instructional work (Robinson, 2011). Primarily, founding school leaders carried the burdens associated with finance, communications, enrollment management, and governance. With respect to finance, founding school leaders spoke often of their relationships

with the bank, with donors, and with the collection of school tuition and fees. Furthermore, founding school leaders were required to be the initial point of contact for all communications and enrollment matters; speaking at open houses, writing promotional materials, and connecting with prospective parents were just a few of the tasks that were required on a daily basis. Lastly, the initial creation of board policies and the foundations of the governance work was the sole responsibility of the founding school leader.

In the cross-case analysis of the data collected, it became apparent that founding school leaders not only demonstrated a common set of leadership practices, they also embodied similar leadership theories, which further supported their school's sustainability. The following section of this chapter will explore the relevant leadership theories that emerged as the data was analyzed.

Practices Associated with Leadership Theories

One theme that emerged as a result of this study was the necessity of a founding school leader to be agile in their leadership practice over the course of a private school going from start-up to sustainability. In the interviews, it was clear that each founding school leader recognized that their leadership evolved over the course of the school's development. In the early phases of all founding school leaders' journeys, it was common for them to speak about the qualities of a visionary leader (Alberta Education, 2020; Barett-Baxendale, 2009; Collins, 2001; Leithwood et al., 2020; Loughead, 2009). After the school had opened and had established its initial operations, the founding school leaders discussed how their practices were associated with servant leadership (Collins, 2001; Greenleaf, 1970; Taylor et al., 2007) and this was typically followed by considerations pertaining to distributed leadership (Harris, 2008; Timperley, 2005). The founding school leaders then discussed how they transitioned to a focus on systems

leadership (Senge, 2006; Fullan, 2005; Koral Kordova et al., 2018). The entirety of their work was enabled by a demonstration of embodying a growth mindset (Caliskan, 2020; Dweck, 2008; Dweck & Yeager, 2019; Schechter, 2021).

Table 16

Leadership Practices and Leadership Theories

Leadership Practice (Leithwood et al., 2020)	Leadership Theories and Frameworks
Setting Directions	Visionary Leadership (Alberta Education, 2020; Barett-Baxendale, 2009; Collins, 2001; Leithwood et al., 2020; Loughead, 2009)
Build Relationships and Develop People	Servant Leadership (Greenleaf, 1970; Greenleaf, 2011; Spears, 1996)
Develop the Organization to Support Desired Practices	Distributed Leadership (Harris, 2008; Spillane, 2006)
Improve the Instructional Program	Systems Thinking (Fullan, 2005; Koral Kordova et al., 2018; Senge, 2006) Growth Mindset (Caliskan, 2020; Dweck, 2008; Dweck & Yeager, 2019; Schechter, 2021)

Visionary Leadership

In initial phases of these private schools' development, the founding school leader was required to demonstrate a high degree of visionary leadership (Alberta Education, 2020; Barett-Baxendale, 2009; Collins, 2001; Leithwood et al., 2020; Loughead, 2009). As Collins (2001)

stated, "vision-based leaders set the course for the organization by using their own vision to create an overall vision to which all stakeholders can commit" (p. 17). This is exactly what all leaders were required to do. In all instances, it started with determining the school's core principles. These core principles included what grades the school would start, if it would be single sex or co-educational, whether the school would have a religious underpinning or a non-denominational one, and what the optimal class size may be. In the present study, the data collected suggested these founders did not rely heavily on academic research to make these decisions but, instead, relied on their personal experience. Of note, the average age of the founding school leader was 35 years old and none of the leaders were over the age of 40. According to Statistics Canada, only 13% of school principals fall into this age category, and over 57% of school principals are over 50 years old (Statistics Canada, 2022). In the context of school leaders, these are relatively young professionals to take on such a responsibility ladened position.

Once the vision for the school was set, founding school leaders were compelled to become strong and effective salespeople. On several occasions they spoke about creating publications, hosting events at hotel conference rooms, or leveraging radio coverage to draw attention to their schools. This is in line with the findings of Yemini et al. (2019): "[Decentralized school systems] enable school principles to take advantage of the opportunities within their school environments to mobilize resources, promote new initiatives and lead change in their schools and communities" (p. 527). In all instances, not only were the founding school leaders required to be building the key infrastructure for the school, they were also having to serve as directors of marketing and enrollment at the same time. All participants noted that the

lack of private school competition in the local area allowed them to create a greater profile and stimulate more attention to their new schools.

Once the founding leader had set the vision and had established that there would be a sufficient number of parents willing to enroll their children, next they needed to turn their attention to finding staff who would join them on this journey. The search for staff took many shapes, including local advertisements and word of mouth recruitment. One very notable finding in this research was the strength and the longevity of the founding senior leadership teams. All founding school leaders interviewed in this study noted that their initial leadership team stayed with them for over a seven years, some for over two decades. The longevity of these teams is remarkable given the nature of leadership team turn over (Baker & Belt, 2010; Bartanen & Rogers, 2019; van der Meer, 2022). It was acknowledged by each founding head that they could not do it on their own. They needed to find leaders who could work alongside them and complement their individual strengths and weaknesses. Beyond the leadership teams, the founding leaders also indicated that a variety of teaching staff was critical. The staff needed to be diverse and flexible and ready to contribute to all school programs and functions.

Finally, it was clear that when reflecting on their path through the initial phase of starting a private school, all founding school leaders embodied optimism. Although there was always an undying concern about enrollment, none of the participants ever conceded to the fact that they thought the school may fail. Over the course of each interview, each founding leader made mention of the fact that they never had any doubt that the school was going to work. On the subject of optimism, one leader stated, "I honestly do not think I thought about [sustainability]. I think back then… I was operating in a mode that I was invincible… [this school] is going to be magic." Lastly, of interest, over the course of the interviews there was not a single instance of a

founding school leader indicating they were feeling stressed. The transcripts were remarkably absent of expressions of negative emotions pertaining to the founding of their schools.

Servant Leadership

As a part of my initial considerations in this study, I questioned whether a founding school leaders' practice would adjust over time. In the case of the participants in this research, they all articulated that their leadership shifted shortly after their school was operational. It was clear that the founding school leaders in this study transitioned from initially demonstrating visionary leadership to practices that would closely align with the philosophies of servant leadership. The founding leaders were required to take on a multitude of tasks inside their school. These tasks ranged from janitorial services to accounting to classroom teaching. Each founding school leader looked back on this work fondly and as though it was a requirement to make the school a successful operation. As Spears (1996) stated, optimal servant leadership is an approach:

> which is based on teamwork and community; one which seeks to involve others in decision making; one which is strongly based in ethical and caring behaviour; and one which is enhancing the growth of people, while at the same time improving the caring and quality of our many institutions. We call this emerging approach to leadership and service, servant-leadership (p. 33).

Distributed Leadership

Distributed leadership (Chitpin, 2020; Diamond & Spillane, 2016; Harris, 2008; Spillane, 2006; Spillane et al., 2004) was also leveraged in all cases. Notably, each school leader appeared to transition from servant leadership to distributed leadership over the course of their school leadership. As Harris (2008) posited, "distributed leadership moves beyond trying to understand

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leadership through the actions and beliefs of single leaders to understanding leadership as a dynamic organizational entity" (p. 174). In the spirit of distributed leadership, it was also clear that each leader hired a staff that provided a nice complement to their strengths and weaknesses. This strategic hiring allowed the founding leaders to easily distribute the leadership, and this practice enabled their programs to maintain optimal efficiency and high quality in the early years. Furthermore, in two of the cases, this distribution also later served to support the succession planning of the school. Although the internal leaders were not appointed to be the succeeding leader, they remained as important members of the senior leadership team once the founding school leader had left. Given the deep and long-standing knowledge of the founding faculty, the transition to a new leader was easily facilitated and even if the succession was not entirely successful, the schools continued to remain sustainable.

Systems Thinking

As the private schools in this case become more established and encompassed more students and staff, the founding school leader started to more deeply consider systems thinking (Dixon & Eddy-Spicer, 2018; Fullan, 2005; Gharajedaghi, 2011;Koral Kordova et al, 2018; Senge, 2006; Shaked et al., 2018) as a tool to support their leadership. The complexity of the systems in schools requires educational leaders to think in this manner to best understand and approach the challenges they face (Schwaniger, 2006). As stated by Norqvist and Ärlestig (2021), systems thinking "aims towards deeper understanding of how action and relations forms organizations" (p. 79). Given that private schools can occasionally fail, and with growth of a student body and teaching staff, the founding school leader must continue to find ways to build systems that support this complexity and growth. Norqvist and Ärlestig (2021) supported this

notion: "School organizations involve complex aims and activities, and leaders with different missions need to work together with and divide tasks among colleagues and staff" (p. 80).

In the four cases presented in this research, it was clear that once the school was through the initial phases of development, the school leaders turned their attention to addressing the breadth and intricacies of the interrelated systems working inside their organization. An instance of addressing complex activities is in the work the founding school leaders engaged in when faced with an increasing need to balance long term facility development with their school's overall financial health. The pressure to have competitive facilities created an opportunity overall organization to become overwhelmed and overextended. To best address these needs, it was observed that systems were developed for deep consultation on complicated matters that involved everything from land acquisition, to architecture, to finance strategies, to human resource acquisition, to teaching methodologies, to student recruitment and retention. Broadening the base of knowledge and structure (Arnold & Wade, 2017) gave the leaders the wisdom and confidence that they were not only supporting their current program, but also the future of their program.

As founding school leaders began to pull themselves out of the detailed nature of their early work and look more broadly at their program, it is clear that they all leveraged the power of systems thinking. Their ability to create a network and see a more comprehensive view of their organization allowed them to bring their schools from start-up to sustainability. Beyond leveraging system thinking, the founding school leaders were supported by a common mindset they embodied, a mindset akin to a growth mindset (Caliskan, 2020; Dweck, 2008; Dweck & Yeager, 2019; Schechter, 2021).

Growth Mindset

Dweck (2008) stated that "true self-confidence is 'the courage to be open—to welcome change and new ideas regardless of their source.' Real self-confidence is not reflected in a title, an expensive suit, a fancy car, or a series of acquisitions. It is reflected in your mindset: your readiness to grow" (p. 127). In her seminal work, *Mindset: The new psychology of success,* Dweck (2008) captured the practices shared by the school founding leaders in the present study. The founding school leaders were willing to learn as they went, they accepted that they would make mistakes and learn from them and they were optimistic about the possibilities that lied ahead.

Table 17

A growth mindset and the founding of a private school

Characteristics of a growth mindset (Dweck, 2008)	Leadership practices associated with growth mindset
Embrace challenge	• The opportunity to start a school system
	• Recruiting students and building enrollment
	• Hiring high quality staff who are dedicated to the new school and its programming
	• Building all required policies, procedures, and programs
Persist in the face of setbacks	• Moving from leased to owned facilities
	• Retaining highly talented staff in spite of the lure and opportunity in other systems

See effort as a path to mastery	• Demonstrating a commitment to servant leadership
	• Teaching courses and supporting co-curricular activities
Learn from criticism	• Adjusting based on feedback from families who opted not be a part of their program on a go forward basis
Find lessons and inspiration in the success of others	• Pursuing CAIS Accreditation
	• Networking with CAIS leaders at regular conferences and professional gatherings

Each of the founding school leaders who participated in this study acknowledged that they were relatively naïve upon entering their leadership journey. In fact, three of the four recognized that if they knew then, what they know now, they probably would not have agreed to taking on the leadership role. The naivety can possibly be attributed to two things: youth and inexperience in leadership. As stated earlier, all founding school leaders were younger than 40 years old when they took the role and their average age was 35 years. What was unique about these leaders is that they had a relatively broad level of school expertise and education prior to taking on the role. All had worked in several schools and all had gone onto complete post graduate studies at university. However, even with the broad experience and advanced education, their experience in leadership was relatively small. At most, the founding school leaders had been in a school leadership position for five years prior to taking the most senior leadership position when starting the new private school.

Beyond being naïve, each school leader made numerous references to their overall optimism for the possibility of the school and the impact it would have on children's lives. In fact, when asked if they were ever fearful of the school not succeeding, all participants acknowledged that the possibility of failure had never crossed their minds. Furthermore, over the course of the interviews, there was no in-depth discussion related to stress, anxiety, or fear. The deep and underlying theme of the conversations was in the sphere of positivity, hope, and optimism.

An interesting result from this research is that the practices of these founding school leaders appeared to be closely aligned to Dweck's (2008) portrayal of a growth mindset. The fact that the founding school leaders embraced challenges, persisted through setbacks and saw their efforts as a path to mastery strongly support the argument that a growth mindset (Caliskan, 2020; Dweck, 2008; Dweck & Yeager, 2019; Schechter, 2021) is connected to founding school leaders' practices and contributes to the overall sustainability of a private school.

Implications for School Founders

In the context of founding a private school in Canada, more often than not, the founders are most likely to be concerned parents or community members and they are not likely to be the actual founding school leader (McConaghy, 2006). Taking this research forward to support the development of sustainable private schools in Canada, the following implications are written for founders of private schools. These implications will center on the leadership practices the founders could seek out in the founding leader in an attempt to guide founders in their search and acquisition of a leader who is best suited to successfully lead their new school forward. A primary consideration for private schools is that the founding leader has a deep understanding of the domains of practice of successful school leadership (Leithwood et al., 2020). Secondly, the

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founding school leader must also be aware of the importance of system thinking (Senge, 2006).

The final implication has to do with the leader's growth mindset (Caliskan, 2020; Dweck, 2008; Dweck & Yeager, 2019; Schechter, 2021).

Domains of Practice for Successful School Leadership

Founding school leaders do not have a playbook for practices and leading a private school is not always predictable; however, over the course of my research, it became apparent that all founding school leaders of the study who brought their schools from start-up to sustainability followed a similar pathway. The journey of these leaders aligns with Leithwood's et al.'s (2020) four domains of practice. The results indicated that founding school leaders set direction, built relationships and developed people, improved the instructional program, and developed the organization to support the desired practices. It is not to surmise that this is the only pathway from start-up to sustainability, but it was evident across the experiences shared by the participants in the study.

As private schools conduct a search for leaders of their new schools, it would be advisable to be assured that the successful leader holds a defensible leadership practice in their mind as they enter into process of starting the school. A model, such as Leithwood et al.'s (2020), could serve as a guidepost for the development of the program. These tangible domains of practice could help support the leader as they use their visionary talents to set the direction for the school, its students, and staff.

Systems Thinking

After establishing the foundation of the private school, the founding school leaders reported a transition to using systems thinking (Dixon & Eddy-Spicer, 2018; Fullan, 2005; Gharajedaghi, 2011; Koral Kordova et al, 2018; Senge, 2006; Shaked et al., 2018;) to support

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the overall growth and development of the school program. The founding school leader connected with networks of support to overcome the predictable complexity of the organization they were striving to lead to sustainability. To support them along this journey, the founding school leaders in this study demonstrated an adherence to a growth mindset.

Growth Mindset

The practices that were discussed by the founding school leaders in this study who helped lead their schools from start-up to sustainability could be characterized as possessing a growth mindset (Caliskan, 2020; Dweck, 2008; Dweck & Yeager, 2019; Schechter, 2021). As previously noted, the founding school leaders were required to not only understand and implement these practices, but also adapt to change over time as the private school developed. Being open and able to make this change is a critical element of their success. Furthermore, founding school leaders showed a remarkable ability to remain optimistic about the future of their programs. As stated by Dweck (2008), "[leaders with a growth mindset] throughout this grueling task, they maintained a healthy sense of confidence" (p. 112). On multiple occasions, the founding school leaders interviewed in this study indicated that they did not ever consider that failure was an option. Furthermore, they continually demonstrated a positive disposition and were willing to be persistent, even when faced with challenges and continual setbacks.

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Chapter Summary

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The purpose of this study was to investigate leadership practices of founding school leaders that contributed to shifting four Canadian private schools from start-up to sustainability. The goal was to determine similarities in founding school leaders who have effectively brought a private school to a place of sustainability.

A cross-case analysis of the interview data, artifacts, and researcher's analytic memos assisted in providing insights with regards to all four research questions. In identifying the practices of founding school leaders who managed to lead their schools from start-up to sustainability, the results showed that founding school leaders' practices aligned closely with successful domains of practice (Leithwood et al., 2020), systems thinking (Senge, 2006), and a growth mindset (Dweck, 2008; Dweck & Yeager, 2019; Caliskan, 2020; Schechter, 2021).

These findings lead to a revised conceptual framework that shows the leadership practices of successful leaders (Leithwood et al., 2020) as a central component to the founding school leaders' success in bringing their schools from start up to sustainability. In addition to the practices, it was also identified that visionary (Alberta Education, 2020; Barett-Baxendale, 2009; Collins, 2001; Leithwood et al., 2020; Loughead, 2009), servant (Greenleaf, 1970; Greenleaf, 2011; Spears, 1996), and distributed (Harris, 2008; Timperley, 2005) leadership theories can be related to the actions of the founding leaders. Finally, the frameworks of systems thinking (Fullan, 2005; Koral Kordova et al., 2018; Senge, 2006) and growth mindset (Dweck, 2008; Dweck & Yeager, 2019; Caliskan, 2020; Schechter, 2021) also served to support the sustainability of the private schools studied in this research.

In Chapter 6, I bring this research to a close with final conclusion and recommendations. The chapter begins by addressing each of the research questions and offering a closing thought on each of them. Following the research questions, I provide a wholistic summary and recommendation based on the entire dissertation. Next, based on learnings of this research, I offer recommendations for future research. Finally, I close the chapter with a final reflection on the problem statement and the outcomes of the research I have conducted.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Chapter 6 presents the conclusions drawn from the research conducted to understand the leadership practices of founding school leaders in sustainable Canadian private schools. This chapter first attends to the four research questions that guided the multiple case study and provides insights from the data gathered and analyzed across cases. This chapter concludes with a discussion of the recommendations and opportunities for future research.

Research Question 1

In conclusion, in considering how founding leaders describe the vision of the private school, the results from this study are very much in agreement with Leithwood et al. (2020) and Kouzes and Posner (2017). In summary, founding school leaders described their vision of the school by setting the direction and by inspiring a shared vision. In the pursuit of setting the vision for the school, the leaders followed a similar start-up timeline, exercised constraints to allow for early focus and mastery, and had an external program to further validate their initial offering. In each of these practices, the founding school leader embodied the qualities of a visionary leader (Alberta Education, 2020; Barett-Baxendale, 2009; Collins, 2001; Leithwood et al., 2020; Loughead, 2009).

A remarkable fact about the initial vision setting for the school is that in all cases, it was done in a rapid and unsophisticated fashion. Several of the founding school leaders indicated that the process was done in a time frame that was between "in one night" to "less than a month." The time constraints they faced appeared to leverage their intuitive vision for the program they were about to build. Furthermore, working in a rapid fashion to create the vision for their school allowed them to embrace their energy and optimism for the project.

In all instances, founding leaders of the study started their school with a limited offering of grades and programs, compared to what it was envisioned to become. Without exception, all schools started in the elementary years and had no more than five grade levels. Furthermore, the schools all started with a limited offering in the co-curricular arena. This limitation was driven by the grades being offered and the small number of human resources available. Although the vision for their schools was to include many more grades and to see their graduates enter post-secondary institutions, the constraint of grades allowed founding school leaders, and their teams to develop a level of mastery in their programs prior to expansion.

Finally, each of the schools opted to leverage a pre-existing curriculum, IB or Montessori, or an expectation of being a university prep program. The decision to offer an additional curriculum allowed prospective parents to have confidence that there was an additional value being offered by the start-up private school. The decision to deliver additional curriculum also provided founding school leaders with the chance to not be consumed by curriculum development or mapping. I found that by focusing on a limited number of grade levels and school offerings allowed the founding school leaders to focus on critical operational elements such as facility acquisitions and human resource management and therefore conclude that starting small may be a component of the leader's overall ability to bring their school from start-up to sustainability.

Research Question 2

When considering how founding school leaders describe their leadership practices enacted in the beginning phases of operating the private school, it was clear that at the onset of founding the school, leaders needed to demonstrate a strong sense of visionary leadership (Alberta Education, 2020; Collins, 2001; Barett-Baxendale, 2009; Leithwood et al., 2020;

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Loughead, 2009). Founding school leaders characterized their initial leadership practices with dynamism, optimism, enthusiasm, and naivety. Their leadership practices were dependent on quickly establishing a teaching and leadership team. Finally, to inspire others to join them in this action, they were required to share their vision with the broader community.

Over the course of the interviews, the founding school leaders' humility was a striking feature of their responses. All recognized that they had never undertaken a project quite as large as the one they had agreed to take on and that they were extraordinarily uninformed and unprepared for the challenges that were at hand. However, the founding school leaders reported that balancing these unforeseen challenges provided a sense of personal confidence and optimism. When asked directly, "at what point did they think their schools had become sustainable," it was very common to have a response in the theme of 'I didn't ever think it wouldn't be sustainable.'

One of the first things all leaders did was to establish an early teaching and leadership team. These teams were tasked with both teaching and leading the new school. All founding school leaders had a distinct philosophy for hiring and were able to quickly articulate the exact qualities of employee they were looking for. Several of the leaders opted to hire close professional acquaintances that they had worked with previously and had already built a high degree of trust. Notably, the earliest hires commonly ended up having a long tenure with the school, often staying with the school for longer than the founding school leader. As a point of consideration, none of the first hires ever succeeded the founding school leader.

Each of the founding school leaders identified the fact that their leadership practices initially needed to be an equal balance of internal and external focus. While they were establishing the initial school procedures internally, they were also required to be externally

facing in the broader community sharing the school vision to recruit families to their programs. These school leaders found themselves doing radio interviews, giving information sessions at hotel conference centers, and answering phone calls from the public to promote their new school. Inspiring the public's confidence in their vision for the school was a critical first step to eventually leading their school to sustainability.

Research Question 3

When considering how founding school leaders describe how their practices have changed over the course of their tenure at the private school, each of the founding school leaders in this study identified that their leadership began to shift from visionary, to servant, to distributed. These practices were nested in systems thinking and a growth mindset. Initially during the period of school start-up, the founding school leaders described practices associated with servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1970; Greenleaf, 2011; Spears, 1996). As the schools continued to grow, founding school leaders then started to employ practices associated with distributed leadership (Harris, 2008; Spillane, 2006). As their leadership continued to evolve, the founding leaders were also called upon to adopt a systems thinking approach (Dixon & Eddy-Spicer, 2018; Fullan, 2005; Gharajedaghi, 2011; Koral Kordova et al, 2018; Senge, 2006; Shaked et al., 2018) to allow their schools to become a thriving environment that was conducive for growth and efficiency. The process and rigour of undergoing CAIS Accreditation (CAIS, 2020d; CAIS 2020f) provided all leaders with an external lens on the operations of the school. Furthermore, the founding school leaders reported that the CAIS network of schools provided strong and trusted professional connections to the founding school leaders. Needless to say, the founding school leaders in this study were required to demonstrate a growth mindset (Dweck, 2008; Dweck & Yeager, 2019; Caliskan, 2020; Schechter, 2021) to survive and thrive.

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Research Question 4

When considering what leadership challenges founding school leaders described from their early years of operating a private school and how these challenges change over time, the leaders in this study identified financial constraints, a concern over enrollment, and facilities. With respect to financial constraints, the founding school leaders identified a strong relationship with lenders as a critical factor in the school's success. Lenders believed in the vision that the founding school leaders were providing and supported them with the early capital to allow the schools to start without major financial constraints.

Private schools' primary recruitment tool is word-of-mouth marketing (Bosetti, 2004; McConaghy, 2006), however, for this strategy to be effective, it is necessary to have satisfied students and parents. Initially, as a private school starts, there are no advocates from whom you can leverage narratives of experience to bring in new families. Primarily, it is for these reasons that founding school leaders saw early enrollment as a formidable challenge during the early years. Finally, finding a suitable first location was a challenge for all founding school leaders in this study. Balancing location with affordability was the primary driver for the facility challenge these schools faced. All school leaders looked for, and found, a location that did not put them in direct competition with another similar school. Second to location, the facilities needed to accommodate teaching, learning, and the expansion of their programs. As a result of this complicated set of needs, all schools in this study started in a leased property, moved between two and five times, and finally purchased a property for the school to use as their permanent location.

Summary and Recommendations

The results presented from this research can serve to provide insights to potential founders of private schools in Canada. There is no question that private schools will continue to be founded and the leadership of these schools will be critical in their eventual sustainability or failure. It can be argued, the selection of the school's founding leader may be one of the most important facet when starting a new private school.

In the case of the founding school leaders in this study, they shared an adherence to Leithwood et al.'s (2020) domains of practice for successful school leaders. Secondly, founding school leaders demonstrated an ability to be visionary, when needed. However, as their leadership requirements changed following start-up, they were able to change their actions, reflections, and insights which related to key considerations of different leadership theories to support the school, students, and staff in the way they needed them most. In the case of this research, all founding school leaders shared a balance of broad exposure to other schools and educational curriculums, such as IB and Montessori, and advanced study at the post-secondary level, and were relatively inexperienced in having started a private school. The balance of background knowledge and lack of exposure to the challenges they were about to face created the opportunity for an informed, yet naive, and an optimistic brand of leadership.

With respect to the operational nature of the new schools, there were several commonalities in these cases which may be worthy of consideration. The first is that all founding school leaders identified that having their school in a location that was both free of competition and was in a community whose residents were affluent enough to be able to support the tuition required by private schools, was an essential element in the school's initial success. Secondly, the opportunity to lease a property and not outlay the capital to purchase was identified as an

early opportunity that all schools in this study realized. Being agile as a school and sharing a facility with a community center or a church proved to be beneficial as the schools started. Another operational element that was perceived to be instrumental in the early success of the school was the connection to an external curriculum, such as IB or Montessori education. This connection provided a sense of assurance to prospective parents and provided early direction to teaching staff.

In summary, the research has provided several insights into what private school founders can learn from schools that have successfully navigated their way from start-up to sustainability. Although similar to any start-up, there will never be a perfect playbook to ensure sustainability, the lessons learned from studying the practices of founding school leaders who have achieved organizational sustainability have provided several useful considerations as founders jump into the complex and challenging process of starting a private school in Canada.

Recommendations for Future Research

Upon the completion of this research, I have established several findings and proposed answers to the questions I set out to resolve. However, upon concluding this research, in the contexts of leadership and founding a private school in Canada, there are multiple areas I have found to be worthy of future research and consideration. In particular, it may be worthwhile to contemplate the intentionality and effect of using design thinking, and it may be worthwhile to study the reasons why private schools may have failed.

What role does design thinking or a design thinking mindset play in the start-up of a private school?

Prominent thinkers in the area of design thinking (Brown, 2008; Brown & Whyatt, 2010; Holloway, 2009) have supported the impact of design thinking on the ability to solve problems in

an innovative fashion. Creating a new private school is certainly a unique problem that requires deep innovative thinking. Furthermore, Howard et al. (2015) suggested that using a design thinking approach can be beneficial for leaders in pursuit of solving problems. In their research, they identify design thinking in the area of 'ways of work' and 'ways of life.' Notably, in the 'ways of life' thinking, Howard et al. (2015) noted that leaders who use a design thinking embody optimism, curiosity, and holistic thinking. This approach, at least on the surface, seemingly aligns with growth mindset (Caliskan, 2020; Dweck, 2008; Dweck & Yeager, 2019; Schechter, 2021) and systems thinking (Dixon & Eddy-Spicer, 2018; Fullan, 2005; Gharajedaghi, 2011; Koral Kordova et al, 2018; Shaked et al., 2018; Senge, 2006). As a result of these apparent connections, it may be worthwhile to consider the intentionality of using design thinking approaches in the process of starting a private school in Canada.

What can be learned about why start-up private schools failed?

On the other side of success, is failure. As noted on the onset of this research, although many private schools find their way to sustainability, several private schools also fail and cease to exist (Adams, 2019; CBC, 2014; McConaghy, 2004; The Star, 2014). There is an opportunity to learn from the shortcomings of these schools in an attempt to better understand how other school founders can avoid making these same mistakes. Ultimately, this research may provide an inverse lens to the research that has been provided in the pages of this dissertation.

Researcher Reflections

On the onset of this research, I indicated that school choice is becoming more prominent (A Class Apart, 2019, Bielmier, 2022; Bosetti et al., 2017; Bosetti & Gereluk, 2016; McShane, 2022a, Wohlstetter & Zeehandelaar, 2015), and that school leadership practices have a material impact on school success and student learning, and that student transition is detrimental to a

child's overall education (Day & Sammons, 2016; Hallinger, 2003, 2011; Hallinger & Heck, 2010, Huguet, 2017; Wong & Ng, 2020). Furthermore, private schools are susceptible to failure due to the overall lack of certainty in funding and enrollment (Adams. 2019; CBC, 2014; McConaghy, 2004; The Star, 2014).

Throughout the course of this research, I believe I have created the opportunity for the founders of schools to better understand what leadership practices (Leithwood, et al., 2020) are required for the hiring of a successful founding school leader. If school founders continue to hire founding leaders who embody the requisite leadership practices that are underpinned by strong understandings of pertinent leadership theories and of systems thinking (Dixon & Eddy-Spicer, 2018; Fullan, 2005; Gharajedaghi, 2011; Koral Kordova et al, 2018; Shaked et al., 2018; Senge, 2006), and who embrace a growth mindset (Caliskan, 2020; Dweck, 2008; Dweck & Yeager, 2019; Schechter, 2021), ultimately the children in the care of these private schools will have a greater opportunity to stay at one school, a school that has attained sustainability.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I have offered succinct answers to each of the research questions that were presented on the onset of this research. The research has led me to a better understanding of the leadership practices (Leithwood et al., 2020) required of founding leaders to bring their start-up school to sustainability. Furthermore, the research has pointed to participants' leadership approaches, as well as a commonality with respect to systems thinking (Dixon & Eddy-Spicer, 2018; Fullan, 2005; Gharajedaghi, 2011; Koral Kordova et al, 2018; Shaked et al., 2018; Senge, 2006) and growth mindsets (Caliskan, 2020; Dweck, 2008; Dweck & Yeager, 2019; Schechter, 2021). From these understandings, I have also proposed opportunities for future research and a

summary of how this body of research may have a positive impact on the educational experience

of students who have the opportunity to attend a start-up private school.

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Appendix A: Analytic Memo Notes

Date:	Time:	School Pseudonym:	School Leader Pseudonym:
Description School Leader's Demeanour			
Description of Zoom Environment			
Reflective Question: Questions to Self and Insights			
Reflective Questions and Thoughts About Artifacts			
Reflective Questions about Mission, Vision and Values			

Appendix B: School Leader Recruitment Email

Title of Project: Starting a Sustainable Private School: Exploring the Founding Leader's Leadership Practices

Email to recruit participants:

Dear _____ (Founding Leader of a Private School):

My name is Jason Rogers and I am Doctor of Education student working under the supervision of Dr. Barbara Brown in the Werklund School of Education at the University of Calgary. The reason I am contacting you is that I am conducting a study about the leadership practices founding leaders deployed to create a sustainable private school. I am currently seeking participants who founded private schools between 1980-2000 and whose schools have since gone on to achieve CAIS Accreditation.

Participation in this study involves the founding school leader taking part in a two-hour personal interview. It will also be of great value if the participant is able to provide the founding governance bylaws as well as the initial school mission, vision and values. I would like to assure you that this study has been reviewed and has received ethics clearance through the Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board at the University of Calgary. If the school your current work at or the school we are discussing has any additional ethics approvals, I am willing to undergo that process as well.

If you are interested in participating, please contact me at Jason.rogers2@ucalgary.ca to further discuss the study and the potential interview.

Sincerely,

Jason B. Rogers, B.Ed., M.Ed.
Doctor of Education Student, University of Calgary
Jason.rogers2@ucalgary.ca
402-891-1330

Research Consent Form

Jason Rogers, Faculty of Graduate Studies, Education, 403.891.1330, Jason.rogers2@ucalgary.ca

Supervisor: Dr. Barbara Brown, Faculty of Education

Title of Project: Leadership Practices of Founding School Leaders in Canadian Private Schools

This consent form, a copy of which has been given to you, is only part of the process of informed consent. If you want more details about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

The University of Calgary Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board has approved this research study.

Participation is completely voluntary, anonymous and confidential.

Purpose of the Study

To develop an awareness of what leadership practices may lead to the sustainability of private schools in Canada.

What Will I Be Asked To Do?

If you are the founding leader of a private school, you will be asked to participate in a semi-structured interview over Zoom. This interview will last no more than two hours and will explore your recollections of your leadership during your time at the private school you were a part of the founding. I will also be asking for any artifacts you think may provide insights into the leadership practices you may have undertaken during the founding of the private school.

Please be advised that participation is completely voluntary, and at any point you have the option to refuse to participate altogether, participate in parts of the study, answer any and all questions, and you will also have the opportunity to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

What Type of Personal Information Will Be Collected?

No personal identifying information will be collected in this study, and all participants shall remain anonymous in any published results.

Audio recordings of interviews will only be available to the researcher and participant. Recordings will not be shared or published in any form.

Are there Risks or Benefits if I Participate?
There are minimal risks in this study. Risk of identification will be minimized by the anonymizing of the information. Any physical risk associated with fatigue or discomfort during the interview will be addressed prior to starting the process. The benefit in participating is primarily the opportunity to inform future school founders and leaders of practices that may have been beneficial when you started your school.

What Happens to the Information I Provide?
Information collected as part of the study will be available only to the researcher who will code, analyze and summarize all findings.

Participants will be identified only by pseudonyms. Names of schools and school divisions will not be used or published in any results. Limitations to anonymity may exist within the limited context of Canadian private schools.

Participants are free to withdraw until 4 weeks after data collection. Following, withdrawal is no longer possible. If a participant chooses to withdraw, all information collected from the participant will be destroyed.

No one except the researcher and his supervisor will be allowed to see or hear any of the answers to the interview recording. There are no names on the survey. The surveys are kept in a locked cabinet only accessible by the researcher and his supervisor. The interviews and any anonymous data will be stored for five years on a computer disk, at which time, it will be permanently erased.

Would you like to receive a summary of the study's results?

Yes: ___ No: ___

If yes, please provide your contact information (e-mail address, or phone number)

_____

_____

Signatures
Your signature on this form indicates that 1) you understand to your satisfaction the information provided to you about your participation in this research project, and 2) you agree to participate in the research project.

In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the investigators, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from this research project at any time. You should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

Participant's Name: (please print) _____

Participant's   Signature: _____   Date:
_____

Researcher's Name: (please print) _____

Researcher's Signature: _____ Date:
_____

Questions/Concerns
If you have any further questions or want clarification regarding this research and/or your participation, please contact:

Mr. Jason Rogers (Researcher)
Education/Faculty of Graduate Studies
403.891.1330 or Jason.rogers2@ucalgary.ca
Dr. Barbara Brown (Supervisor)
Education/Faculty of Graduate Studies
bbrown@ucalgary.ca

If you have any concerns about the way you've been treated as a participant, please contact the Research Ethics Analyst, Research Services Office, University of Calgary at 403.220.6289 or 403.220.8640; email cfreb@ucalgary.ca. A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference. The investigator has kept a copy of the consent form.

Appendix D: School Leader Interview Schedule

Interviewer Guide

Participant Pseudonym:

Location:

Date:

A. Interviewer will review the terms of and sign consent form with participant.

B. Interview will retain a copy of the consent form.

C. Interviewer will read the following to the participant: This interview will take roughly two hours to complete and I appreciate your participation. I will ask you a series of questions and I will record your responses using the Zoom record function. When we complete the interview, I will transcribe your responses and then send you a copy for your review. You will have up to one month to review and approve the transcription and edit the transcription for additional meaning or to offer corrections. If you would like a copy of the interview for your records, I am happy to provide the video recording and/or the final transcription to you. Do you have any questions? Are you ready to begin?

D. Interviewer will turn the recording on and being the interview.

Questions:

6. Please state your chosen pseudonym.

7. Tell me the pseudonym for the school you started and what date was it established?

8. What year did you begin working at the school as the school leader?

9. How long did you work in the capacity of school leader?

10. What year did you leave your school?

11. Under what circumstances did you become the school leader?

12. What was the niche your school was seeking to fulfill in the context of school choice?

13. How would you describe your vision for the school when you started it?

14. Did you vision for the school change over your time leading it?

15. When you started leading the school, what are some practices you remember undertaking?

16. Of these practices, which ones do you believe may have led to the school becoming sustainable?

17. At what point did you believe your school would become sustainable?

18. What was an indication that your school had achieved sustainability?

19. What was the founding mission, vision and values of the school?

    a. Have these changed since the establishment of the school? If so, why did they change?

20. What would you say is a unique or distinguishing factor about your school?

21. When thinking back on the founding of your school, what are you proudest of?

22. When considering the overall governance of the school, what was the process for establishing the original bylaws for the Board of Directors?

23. What was the greatest success you had while leading your school?

    a. In the first year?

    b. In the first five years?

    c. During your time at the school?

24. What were the greatest challenges you faced:

    a. In the first year?

    b. In the first five years?

    c. During your time at the school?

25. During your tenure at your school, what did you do to create a sustainable leadership model? How did succession planning play a role?

26. Do you have any questions for me?

Thank you for participating in this interview. Your answers and reflections are extremely important to this study.

Interviewer: turns off the recording device.