

School of Education

**The Role of Educational Leader:
The Practices and Perceptions of Educational Leaders in Four Early
Childhood Education and Care Settings in Western Australia**

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Declaration

To the best of my knowledge and belief this thesis contains no material previously published by any other person except where due acknowledgement has been made. This thesis contains no material that has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university

Human Ethics

The research presented and reported in this thesis was conducted in accordance with the National Health and Medical Research Council National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007) – updated March 2014. The proposed research study received human research ethics approval from the Curtin University Human Research Ethics Committee (EC00262), Approval Number #**HRE2017-0115**

Abstract

With the introduction of the National Quality Framework, incorporating the National Quality Standards and the Early Years Learning Framework (COAG, 2009), there has been an increased focus on leadership in the Australian early childhood education and care sector, and particularly the introduction at this time of the position of the Educational Leader. The Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA) describes the Educational Leader as influential, inspiring and extending the pedagogy of educators (ACECQA, 2019). However there is a lack of specific guidelines for the Educational Leader position, and the result is uncertainty amongst Educational Leaders about how their role should be enacted.

This qualitative research study explores the practices and perceptions of four Educational Leaders, working in Western Australia in Early Childhood Education and Care. This research study unpacks the current role of each of the four Educational Leaders, through semi-structured interviews and observations of the participants' in their workplace. A qualitative, grounded theory design was utilized to investigate the practices, understandings and knowledge of the Educational Leaders working in the position. The findings of the research are significant for the early childhood sector through the examination of the lived experiences of the four participating West Australian Educational Leaders, and through the promotion of dialogue about how the Educational Leaders themselves are interpreting and enacting their leadership role.

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Chapter 1

Introduction to the Research

1.1 The General Context

Leadership models in early childhood education and care are constantly transforming as the sector grapples with persistent evolution of the early childhood education and care landscape (Fasoli, Scrivens & Woodrow, 2007). In 2012 an Educational Leader role was introduced in the Australian Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) sector. The Educational Leader role potentially offered new leadership possibilities for the ECEC sector. In Western Australia ECEC services cater for children from birth to five years of age, after which children begin their first formal year of schooling (Department of Education Western Australia, 2016).

Initially very little clarity was provided about the Educational Leader role, with the Education and Care Services National Regulations (Government of Western Australia, 2012) stating only that an appropriately qualified and experienced educator, coordinator or an individual can be appointed into the role. In 2019, seven years after the Educational Leader position became mandatory, the Australian Children's Education & Care Quality Authority (ACECQA) released a document entitled *The Educational Leader Resource* (ACECQA, 2019). The resource contains helpful guidelines for educators in the position of the Educational Leader but like the preceding documentation, the resource is limited in the description of the requirements of the Educational Leader position.

Without directives regarding suitable qualifications and experience for appointment to the position of Educational Leader this had led to uncertainty and disparity within the early childhood sector (Fleet, Soper, Semann & Madden, 2015; Rouse & Spradbury, 2015).

1.2 The Specific Context

When I started teaching twenty-two years ago the purpose of the ECEC sector was widely regarded as caring for children under the age of five years old, rather than providing an education. Professor Fiona Stanley (2009) wrote a commentary on how early childhood educators were paid less than car parking attendants. She questioned what this said about the value Australian society placed on young children and their education. The early childhood education and care sector has historically been underfunded and its educational value unrecognized, not only by successive governments in Australia, but worldwide (OECD, 2006a; Li & Chen, 2016).

As my professional experience and qualifications increased, I began to take on leadership and management positions within the early years sector. These positions included traditional leadership roles such as being the designated preschool room leader and the centre manager of an early childhood centre. My understandings of leadership developed and I understood that leadership could be used as a tool to raise the professional practices and understandings of my colleagues. More than that, it could be used to promote the educational benefits of early childhood education to the families that used our services, as well as to the wider community. However I discovered that leadership in early childhood education is complex and multifaceted. As the centre manager my experience was that there was not enough time to focus on the pedagogical elements that I wanted to develop amongst my team. I was preoccupied with budgets, legislation and staffing requirements. Eventually I returned to a teaching role where I felt I could focus on promoting the educational and nurturing aspects of early childhood education to the children and their families.

In 2012, the Australian Education and Care Services National Regulations were introduced, containing a legal requirement for all ECEC services to have a designated Educational Leader. This was an exciting outcome, being a newly conceived position. The role of Educational Leader held promise of raising the image and standard of early childhood education through a focus on ongoing development of the pedagogical practices of early childhood educators. The Educational Leader was described as a suitably qualified and experienced individual who would lead the development and implementation of the service's educational programs (Government

of Western Australia, 2012). Over the next three years interactions with colleagues in early childhood services led me to realize that this broad description of an Educational Leader was confusing and seemingly lacked purposefulness. Why was the position so vaguely described in the regulations and other documentation? What effect was this having on individuals in the Educational Leader role, and on the effectiveness of the role itself? Who was being appointed to the position and why? My research evolved from these questions, with the desire to highlight the perceptions and practices of those individuals situated in this relatively new early childhood leadership role

1.3 The West Australian Context

The current research study is focused on early childhood education and care services in Western Australia (WA) because WA is the largest state in Australia, with diverse early childhood education and care services, some of which are in very remote and hard to staff locations (Rural and Remote Education Advisory Council [RREAC], 2011). While WA has a relatively high uptake of ECEC services by families, there is a shortage of early childhood educators with a teaching degree (Productivity Commission, 2011). The intricacies of a mixed market approach in WA have also added to the shortage of early childhood educators. A degree-qualified early childhood educator has a choice between employment in school settings, private or non-profit kindergartens or in long daycare settings. In this competitive market, below average wages, long hours of work and low levels of professional recognition within the ECEC sector have resulted in poor retention of early childhood educators, particularly degree qualified educators who can teach across education sectors (Irvine, Thorpe, McDonald, Lunn & Sumsion, 2016). The diversity of ECEC services, the shortage of degree qualified ECEC educators and the mixed market approach to ECEC in Western Australia add further levels of complexity in defining the Educational Leader role, which the current study sought to explore.

1.4 Sample Size

A number of resources and strategies were utilized to find suitable participants for the research study. These included sending out invitations to Educational Leaders employed in early childhood centres within the Perth region, and utilising online sources such as websites and online early childhood education groups. The research criteria required participants to be the Educational Leader, employed in a Western Australian ECEC service, with responsibility for the educational leadership of a minimum of three staff members. Four Educational Leaders who met the research criteria and were willing to be involved in the research were identified.

Consideration of the low number of respondents led to the understanding that there was reluctance on the part of Educational Leaders to participate in the research. The reasons for this reluctance are uncertain. Rodd (2006) provides the perspective that early childhood educators are often time-poor and there may be insufficient funding or staffing levels to enable an Educational Leader to attend meetings outside of allocated non-contact times. Rodd (2006) also noted that some early childhood educators are mistrustful of academic researchers. The educators perceive the researchers to have little or no functional knowledge of their working environment, yet the researchers are attempting to prescribe quality practice. Rodd's (2006) findings provide some insights into why Educational Leaders may have been reluctant to involve themselves in the current research study.

Although the participant sample size was small it was the rich experiences and practices of current WA Educational Leaders that the current research study sought to capture. Emmel (2013) argues that the largest or the smallest qualitative study represents just a slice of the lived experiences that the researchers are trying to capture. In qualitative research the data is illustrated through the perspectives of the participants that elaborate on their lived experiences (Emmel, 2013).

A small sample size in the current study lent itself to in-depth qualitative research, utilising a grounded-theory methodology. Qualitative research studies have differing sample sizes, but can be considered effective if the sample size provides enough data to answer the research questions (Emmel, 2013). The generation of a hypotheses, or theory grounded in the data was the ultimate goal, with Glaser and Strauss (1967)

recommending the concept of data saturation as a measure for the appropriate research sample size. Nowell, Norris, White and Moules (2017) argue that data saturation is reached when the research has exchangeability. Exchangeability is achieved when participants are no longer voicing additional perspectives but are sharing similar information and perceptions (Nowell et al., 2017).

The four Educational Leaders that participated in the research worked in services within one hour's drive from Perth City in Western Australia. This was due to the logistics of travel, my own work schedule as an early childhood teacher, and availability of the Educational Leaders.

1.5 Significance Of The Study

This research study highlights a number of issues experienced by the current Educational Leaders in four services in the Western Australian early childhood education and care sector, including the complexity of the role and uncertainty as to how the Educational Leader role should be enacted. The research focuses on educators employed in the mandated Educational Leader position in Western Australian Early Childhood Education and Care services.

It investigates the perceptions and practices of Educational Leaders currently employed in that role, providing insights into the realities of the position. The research provides insights into the experiences of Educational Leaders working towards making sense of, and establishing, the Educational Leadership role. The information provided in this research study helps to ascertain emerging patterns in understanding, skills and knowledge as each Educational Leader describes their role. Findings regarding areas of strength, areas for development and areas for further investigation contribute to the continued research of leadership in the early childhood sector.

1.6 Research Objectives

The Educational Leader role is included in the National Quality Standards (NQS) (ACECQA, 2018b) but there are limited directives for appointment to the role.

Individual early childhood service providers are encouraged to interpret the role to suit their unique setting. Educational Leaders who have been appointed to the role are working with different levels of experience and qualifications.

The research explored the question: Has a lack of specific guidelines and training impacted on the practices and understandings of individual Educational Leaders about their role in Western Australia ECEC services?

The following three sub-questions shaped the research to ascertain the perspective of the Educational Leaders:

- How do Educational Leaders describe and enact their roles?
- How is the role interpreted in the four early childhood settings?
- What values, skills and beliefs influence the Educational Leader role?

1.7 Summary

The role of the Educational Leader in Western Australia is evolving, but remains contentious. Published documentation to support Educational Leaders has increased in recent years, yet how the role is understood and enacted in early childhood education has not been extensively explored from the perspective of those in the Educational Leader role. The purpose for this study is to examine how those employed as the Educational Leader are enacting their role in their specific service. The following chapter contains the literature review, which explores literature relating to educational leadership, as well as the methodological approaches used in the current research study.

Chapter 2:

Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

In order to contextualise the role of the Educational Leader in ECEC it is crucial to review a range of literature about leadership. This literature review also provides an historical background to the formation of the Educational Leader role. This approach is pertinent in order to situate the research study in the wider context of educational leadership, as well as in the specific contexts of the four research participants. The literature review aims to highlight the limited research of the Educational Leadership role, particularly in the Western Australian ECEC context.

The Australian Education and Care Services National Regulations of 2012 require a suitable person to fulfill the Educational Leader role, a position that focuses on the pedagogical practices of early childhood educators (ACECQA, 2019). However there are no directives for appointment to the Educational Leader role, such as levels of qualifications, skills or experience required. It has been left to individual services to determine the most suitable educator, coordinator or individual for that position within their service. Prior research suggests that these factors present some of the reasons why there is uncertainty as to how the role should be enacted (Lloyd & Hallet, 2010; Fleet, Soper, Semann & Madden, 2015; Rouse & Spradbury, 2015).

2.2 Background

In 2006 the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) published a major international review of early childhood, entitled 'Starting Strong II: Early Childhood Education and Care' (OECD, 2006a). The OECD is an international organisation that works with governments, policy makers and citizens to establish common standards and devise solutions to a range of international challenges. The OECD's review, Starting Strong II, identified the negative effects of decentralization of power and responsibilities across states and regions. Using Australia as an example, the review stated that in spite of adequate funding, a

scattered population, state support for pre-school education and a market-oriented approach to childcare could inhibit quality early childhood education. In 2009 this review, as well as other international and local research, led to the development of ‘Investing in the Early Years, The National Early Childhood Development Strategy’ (Council of Australian Governments [COAG], 2009). Contained in COAG’s 2009 national early childhood development strategy were several focus areas. Two of these areas emphasized workforce and leadership development, as well as knowledge management and innovation. Later that same year, COAG entered into an agreement with the state and territory governments to create a National Quality Framework for early childhood education and care. The National Quality Framework (NQF) forms a nationally utilized framework that provides early childhood education and care settings with regulations, assessment guidance and quality improvement (ACECQA, 2019). The NQF is part of a broader agenda with which to build an ‘...effective early childhood development system in Australia that will contribute to the nation’s human capital and productivity’ (COAG, 2009, p. 2).

The investment in the National Quality Framework formed part of an introduction of more stringent regulations for early childhood services, as well as the emergence of quality and rating systems. The emphasis was now on early childhood education and care that was accountable, effective and supported positive outcomes for children, their families and communities. Once the National Quality Framework was introduced there was also an increased focus on leadership in the early childhood education and care sector. The framework brought with it another tier of leadership, namely the newly created position of the Educational Leader. The Educational Leader role was described as influential, inspiring and extending the pedagogy of educators, as well as being a tool to raise levels of quality across the early childhood education sector (ACECQA, 2019).

2.3 Quality

The COAG used the National Quality Framework (NQF) to define what quality early childhood education and care would look like in Australia. The word ‘quality’ is used in the title and throughout the documentation of the NQF. ‘Quality’ is also referred to in the description of the Educational Leader role. Defining quality in the

early childhood education and care (ECEC) sector has been contentious, with numerous researchers debating the characteristics of quality in early years services (Farquhar, 1990; Woodhead, 2006; Bassok, Finch, Lee, Reardon & Waldfogel, 2016; OECD, 2018b). Farquhar (1990) referred to the New Zealand early childhood context when she described quality as having no simple definition. Farquhar indicated that knowing how the educators, families and children defined quality ECEC would help with its implementation in each early years service. Woodhead (2006) expanded on this notion of exploring the concept of quality with those directly affected by it. He identified the anomalousness that exists between ECEC settings, such as the programs themselves as well as environments, staff qualifications and family-educator-child relationships. Woodhead (2006) also identified a tendency for quality to be defined by economically privileged societies and contended that quality is relative to specific circumstances, cultural values and beliefs (Woodhead, 2006). Applying quality indicators directly from one context or one country to another may not be appropriate and Woodhead (2006) argued for a contextual approach to defining quality measures in early childhood education.

ACECQA (2018a) commissioned Hall & Partners to research what factors influenced Australian parents in their choice of ECEC services for their children. The findings of the report were that parents frequently chose ECEC services based on factors such as affordability, location, referrals from other families, subjective feelings about the service and the specific developmental needs of their child. While the NQF provides the early childhood sector with a framework of regulations and quality assessment criteria, it enables services to focus on how they will meet the regulations and criteria in subjective, contextually-specific ways that are relevant to their communities needs (ACECQA, 2018a). This is particularly relevant when considering the broad NQF descriptions of the Educational Leader role, enabling a contextual approach that best suits the needs of individual ECEC services.

Scarr, Eisenberg and Deater-Deckard (1994) describe three reasons why determining quality in early childhood education and care settings is important. These are for regulation purposes, to inform policy development and for practice improvement. In Western Australia the assessment and rating of ECEC services occurs on site at each service, conducted by a team of trained assessors who are employed by the WA

Education and Care regulatory unit. The assessors measure the quality of each ECEC service against a nationally legislated framework of regulations and criteria (Department of Communities, Western Australia, 2017). This approach, with the objective of regulating quality practices, still enables a subjective and context-specific implementation of pedagogical practices by individual services. Using research to advise policy development is the second method for measuring quality early childhood education (Scarr et al., 1994). Researchers use various resources to assess and define quality in ECEC.

The third reason that Scarr et al. (1994) proposed for evaluating quality in the early childhood sector is for practice improvement. Practice improvement includes researching and assessing professional practices, curriculum development and staffing, parental and community partnerships. Siraj-Blatchford and Wong (1999) describe the evaluation of quality practice in ECEC settings as being conducted by someone with a special interest in improving the educational practices of the individual ECEC setting. This might include educators and management in a particular ECEC service. In Australia the Educational Leader plays a central role in developing and supporting a cultural of continuous practice improvement and professional development (ACECQA, 2019).

Several studies have focused on ongoing, in-service professional development for early childhood educators (Dowling & O'Malley, 2009; Colmer, Waniganayake & Field, 2014; OECD, 2018b). Dowling and O'Malley (2009) specifically noted that ongoing and contextually relevant pedagogical development for educators is more likely to lead to high-quality educational outcomes for young children. It was also determined that individual coaching is a key part of quality pedagogical development for educators, particularly in their educator and child interactions. Coaching ensures targeted feedback about actual situations and encourages educators to identify future directions (OECD, 2018b). Colmer et al. (2014) suggest a transition from the term professional development, proposing that professional development implies transferring knowledge, but not necessarily following it through to implementation. Colmer et al. (2014) recommend the adoption of the term professional learning that involves groups of educators working together collectively to share and develop their professional knowledge and skills in practice.

Similarly, Hedges (2012) described how educators draw on their funds of knowledge when extending children's learning. Funds of knowledge is a framework Hedges employs to describe the prior knowledge or experiences that educators use to recognise, respond and extend children's enquiries, alongside any theoretical and practical knowledge that they have acquired. Hedges (2012) focused her qualitative research study on ten educators from ECEC services in Auckland, New Zealand. Hedges positioned the educators' knowledge into three sections that include personal experiences, workplace experiences and community based experiences.

The educators participating in Hedges' (2012) ethnographic study identified their personal, lived experiences as having a highly positive impact on their professional teaching practices and interactions with children. Hedges concluded that early childhood educators constantly sieve through theoretical, experienced and practical knowledge frames in order to form their pedagogical practices. Hedges' (2012) research focused on the educators in ECEC services, and did not investigate the effect of these different funds of knowledge on ECEC leaders and leadership theories. The distinction between leader and educator is an important one. It illustrates the need for further research into the influence of theoretical, experienced and practical knowledge frames on the role of the Educational Leader as a pedagogical leader.

A flexible curriculum framework, such as The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations [DEEWR], 2009a), is reliant on comprehensive theoretical knowledge and skills to identify and interpret the spontaneous curriculum. The Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) is Australia's first national curriculum for children from birth to the age of five years old. It provides a broad framework for early childhood educators, guiding them in establishing a curriculum that is specific to each individual ECEC community. The EYLF also assists educators in planning, implementing and evaluating quality pedagogical practices (DEEWR, 2009a).

The EYLF contains overarching principles, practices and outcomes. It is dependent on the knowledge and skills of early childhood educators in interpreting the principles, practices and outcomes to fulfill the needs of individual children and

educational contexts (Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, 2008). According to Sims, Waniganayake and Hadley (2018) Educational Leaders are tasked with understanding and putting the EYLF and other pedagogical practices into action in order to mentor their colleagues in doing the same.

Hedges (2012) argues in favor of graduate studies as a way to ensure continued theoretical development for educators. Undertaking tertiary studies may not be affordable or logistically possible for every educator in every early childhood service across Western Australia. The introduction of the mandatory Educational Leader position means that every ECEC service in Western Australia provides staff access to someone who is tasked with extending the pedagogy of all the educators in the service, as well as helping to raise the levels of quality across the ECEC sector (ACECQA, 2019).

2.4 Leadership in ECEC

Defining leadership as it relates to ECEC is both controversial and challenging. Rodd (2006) suggests that defining leadership in ECEC is challenging because the sector does not have an agreed definition of leadership. Rodd (2006) suggest that this is because there are many dimensions of leadership in early childhood education and care.

In Western Australia a nominated leader (also referred to as the Centre Manager or Director) is responsible for leading the administration and management of the early childhood service. The approved ECEC service provider employs a nominated leader as part of legislative requirements contained in the Education and Care Services National Law (WA) Act of 2012. The mandated Educational Leader role is in addition to, but can be undertaken by, the nominated leader. Jorde-Bloom (2003) defines an administrative and management role as the organization of tasks and establishment of systems in order to achieve a vision for the ECEC service. Administrative and management skills are viewed as a set of teachable skills and the person in the nominated leader role is ultimately accountable for decisions that affect the service (MacBeath, 2005).

Leadership goes beyond management skills, with an emphasis on development, to be forward thinking in an effort to improve an organization (Rodd, 2006). The terms leadership and management are often fluidly exchanged (Blackmore, 1999) and in ECEC services the nominated leader characteristically has both management and leadership roles (Ebbeck & Waniganayake, 2003).

When leadership in ECEC is defined as positional, such as the nominated leader role, there is an expectation that someone has exclusive responsibility for that leadership role (Rodd, 2006). Modernist notions of a hierarchical, top-down leadership structure are at odds with the postmodern collaborative and distributed leadership styles that are present in many early years services (Murray & McDowall Clark, 2013; Ebbeck & Waniganayake, 2003; Kagan & Hallmark, 2001). A modernist perspective of leadership is based on assumptions that leadership is structured and ordered, with individuals being either leaders or followers (Nicholson, Kuhl, Maniates, Lin & Bonetti, 2018). In contrast, postmodern leadership is complex, with actions influenced by social, cultural and political contexts (Nicholson et al., 2018). Cunliffe (2009) argues for the development of leaders who can critically engage with others about programmes, policies and practices with the understanding that they are the authors of their own social and organisational contexts. Leadership roles in a postmodern environment are fluid, context and belief specific, and interactive across all team members. Ebbeck and Waniganayake (2003) offer the idea of a distributed model of leadership in which a number of educators within an early childhood service take on leadership roles.

Numerous local and international researchers (Nicholson & Maniates, 2015; Fleet, Soper, Semann & Madden, 2015; Siraj-Blatchford & Manni, 2007; Ebbeck & Waniganayake, 2003) investigated the model of distributed leadership. They supported the notion of distributed leadership models as a means to amalgamate the nominated leader roles in ECEC, and spread leadership across teams. Accordingly distributed leadership models draw on the strengths and interests of individual educators. Waniganayake (2014) describes distributed leadership as ‘...valuing the collective intelligence...that individual educators bring to the organisation’ (p. 74).

Distributed leadership acknowledges collective collaboration that extends beyond the ECEC setting and includes sharing leadership with community experts (Waniganayake, 2014). Contained within the NQF are the National Quality Standards (NQS). There are seven quality areas in this document, with Quality Area 7 focused on leadership and management. Quality Area 7 states that effective leadership will build a community of learners, inclusive of the children, families and educators (ACECQA, 2018b).

Transformational Leadership is a postmodern, contemporary form of leadership, first defined in the 1970s. There is congruency between transformational leadership models and the notion of distributed leadership. Bass (1990) highlighted transformational leadership characteristics such as encouraging staff to think divergently and engaging with staff on an individual basis through mentoring techniques. According to Bass (1990) the transformational leader mentors their followers by providing them with inspirational vision and purpose, valuing their unique intellectual abilities and giving each follower individual attention.

The work of Brownlee, Nailon and Tickle (2010) investigated the construction of a transformational leadership identity through semi-structured interviews with fifteen nominated early childhood leaders. Each service was located in a major metropolitan area in Queensland, Australia. Brownlee et al. (2010) sought to discover how transformational leadership was influenced by epistemological beliefs. Epistemological beliefs reveal an individual's views about knowledge, how it is gained, and what criteria define knowledge (Brownlee et al., 2010). The researchers had noted, through prior research, that transformational leadership characteristics were prevalent in the early years sector (Tickle, Brownlee & Nailon, 2005) and sought to explore what factors influenced this. The researchers used open-ended telephone interviews in order to capture the perspectives of each participant. The study identified strong links between the prior experiences and epistemological beliefs of the participants on their leadership styles. The findings of the study provide justification for further research of epistemological beliefs and their impact on early childhood leadership.

2.5 Pedagogical Leadership

Pedagogical leadership is described as leading and advising educational practice, with accountability for ensuring that those practices are appropriate for young children (Andrews, 2009; Heikka & Waniganayake, 2011).

The National Quality Standards refer to the Educational Leader role under Quality Area 7, Governance and Leadership (ACECQA, 2019). Quality Area 7 states that the Educational Leader will lead pedagogical practices and curriculum development, as well as mentor the professional development of the educators (ACECQA, 2018b). This implies that the Educational Leader needs both extensive early childhood teaching experience, as well as an understanding of adult learning styles in order to effectively mentor their colleagues (Nuttall, Thomas & Wood, 2014). This further highlights the complexities of the Educational Leader role. In contrast the Education and Care Services National Regulations (Government of Western Australia, 2012) loosely refer to a suitably experienced individual, without more definitive guidelines as to what this experience might be.

Hedges and Cooper (2018) assert that it is necessary for early childhood educators to have broad content and resource knowledge in order to support children's learning. Their findings are based on an interpretivist case study, involving educators from two early childhood settings in New Zealand. Video and audio recordings aided cycles of inquiry and reflection between the researchers and the teacher-participants. The rationale for this approach was that pedagogical development is enriched when a knowledgeable observer facilitates a reflection process with educators (Hedges & Cooper, 2018). The OECD (2018b) provides an overview of numerous studies, undertaken in a range of international early years services. These studies evaluated quality early childhood education by examining workforce development. Whilst results from the various studies were mixed and inconsistent, participation in ongoing professional development was the most reliable predictor of quality educator and child interactions. Ongoing professional development also had direct, positive links to the children's development and learning (p.79). An Educational Leader with extensive pedagogical knowledge would be well positioned to support the comprehensive, ongoing pedagogical development of the educators in their service.

2.5.1 The Role of Critical Reflection in Pedagogical Development

The Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) (DEEWR, 2009a) is the key curriculum document for ECEC in Australia. The EYLF promotes continued learning and critically reflective practices as a key principle of effective pedagogical practices and contains a series of reflective questions for educators. These questions encourage educators to deeply examine their existing practices, generate outcomes that are underpinned by literature, theory and wider social and political influences, and generate new approaches to learning (DEEWR, 2010b). According to Anderson (2014) critical reflection is a way to transform early childhood education through the constant and dynamic exploration of new approaches to teaching and learning. Hadley, Waniganayake and Shepherd (2015) agree, stating that if educators become complacent in their pedagogical practices, innovation and creativity are lost and educators become resistant to change. Critical Reflection provides a means for Educational Leaders to encourage educators to reflect on their practices, to engage in meaningful conversations and to collaborate with others to bring about change (ACECQA, 2019).

2.5.2 Adult Learning Styles

Being able to support the ongoing pedagogical development of colleagues, including engaging in critical reflection, implies knowledge of adult learning styles and mentoring techniques. This serves as a tension for those in the Educational Leader role, as although they may be well versed in effective early childhood pedagogical practices, they may not have experience in educating and mentoring adults. Throughout a newly released Educational Leader Resource document the Educational Leader is referred to in terms of mentoring and coaching educators (ACECQA, 2019). Supporting others to improve practice and the ability to give feedback are also emphasized. The Educational Leader Resource provides some insights into mentoring, but the approach described in the document is informal and generalised.

Zachary (2012) argues that facilitating adult learning is complex, and knowledge of adult learning styles is imperative to successful mentoring relationships. Mentoring traditionally involved an interpersonal relationship between a knowledgeable colleague (mentor) who provided support, direction and feedback to a less knowledgeable colleague, the mentee (Eddy, Tannenbaum, Lorenzet & Smith-Jentsch, 2005). Zachary (2012) argues for a collaborative mentoring paradigm that fits with the notion of distributed early childhood leadership.

In Zachary's model the learner shares responsibility for their learning and resources. They become increasingly self-directed throughout the mentoring process. The mentor nurtures the mentee's ability to self-direct their learning and development. Rouse and Spradbury (2015) conducted a Melbourne-based, small-scale study of five Educational Leaders. They found that a lack of formal adult education training and a lack of clarity about the role were two key factors impacting on the perceived effectiveness of the Educational Leader. The Educational Leaders felt that, as a result, they battled for credibility from their fellow educators and the communities that they served. Waniganayake (2014) describes the role as 'unbounded' (p. 68), with those in the role expressing confusion as to whether they are teachers, mentors, adult trainers, social workers and multiple other descriptions of a position that involves working with children, colleagues, families and communities.

2.6 Vision

Rodd (2006) describes vision in leadership as providing direction for, and sustaining action in, the teaching team. Without vision Rodd argues that leaders would be challenged to capture the imagination and loyalty of their team. Press (2012), in an article on embedding collaboration in early childhood services, expands on the idea of visionary practices that sustain action in the team. Press (2012) suggests that early years services need to develop leadership structures supportive of the specific needs of their children, families and the community in which the service resides. These structures may challenge existing leadership models. Shonkoff and Philips (2000) defined a model of community engagement that is based on the distribution of leadership. Shonkoff and Philips (2000) described how the community could become involved in the strategic planning of an ECEC service, sharing in the vision for the

future direction of the ECEC service. These community stakeholders would include researchers and policy makers. Waniganayake (2014) further developed these ideas about community engagement by including the microenvironment of the ECEC service within the macro system of the wider community. Waniganayake describes how ECEC services could be considered the heart of the distributed leadership model, with numerous community members sharing specialist skills and knowledge that would benefit the children and their learning environment. Press (2012) refers to 'sustainable change' (p. 33) as being when ECEC service leaders identify, develop and articulate a clear vision that is cultivated through shared understandings, goals and explicit expectations.

Current research into the Australian Educational Leader role has provided valuable perspectives about the Educational Leader role in early childhood education (Fleet, Soper, Semann & Madden, 2015; Rouse & Spradbury, 2015; Garrock & Morrissey, 2013). However there is limited exploration of the role of vision in implementing educational leadership practices

2.7 The Educational Leader as a Community Leader

The Educational Leader is regarded as pivotal in guiding and developing families' understandings about their child's learning and development (ACECQA, 2019). Research has identified the importance of developing relationships with children, colleagues, families and communities as part of early childhood leadership (Stamopoulos, 2015; Colmer, Waniganayake & Field, 2014). Stamopoulos (2015) states that there is a scarcity of research and training focused on family and community leadership in early childhood education.

Research conducted by Campbell-Evan, Stamopoulos and Maloney (2014) indicated that school-based early childhood teachers saw themselves solely as pedagogical leaders within the classroom. They did not view themselves as leaders of family and community engagement. Yet there are indications that the Educational Leader role in ECEC should incorporate relationship building with families and the wider community (ACECQA, 2019), as well as with colleagues. Campbell-Evan,

Stamopoulos and Maloney's research was situated in the Western Australian primary school sector, and did not include teachers or educators working in early childhood education and care services.

Nuttall, Thomas and Wood (2014) identify risks associated with the early years sector looking to leadership understandings developed in schools, in order to inform the Educational Leader role. Nuttall, Thomas and Wood (2014) acknowledge that the ECEC sector has a different knowledge base and skills set to that of the primary school sector. In addition, there are vast differences between pay rates, hours of work and other conditions of employment.

The findings of school-based research are not always relevant for the typical team-approach of early childhood education and care services, as reported in a study by Krieg, Davis and Smith (2014). Krieg et al. (2014) conducted research with ninety early childhood Educational Leaders from the state of Victoria. Findings of the qualitative study indicated that Educational Leaders valued the notion of shared understandings that could flow through to all members of their ECEC community. This included their colleagues, the children and the children's families, as well as other community relationships.

2.7.1 Field Credibility

Hard (2005) devised the phrase 'Field Credibility' to explain findings from her doctoral dissertation. The findings of Hard's (2005) study accentuate the notion of team-focused leadership. This, according to Hard, is when leaders build collegial relationships by valuing individual educators, rather than placing value or power on the title or role an educator holds in an ECEC service (Hard, 2005). Educational Leaders might role-model quality pedagogical practices to other educators by being actively involved in the daily routines, challenges and tasks that are a part of working in an ECEC service. In this way leaders, and leadership, builds credibility amongst colleagues.

Sims, Waniganayake and Hadley (2018) contend that the role of the Educational Leader is a by-product of the 2009 COAG reforms that focused on quality and compliance in ECEC. Sims et al. (2018) argue that the Educational Leader is

therefore responsible for supervising quality compliance of pedagogical practices in the ECEC workplace. It could be concluded from the literature review that educators might perceive the Educational Leader role as yet another hierarchical layer of top-down monitoring and checking for policy compliance.

2.8 Sociological Environment

Sociology is the study of society, culture, relationships and social interactions (Little & McGivern, 2014). The sociological environment is the place in which these sociocultural relationships and interactions occur. Numerous researchers (Hard & O’Gorman, 2007; Stamopoulos, 2012; Murray & McDowall Clark, 2013) have envisioned leadership as something created and defined by the sociological environment in which it is situated. Murray and McDowall Clark (2013) reiterate the complexity of early childhood leadership as it is centrally situated in relationships between people. They argue that a profession that has people at its core needs leadership that is interpretive, evolutionary and contextual.

Numerous researchers have investigated, and attempted to define, leadership in early childhood education (Ebbeck & Waniganayake, 2003; Hard, 2008). However Murray and McDowall Clark (2013) argue that the absence of an agreed definition of leadership enables flexible leadership within any specific collection of conditions and influences. The term Social Constructionism is derived from the notion that knowledge is actively developed in a social context (Hirtle, 1996). The conversations and actions in this social context act as the conduit between the current and developing knowledge of individuals involved in a specific social context (Hirtle, 1996). Investigating the socially constructed roles of each Educational Leader formed the basis for the research study.

2.9 Conceptual and Theoretical Frameworks

The findings of the literature review have led to the development of a conceptual framework. The conceptual framework (see Figure 2.1) summarizes the influences, identified in the literature review, that may impact on the Educational Leader role.

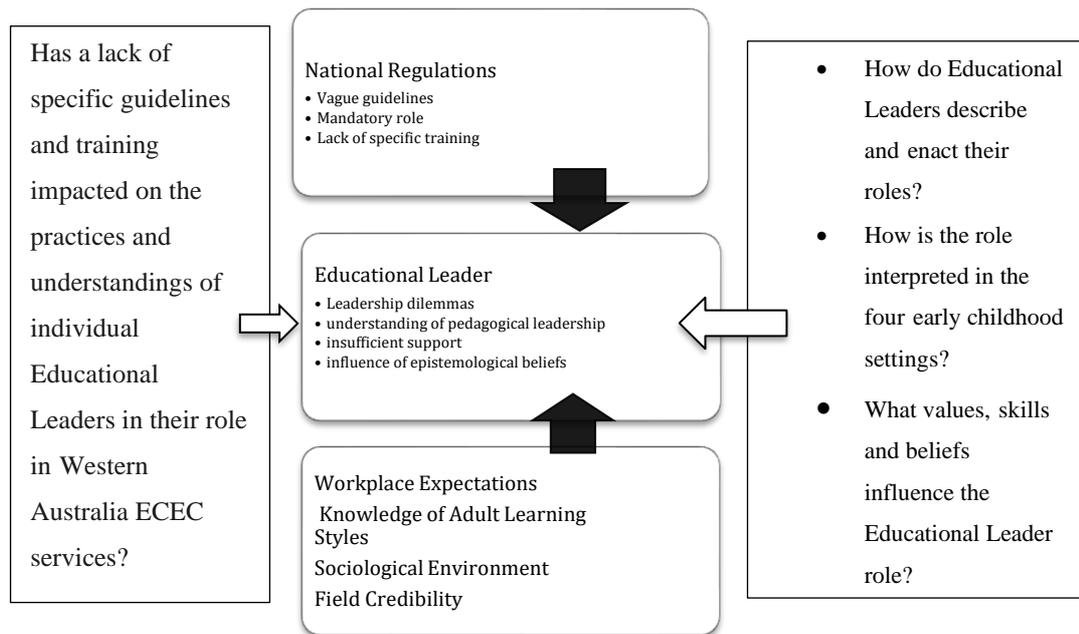


Figure 2.1. A Conceptual Framework of influences that may impact on the Educational Leadership Role

The Framework of Sustainable Professionalism (Fasoli, Scrivens & Woodrow, 2007) provides a theoretical representation of leadership in ECEC. The framework explores leadership as something that is durable, future focused and context relative, with a vision of distributed leadership at its core. The Framework of Sustainable Professionalism is grounded in the belief that leadership roles are constructed by people in particular times and places, and leadership roles are therefore fluid depending on the specific person and environment. The framework of Sustainable Professionalism was used in the current research study to further conceptualise the role of the Educational Leader in ECEC in Western Australian. This enabled a context-specific view of the Educational Leader role in each individual early childhood service.

There is continued acknowledgement that traditional understandings of leadership are not appropriate for early childhood education contexts (Ebbeck & Waniganayake, 2003; Nuttall, Thomas & Wood, 2014). Traditional perspectives are that leaders are powerful individuals, equipped with unique skills and looked to for answers in times of crises (Rodd, 2006). However Fasoli, Scrivens and Woodrow (2007) drew on the

vision of Sachs (2000) which promoted the idea of distributed leadership, where people are encouraged to work across the perceived boundaries created by their job descriptions or professional roles. Sustainable Professionalism is grounded in the belief that leadership roles are socially constructed by people in particular times and places, and leadership roles are therefore fluid (Fasoli, Scrivens & Woodrow, 2007). Sustainable Professionalism aligns with leadership concepts such as care, ethical practices and collaboration between all members of the ECEC community. For the purposes of the current research study Fasoli, Scrivens and Woodrow’s framework was divided into four frames through which the Educational Leadership role is viewed (see Figure 2.2). These four frames were used as a theoretical framework against which to measure the functional traits of the Educational Leader as these traits emerged through the data collection process.



*Figure 2.2. A Theoretical Framework for Educational Leadership. Adapted from “Challenges for Leadership in Aotearoa/New Zealand and Australian Early Childhood Contexts”, by Fasoli, Scrivens & Woodrow. In L. Keesing-Styles & H. Hedges (Eds.). *Theorising Early Childhood Practice. Emerging Dialogues*, (p. 243), 2007, Auckland: Pademelon Press.*

Given that individual centres have been left to determine the most suitable educator for the Educational Leader position within their service, the Framework of Sustainable Professionalism enables a context-specific view of the Educational Leader role in each early childhood service. Each of the four frames of the framework are described as follows:

2.9.1 Leadership as Ethical Entrepreneurship

Fasoli, Scrivens and Woodrow (2007) define ethical leadership in early childhood education as a belief in social justice, focusing on strategies that contribute to the wellbeing of children, families, community and colleagues. It is vital that the leadership strategies used are ethical, ensuring that all stakeholders are considered when any actions or changes are made (p. 244). Ethical entrepreneurship encourages Educational Leaders to reflect on the effect of their actions on different groups and different interests, focusing not only on the financial realities of operating an early childhood service, but also the range of resources and inputs that ensure the sustainability of the service. This supports the notion of distributed leadership where leadership roles are fluid and interactive across all members of the ECEC community (Ebbeck & Waniganayake, 2003; Cunliffe, 2009).

2.9.2 Leadership with a Futures Perspective

Being future-focused requires an Educational Leader to critically examine past practices, and be ready to move forward. It is a transformative attitude that requires an Educational Leader to deeply understand their professional context and the effects of any future actions on this professional context (Fasoli, Scrivens & Woodrow, 2007). This aligns with Anderson (2014) and Hadley, Waniganayake and Shepherd (2015) who emphasize continued and dynamic exploration of new educational approaches. Hutchinson (1996) explains that the future is not predetermined, and there are always context-specific opportunities for improvement. He refers to the language of hope where an Educational Leader's dreams and expectations about the future need to be nurtured.

2.9.3 Leadership with an Ethic of Care

The idea of care and caring is widely acknowledged as an essential value of early childhood education (Press & Woodrow, 2005; Nyland & Rockel, 2007). However this notion of care is usually expressed in terms of responsibility for, or taking care of, others in dependent relationships. Tronto (1993, as cited in Fasoli, Scrivens & Woodrow, 2007, p. 246) defines care as consisting of four key elements, namely caring about, caring for, taking care of and receiving care. Tronto (1993) provides

an expanded understanding of the term care, that she calls Ethical Care. Ethical Care has a further four elements. These are responsibility, competence, integrity and being responsive to others. It is this expanded understanding of ethical care that provides a useful resource for examining the practices and perceptions of the Educational Leaders' roles.

2.9.4 Leadership as Activism

Fasoli, Scrivens and Woodrow describe leadership as a collaborative experience, and having an understanding of this is fundamental to the activist leader (2007, p. 247). Being able to bring about a coalition of understanding amongst stakeholders in the workplace, in a way that mentors them to take action, is at the heart of the role of the activist Educational Leader. Adding to the complexity of collaboration is that the values and beliefs that underpin the practices and perceptions of early childhood educators are often hidden. The Educational Leadership role might include unpacking the values and beliefs of colleagues, as well as their own. According to ACECQA (2019) the most effective Educational Leaders view their role as collegial.

2.10 Qualitative Research, utilising a Grounded Theory Methodology

Punch and Oancea (2014) have described qualitative research as being “naturalistic” (p. 146), a study of people and things in their natural environment. Qualitative research embraces the subjectivity and biases of the research participants and seeks to capture their rich perspectives (Snape & Spencer, 2003). It is a research design that is well suited to the exploration of the knowledge, perspectives and practices of individual educational leaders, working in their natural environment of an early childhood education and care setting. Qualitative research is suited to research that focuses on a small sample as it allows the researcher to engage deeply with the research participants, and is inductive in nature (Davidson & Tolich, 2003).

The founders of early Grounded Theory methodology, Glaser and Strauss (1967), approached research with a positivist interpretation. They regarded qualitative research as an objective social science through which the researcher, a neutral observer, sought to discover an external reality (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Since the

seminal works of Glaser and Strauss there have been many adaptations to Grounded Theory methodology. This current research study is guided by the work of Birks and Mills (2015) who consider the following to be the essential set of Grounded Theory methods: initial coding of data and placing this into categories; ongoing, concurrent data collection and analysis; memo-writing; identification of a core category; and advanced coding with theoretical integration (p.10).

Grounded Theory methodology was used as the current study attempts to generate a theory, grounded in data, about the practices and perceptions of Educational Leaders in ECEC settings. Grounded Theory differs to traditional research that follows a theory-testing model (Punch & Oancea, 2014). The research began with some broad research questions and sought to develop categories and sub-categories as data was collected. Fraenkel, Wallen and Hyun (2015) state that the relationship between the researcher, data and developing theory is dynamic and cyclic, it is an ongoing process whereby data is collected, analysed and collated according to emerging concepts. From these concepts categories are developed. Further data is then collected and concepts are revised and/or clarified. The process is repeated in a cycle until the categories are saturated with data from the research. At this stage the researcher is able to generate a theory, grounded in the research data.

2.11 Summary

The literature review highlights a number of key issues surrounding the Educational Leader role in early childhood education and care services, including the complexity of the role. Uncertainty as to how the role should be enacted may be limiting its potential in supporting quality outcomes for educators, children and their families. The literature review also raised questions about the provision of leadership professional development for Educational Leaders, as well as the impact of the sociological environment on development of the Educational Leader position in individual services.

Fasoli, Scrivens and Woodrow's (2007) Framework for Sustainable Professionalism supported the development of a conceptual model against which to measure the

functional characteristics of the Educational Leader role as they emerged through the data collection process. As a result the current research sought to explore the voices of the Educational Leaders in depth. This was important in order to ascertain their individual understandings about leadership, and how their practices and perceptions relate to the sociological environment in which each Educational Leader worked.

Chapter 3

Research Methods

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter examined how the role of the Educational Leader in ECEC services is presented in literature. The findings of the literature review highlighted the limited research of the Educational Leadership role in the WA ECEC context and from the perspective of Educational Leaders working in the role in WA. Seeking to fill this gap, the current research study investigated the practices and perceptions of four Educational Leaders in WA. The current research study focused on three areas of interest, namely how the Educational Leaders described and enacted their roles, what leadership values, skills and beliefs influenced their professional practices and how the role was interpreted in the four early childhood settings. In order to capture the rich perspectives and professional practices of the Educational Leaders a qualitative research design was used, employing a Grounded Theory methodology. In this chapter the research design is described, explaining how the research study was conducted and how the data was analysed.

3.2 Participants

Four participants from the Perth region were selected using purposeful sampling and invited to participate in the study (see Appendix A). The four participants were selected based on the following criteria: the participant was the Educational Leader, employed in a Western Australian ECEC service, with responsibility for the educational leadership of at least three staff members.

ECEC services within one hours drive of the Perth City centre were contacted. Initially only two responses were received from the thirty posted and emailed invitations that were sent out to ECEC services. A third participant initially agreed to participate in the research, but withdrew from the research before the first interview. A second round of emails were sent out and one further participant accepted the invitation to participate in the research. Lastly, an early childhood

online group was then utilised to extend an invitation to interested Educational Leaders. It was from this group that the final research participant was found.

3.3 Research Design: Qualitative Research, utilising a Grounded Theory Methodology

Qualitative methodologies were used because the purpose of the research was to explore the professional practices, understandings and experiences of the Educational Leaders within their individual, sociological professional environments. A qualitative, grounded-theory approach was suited to the small sample size of four participants, enabling the researcher to thoroughly investigate data from each participant. The professional environments of each educator were important factors in deducing whether the Educational Leader role had been adapted to suit that specific environment. A qualitative, grounded-theory approach is both inductive and deductive, allowing the researcher to deduce specific conclusions from proven generalised principles, as well as moving from specific cases to a generalised conclusion (Davidson & Tolich, 2003).

The research study attempted to unpack the current role of each of the four Educational Leaders through two semi-structured interviews and observations of the participants' in their workplace. In accordance with grounded-theory methodology, the data was collected as summarized in Figure 3.1.

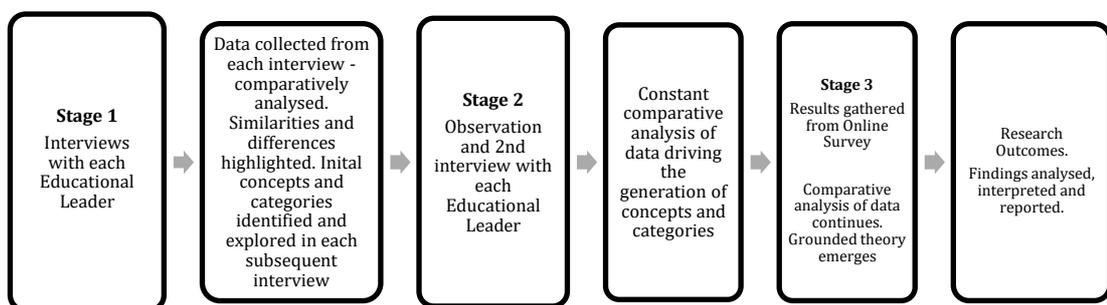


Figure 3.1. Summary of the Data Collection Procedure

3.3.1 Data Collection Procedure

In this section the three stages of the data collection procedure, outlined in Figure 2, are described in detail.

3.3.1.1 Stage One: First Interview

Each participant was contacted either via telephone or email to arrange the first, semi-structured, interview. These two options were chosen, as it was not always possible to speak directly to an Educational Leader during work hours. Email offered the Educational Leaders an option to contact me at a time that was convenient for them. The participants were interviewed individually at their selected location. All of the participants chose to be interviewed at their workplace, in an office space away from other staff and children attending the ECEC service. Prior to each interview a letter was sent out to the management of the centre explaining the research process and what would be required of the Educational Leader (see Appendix B). A letter was also sent to each Educational Leader so that they could provide informed consent when agreeing to participate in the research study (see Appendix C). Once initial contact had been made I also explained the observation process to each participant. The observations of each Educational Leader took place after the first interview, but before the second interview. This enabled me to build a relationship with each Educational Leader and ensure that they were comfortable in participating in the research process. All of the participants agreed to be observed.

Each initial interview was recorded using a hand-held recording device. A Sony IC Recorder, model ICD-PX470 voice recorder was used. The participants were informed when the recording device was turned on and off. The recording device was situated in as inconspicuous a position as possible in order to help the participants relax and focus on the conversation rather than the sense of being formally interviewed. I wrote notes but endeavored to keep the atmosphere relaxed and as informal as possible for the participants so that they felt comfortable in sharing their perspectives and practices about the Educational Leader role. The total duration of each participant interview was approximately one hour.

Appendix D presents the initial framework of questions and interview prompts, providing a starting point for each interview. Opie (2004) suggests that semi-structured interviews enable the researcher to investigate and expand on the participant's responses and are inductive in nature. Semi-structured interviews also enable the interviewer to expand on predetermined questions and enable the participant to deeply engage in conversation with the researcher. According to Creswell (2013) semi-structured interviews involve using a set of key questions that can be followed up in an undefined way. As each initial interview was transcribed and analyzed, the interview questions evolved with each subsequent interview.

Each interview was transcribed after the interview had taken place. The findings of an interview frequently led to new concepts that I wanted to explore with the other participants. Any unexpected or new concepts that emerged from the data analysis were explored in the second interview with each Educational Leader.

Following the precedent of Birks and Mills (2015) the data was analysed according to their essential set of Grounded Theory methods: initial coding of data and placing this into categories; ongoing, concurrent data collection and analysis; memo-writing; identification of a core category; and advanced coding with theoretical integration (p.10). Each interview was transcribed verbatim from the recordings and once checked, was sent to each of the participants to read through. None of the participants responded with queries regarding the transcription of their interview data. The transcripts were subjected to a process of constant comparative analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Mutch, 2005; Fraenkel, Wallen & Hyun, 2015). The data was initially coded using coloured highlighters to identify key and repeated concepts, themes or patterns in each interview. As each interview was transcribed I began to notice recurring concepts, themes and patterns across the four interviews. The concepts and emerging themes were grouped together and categories began to emerge. I also examined the data for any contrasting concepts and themes. The contrasting concepts were revisited in the second interviews with each Educational Leader in order to investigate whether these were variations in practice and perceptions, or had not been identified as important by other Educational Leaders in previous interviews.

3.3.1.2 Stage Two: Observation and Second Interview

Upon completion of the initial interviews Stage Two of the data collection process commenced. Stage Two included an observation of each Educational Leader in action and a second semi-structured interview. During the observations I was a non-participant observer, which Mutch (2005) describes as watching and documenting the events being observed in the role of an outside researcher. By observing each participant data could be collected in the sociocultural context of each Educational Leader, and enabled investigation into how the Educational Leader physically enacted their professed leadership (Punch & Oancea, 2014). Observations also enabled the triangulation of data as the current research study sought to investigate both the perceptions and the practices of Educational Leaders. The data gathered from the semi-structured interviews and observations of the Educational Leaders was analysed and merged together to form key categories.

Once each Stage One interview had been transcribed and the data analysed, I then looked for key words and concepts that each participant had used to describe their professional practice. This included words and phrases such team player, collaborative, hands-on and being a mentor to colleagues. Headings were developed for field notes for each participant. The headings were derived using the terms that each participant had used to describe their professional practices (see Appendix G).

The observation and second interviews were arranged for a time that suited each participant. During the observation I focused on the Educational Leader as they carried out their professional role within their workplace. Field notes were written about what was observed, specifically looking for actions or information that related to what the Educational Leaders had described about their professional practices in the first interview (see Appendix G). A second semi-structured interview took place with the Educational Leader following this observation. This allowed me to share my field notes, discuss the observation, and ask for elaborations of concepts from the participants that may have resulted from previous interviews. The field notes were not shared before or during the observation, as I wanted the professional practices of the Educational Leaders to be as uninhibited as possible. That is, although the observations were sharpened by the use of concepts and categories that had evolved

during Stage One, I was able to add to these concepts as I observed the Educational Leaders' professional practices unfold in their working environment. Copies of job descriptions and a newsletter written by one of the Educational Leaders are examples of additional documentation that was shared with me during the second interviews. The data gathered during Stage Two was analysed in the same manner as the data gathered in Stage One.

3.3.1.3 Stage Three: Online Survey

Hard (2005) applied the notion of field credibility to positional leaders when they are engaged in the hands-on, daily work of early childhood education and care. This, according to Hard (2005), gives positional leaders integrity, for example when educators are able to explicitly see what an Educational Leader knows and does, educators are more accepting of the Educational Leader role. In order to explore the notion of the field credibility of the Educational Leaders a survey was sent out to educators working with the participating Educational Leaders. The survey links were sent out to each Educational Leader after the first interview with them was completed. By Stage Two of the data gathering I had already had the opportunity to review some of the survey data, and had identified that, whilst the Educational Leaders felt they were effectively sharing the purposes of their role with their colleagues, their colleagues, in turn, were identifying alternative understandings about the Educational Leader position in ECEC.

Prior to conducting interviews in Stage One of the data collection process a letter was sent out to the management of each ECEC service explaining the research process. This included information about the survey that would be sent to educators working in each of the four ECEC services (see Appendix C). A copy of the survey questions was included with the letter (see Appendix E). The survey was set up using the SurveyMonkey website and a link to the online survey was sent to each Educational Leader via their workplace email. An online platform was selected for the survey as web-based surveys provide greater access to, and for, survey participants (Fraenkel, Wallen & Hyun, 2015). The survey was set up so that the ECEC service manager or Educational Leader could email the survey link to multiple educator email addresses. Educators could therefore anonymously complete the

survey during work hours or at another suitable time. The questions contained in the survey were open-ended questions. According to Fraenkel et al. (2015) open-ended questions allow for individualised and personal responses that enable follow-up by the researcher. Although the survey responses were not followed up with the educators themselves, the responses provided data that was further explored in comparison to the data generated by the Educational Leaders. Eleven educators from the four participating ECEC services completed the survey.

It was clearly stated at the beginning of the survey that the focus was on a general overview of the Educational Leader role, rather than about a particular individual. This was important to clarify, as the intention of the survey was to gather the perspectives of educators about the Educational Leader role in ECEC services. The survey sought to discover what educators understood about the Educational Leader role in the ECEC sector, what gaps might exist and what the educators viewed as the purpose of this leadership role in ECEC.

The information gathered from the survey responses was analysed and grouped according to responses. As with the data gathered in Stages One and Two, the survey data was comparatively analysed and key words, concepts and themes were identified. Links were made between the findings of the survey and the data gathered in the interviews and observations of the Educational Leaders. Commonalities and differences in the perspectives of the educators and the Educational Leaders were also identified. The survey provided data about the educators' understandings of the Educational Leader role in comparison to the perceptions of the Educational Leaders themselves.

3.3.1.4 Member Checking

A letter was initially sent to each Educational Leader so that they could provide informed consent when agreeing to participate in the research study (see Appendix C). Once initial contact was made, I also explained the observation process to each participant. This ensured that each participant felt comfortable about what was expected of them and what I would be documenting. Each participant was contacted

either via telephone or email to arrange the first interview. The participants were interviewed individually at a time and place of their choice. This ensured the comfort of each participant as well as their anonymity. Each participant agreed to be observed and understood that they could withdraw from the research study at any time. Once transcripts for each interview had been typed up the transcripts were shared with the participants and they were offered the opportunity to provide feedback and further input if they chose to.

3.3.2 Data Analysis

The overarching focus of the current research study was to explore the professional practices, understandings and experiences of a group of Western Australian Educational Leaders, within their specific sociological environments. Therefore the data analysis methods were purposefully selected to capture the voices of the Educational Leaders, their interpretations of their role within their communities.

Birks and Mills (2015) described initial or open coding as the first step of data analysis. It is when the gathered data is dissected into smaller parts, through a process of comparison, questioning and contrasting. It is a method used to identify important words or phrases in the data. The interviews were recorded, transcribed and coded by respondent and line number. Open coding was used to investigate each transcript in detail, using coloured highlighters to categorise similarities and emerging concepts. I also used written notes as a method to constantly correlate the large amount of data that emerged from the two interviews, observation and online feedback, before each interview was transcribed.

Memo notes were written during and within two hours of each interview, using what Glasser and Strauss (1967) described as the process of constant, comparative analysis. This enabled the research to develop progressively, based on the perceptions and practices of each participant, and for emerging concepts to be built upon with each subsequent interview. These concepts were further explored in a second conversation with each participant. Frequently, concepts noted during a conversation with one participant were then further explored in subsequent

conversations with the other participants. A single observation of each participant in their role as Educational Leader was conducted and anonymous online survey responses from the colleagues of each Educational Leader were collected.

3.3.3 The Framework of Sustainable Professionalism

The gathered data was continually coded, compared and analysed, using the theoretical Framework of Sustainable Professionalism (Fasoli, Scrivens & Woodrow, 2007) as a tool to measure the functional traits of the role. Using the four frames of the Framework of Sustainable Professionalism I devised a list of questions to target my focus on the understandings and practices of each Educational Leader as I analysed the interview transcripts and other gathered data. The four frames and questions are illustrated in Table 3-1.

Table 3-1

Questions Used to Focus Data Analysis

Frame 1: Ethical Entrepreneurship	How is this Educational Leader describing their professional role?
Frame 2: Hopeful Futures Perspective	How would this Educational Leader like to see their role change?
Frame 3: Leadership with an Ethic of Care	What values, skills and beliefs are important to this Educational Leader in their professional practices?
Frame 4 – Leadership as Activism	How is this Educational Leader’s role interpreted in their specific context?

3.3.4 Coding

The use of open coding enabled close examination of the data, sectioning it into parts, making comparisons and raising further questions (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Intermediate coding is the second stage of data analysis (Birks & Mills, 2015). However the researcher continually moves between the initial and intermediate

stages of data analysis as they collect, analyse and compare data. Axial coding is a form of intermediate coding, featured in the works of Strauss (1987), and Corbin and Strauss (2008). Axial Coding was used to focus on each category at a time, looking at the paradigmatic conditions of each category, the in-depth examination of the relationships between the who, what, when, where and why (Strauss, 1987). The focus during Axial Coding was on unpacking the story of each Educational Leader, examining how their environment, professional knowledge, and personal experiences added to the complexity of the data.

Axial coding leads towards theoretical saturation. Dey (2007) likened theoretical saturation to a sponge that is as full of water as it can get. He defines theoretical saturation as present when additional data no longer adds new properties or dimensions to an existing category. However Morse (2007) cautions against viewing theoretical saturation too literally, rather he advises that theoretical saturation is viewed in abstract terms, represented by the judgement of the researcher that a pattern or theme has evolved, and no further data needs to be collected. Dey (2007) concurs, stating that the focus of theoretical saturation is on the quality, and not quantity, of the data.

3.3.5 Developing a theory, grounded in data

The final stage of the current research, to be scrutinized in Chapter 5, was advanced coding and theoretical integration. Advanced coding requires a level of deductive analysis, and the formulation of a theory, generated from the data. Birks and Mills (2015) define the word ‘theory’ as an explanatory scheme, consisting of a set of concepts that are interrelated and connected through relationships and patterns (p.108). The theory generated by the research is contextually constrained, relating to the particular set of Educational Leaders involved in the research, at a particular time and point in their leadership role.

3.4 Ethical Considerations

The four participants were given pseudonyms for confidentiality purposes. The pseudonyms chosen were Abby, Bec, Chris and Dana. The Educational Leaders are not referred to in any particular order in the research study. The research study

complied with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research involving Humans (NHMRC, 2014) and Curtin University HREC low risk ethics clearance was obtained. Permission was obtained from the participants to conduct the research and permission sought from each research participant prior to recording the interviews. Participants were treated with respect and dignity; and made aware of the reasons for, use and publication of the research. Participants were made aware they could withdraw at any time without explanation. Permission was also sought to carry out observations. The observations were recorded through the use of handwritten notes only (see Appendix G). These were discussed with each participant during the second interview. Data was not gathered about anyone else that may have been present at the time of the observation.

3.5 Strengths and Limitations of the Research

The sample of four Educational Leaders was small and the findings do not claim to reflect the perspectives and practices of all Educational Leaders. The research study aimed to present the beliefs and practices of four participants, at a particular point in time. Whether the views and practices of the Educational Leaders are transferable to the experiences of a wider group of Educational Leaders bears further research. There were certainly similarities identified between the perspectives and practices of the four Educational Leaders in this study. Researching the Educational Leader role in a wider range of settings, such as remote and difficult to staff locations, would add different insights into the challenges, practices and understandings of the role, the types of variables acknowledged by ACECQA (2019) in their Educational Leader guide.

The data was triangulated through two interviews with each Educational Leader, a single observation of their practices, and anonymous input from their centre educators. Educators from each service were invited to complete an anonymous online survey and were not interviewed face to face. The accuracy of the findings can therefore only be based on anonymous opinions expressed by a small number of educators at that point in time. Lastly, the research study sought to capture the voice of the Educational Leader regarding the level of support that they received in their

role. The nominated leader or centre manager in each ECEC service was not specifically interviewed so verification of the level of support for the Educational Leadership role was not substantiated. This is an area for future research.

3.6 Summary

This chapter presented the research methods used to conduct the current research study. The use of two interviews and an observation of the Educational Leaders in practice provided a way to uncover similarities and differences between the espoused perceptions, and the actual practices, of the four Educational Leaders. Additionally, data was collected from ECEC educators using an anonymous online survey. The surveys provided supplementary perspectives about the Educational Leader role, adding to the richness and complexity of the role (Fraenkel, Wallen & Hyun, 2015). As described, the focus of the current research study was to ensure that the perceptions and practices of those in the Educational Leader role were captured and described authentically and with validity.

Chapter 4

Results

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the results from the two individual interviews with each of the four early childhood educators who participated in the research. Data collected from observations of each of the Educational Leaders is presented and the findings of a survey are also represented in this chapter. The survey focused on the role of an Educational Leader within the ECEC context and did not seek specific information about a particular Educational Leader. In total eleven responses were received from the four participating ECEC services (Appendix F).

The purpose of the current research was to explore the professional practices, understandings and experiences of four Educational Leaders within their specific professional, sociological environments. During data analysis the four frames from Fasoli, Scrivens and Woodrow's (2007) Framework of Sustainable Professionalism were used to design a set of questions. These four questions focused the data analysis on the understandings and practices of the Educational Leaders as they emerged from the interview data (see Table 3-1). The four questions were

1. How did the Educational Leaders describe their professional role?
2. What changes did the Educational Leaders envisage for their role?
3. What values, skills and beliefs influence the Educational Leader role?
4. How were the Educational Leaders roles interpreted in their specific ECEC context?

As the interview transcripts of the Educational Leaders were reviewed, a number of recurring concepts emerged from the data. The recurring concepts were words or phrases that were frequently expressed by each of the participants during their interviews, revealing links between the perceptions and practices of the four Educational Leaders.

The term ‘concept’ in Grounded Theory research can be defined as a word with an evocative or explanatory meaning, that describes how the data relates to the substantive area of research (Holloway, 2008). The recurring concepts were further explored in a second interview and observation of each Educational Leader. Each recurring concept was linked to the four questions that were used to form the investigation of how the Educational Leaders interpreted their roles. The recurring concepts that revealed themselves through this process are highlighted in Table 4-1.

Table 4-1
Recurring Concepts that Evolved from Data Analysis

1. Ethical Entrepreneurship: How did the Educational Leaders describe their professional roles?	2. Hopeful Futures Perspective: What changes did the Educational Leaders envisage for their role?	3. Ethic of Care: What values, skills and beliefs influence the Educational Leader role?	4. Activism in Leadership: How were the Educational Leaders roles interpreted in their specific ECEC context?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a focus on pedagogy • mentoring and influencing • a ‘hands-on’ participant in learning • building relationships • confusing • respect, or lack thereof 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • interpretation • clarity • credibility • relationships • increasing knowledge base • expectations • communities • future-focused 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • life experience • qualifications • flexibility • critical reflection skills • collaboration • communication 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • developing critical reflection skills • developing pedagogical knowledge and skills • building leadership skills • shared philosophy • researching • on-going professional training and learning • bridging the knowledge gap • community partnerships • future-focused

The findings of the data, outlined in Table 4-1, are now described in detail in the following categories.

4.2 Ethical Entrepreneurship: Descriptions of the Educational Leader Roles

The four participants conceptualised their Educational Leader roles as that of supportive and collaborative leaders, with a responsibility to develop the pedagogical

skills of their teaching teams. The participants described the different structures of the Educational Leader role in their individual workplaces. Three of the Educational Leaders shared copies of their job descriptions, which varied in each setting.

Abby was an ECEC service owner. Within her service she held the positions of Centre Manager, Early Childhood Teacher and Educational Leader. “There always needs to be somebody who’s just overseeing everything so, you know, being that it’s my centre that fell to me” (Abby, lines 13-14). Abby described her Educational Leader role as involving lots of mentoring, including mentoring staff that are currently studying, as well as mentoring the educators in their use of the Early Years Learning Framework (DEEWR, 2009a). She termed herself “...a hands on leader. I’m not a sit back and tell people what to do. I lead by example” (Abby, lines 42-43). Abby went on to describe the Educational Leader role in her service as a behind the scenes position, a staff support role rather than engaging directly with families (lines 369-370).

According to supplied documentation, Abby’s job description was aligned with the position description of a qualified educator or centre director. Therefore in her workplace someone already working as a qualified educator or centre director fills the Educational Leader role. Abby acknowledged that holding multiple roles within her early childhood service was challenging. “Umm, I think there’s certain times where, umm, those roles become quite overwhelming. All those different roles that I have” (lines 67-68).

Chris was employed in the Educational Leader role for two days a week. Chris was employed solely as the Educational Leader in her service. Chris felt this was a positive aspect of her role, but she also considered it challenging. “...I’m only looking at the educational side of things most of the time...” (Chris, lines 21-22). She felt challenged as “...the girls are really passionate but maybe not quite as passionate about one specific area as what I am sometimes” (Chris, lines 23-24). Chris expressed her role as being focused on programming and planning practices, as well as working closely with the room leaders. Chris said:

I like to spend so much time researching current practices and seeing how we can feed that through into the rooms. And how I can get the leaders excited about changes in practice, or sharing their practices with each other (Chris, lines 16-17)

At the time of the interviews Chris was focused on ways to involve all educators in programme planning. She felt having the sole role of Educational Leader enabled her to spend time with all educators in the centre. “So if I’m feeling that they’re unsure about, if it’s a confidence thing, then I make time to be able to talk to those educators as well, to see where we’re at” (Chris, lines 51-52). Chris had a very extensive and specific job description. She was employed as the Educational Leader for an organisation with two ECEC centres. Previously Chris had been employed in one of the centres as the early childhood teacher. Chris considered herself very lucky that her employers acknowledged the Educational Leader position as an important role. In her ECEC service the Educational Leader role was “... a specific role that comes with its own job description and set of expectations” (lines 166-167).

Bec was employed fulltime as the Centre Director and Educational Leader. She was mentoring a colleague to take over the Educational Leader role. Bec described her Educational Leader role as a supportive one. “...the Educational Leader is someone who just needs to be there for the staff, as a pillar of support” (Bec, lines 48). She explained her involvement in programming, stating that she believes an Educational Leader must be involved in programming, planning and reflection alongside her educator team. “Someone who is heavily involved in the programming as well. You can’t be a Centre Director and Educational Leader, and not be hands on, on the floor as well” (Bec, lines 51-52). By referring to being ‘hands on’ Bec was describing her belief that Educational Leaders need to be involved in the typical responsibilities and tasks of an early childhood educator.

Dana was employed as both an educator and in the Educational Leader role. She worked three days a week, dividing this time between her Educational Leader position and her role as an educator. Dana found her Educational Leader role rewarding because she is able to support and mentor staff, resulting in what she regards as the provision of best practice. “...helps staff members and educators to

learn how to look at children's development, look at how they can move them forward" (Dana, lines 47-48). At the time of interviewing the participants Dana did not have a specific job description for her Educational Leader role. Her workplace had created a general outline of the expectations of the role. "...we could probably look at and change it, having done the role for a little while, and look at some of the restraints that we have, or some of the situations that we've come across" (Dana, lines 79-81). In a previous workplace Dana had been the nominated manager of the ECEC setting. Dana indicated that before being given the Educational Leader role, she was happy to be in a hands-on role working with families and children, without the workload of a leadership role. Dana explained that she was chosen for the Educational Leader role, rather than applying for it. "I think I was chosen because I have many years of experience in, umm, the field, in early years" (Dana, lines 5-6).

Three of the four participants emphasized the lack of clear role expectations, particularly in the early childhood regulations. The participants stressed uncertainty about what they should be doing within their Educational Leader role that, they felt, made the role very confusing.

Abby believed that the title of Educational Leader was at the heart of the confusion about the role. She felt that "...that word Education, umm, conjures up, in most people's minds, school-type learning" (Abby, lines 228-230).

Chris admitted initial confusion from the lack of specific guidelines for the role within the early childhood regulations. She constantly questioned her centre management about what it is that she was expected to do in her role as Educational Leader. "(Centre Manager) worked really hard with the management group that oversee us to really make sure that I had a job description that I could work through" (Chris, lines 175-177). As a result, Chris claimed to feel more secure knowing that she is meeting the expectations of her role. She was also able to spend time on the aspects of her role that she was particularly passionate about.

Bec offered further insights, expressing the opinion that the Educational Leader role developed because of the assessment and rating process. She believes that the role

developed as a result of shortcomings in the early childhood sector, identified during the assessment and rating process. She agreed with the sense of confusion surrounding the role. “I think that when the role was first introduced there was a lot of confusion around what an Educational Leader was and what their positions were” (Bec, lines 159-160).

Dana believed these factors affected the quantity of employable staff for the Educational Leader role. “But I think for me, who works quite closely along guidelines and policies and procedures, I find those guidelines very helpful to understand that I’m doing the job in the correct and best way” (Dana, lines 109-111). Dana also mentioned particular uncertainty around the assessment and ratings process. “Because everybody has how they read the paragraph that is in the guidelines. That can be read in so many different ways. And so one person may think the role should be doing A, B, C and someone else might look at it and say, well it should be D, E, F” (Dana, lines 91-94).

4.3 Hopeful Future Perspective: Developing the Educational Leader Role

Abby expressed frustration at not being able to focus on the Educational Leader role as much as she would like. “So, you know, if I could give away all the paperwork side of things, and just be, you know, that hands on, mentor teacher type person to the children and the staff then I’d do that in a second” (Abby, lines 74-76). However Abby also proposed that the Educational Leader role has been pushed onto the sector, in an attempt to improve educational outcomes for children upon entry to formal schooling. “And it’s not fixing it so they’ve gone what else can we fiddle with to try and fix it. Oh well let’s start teaching all the children a lot earlier” (Abby, lines 302-303). She felt strongly that the Educational Leader position was unnecessary. From her perspective as centre owner Abby believed that the position had made the early childhood sector ‘top heavy’ with managers, assistant managers, early childhood teachers and now Educational Leaders. “Umm, I think even in big centres where they have, umm, area managers and things, that is part of the role that that person would be doing. In my opinion. Is going out and making sure that, you know, documentation is being done...that records were being kept up to date, all those sorts of things. And not as individual roles but as one, as one task” (Abby, lines 375-377).

In contrast Chris asserted that the Educational Leader role was important because parents using childcare services were expecting more than just care for their children. "...how are we supporting the early education of their children. And I believe that does take somebody...that role is there now for that person" (Chris, lines 82-83).

Bec believed that "... the Educational Leader should never be the Centre Manager or Director because you need a leadership team to run a centre the best that you possibly can. And one person is not going to be able to" (Bec, lines 190-191). Bec had begun to mentor a colleague to take over the Educational Leader role. This, she believed, would allow her to focus on her management role, whilst she mentored someone who was tasked with the pedagogical development of the ECEC service's educators.

Dana stated that she enjoyed the Educational Leader role but was dissatisfied with the time allowance for her to fulfill her role. She was allocated one half day a week which Dana felt was not enough time to mentor and support educators in the centre. "So my ideal situation would be to have one extra day where I'm just Educational Leader. It still would be difficult but it would help with being able to be off the shop floor and be able to...observe what's happening, talk to staff..." (Dana, lines 62-65). Dana also acknowledged the opportunities that the lack of official guidelines in the regulations gives to ECEC services. She indicated that ECEC services are so diverse, given their location, economic and cultural situations, and limited definition of the Educational Leader position enabled services to make the position suitable for their specific needs. Dana suggested that with more non-contact time she would like to extend her role into the wider community, building relationships with the local primary school and other Educational Leaders near to her workplace. "It's very difficult with time restraints. I wouldn't want to impact on the role I need to have within the centre" (Dana, lines 166-167).

4.4 Ethic of Care: Values, Skills and Beliefs that influenced the Educational Leader Role

The participating Educational Leaders described a range of values, skills and beliefs that they believed underpinned their professional practices, including mentoring and working with adults, the value of life experience and their beliefs about having credibility within the ECEC sector.

4.4.1 Mentoring and Adult Education Skills

Each of the participants discussed the concept of mentoring, as a skill and as a knowledge base. When asked to describe her Educational Leader role, Abby immediately responded “Lots of mentoring” (Abby, line 27). She described this in terms of mentoring educators that were studying early childhood qualifications, as well as mentoring all educators in using the Early Years Learning Framework and National Quality Standards. As the conversation progressed Abby stated that she felt some form of mentoring experience was beneficial for Educational Leaders. “...I don’t know necessarily as a qualification but more that they have done some level of training so that they understand what the role of a mentor is, and umm, and the value of communication...” (Abby, lines 141-142). Abby added that whilst she did not regard the Educational Leader role as necessary “I would more refer to myself as the...as a mentor...” (Abby, lines 336-337).

Chris also felt that a mentoring or leadership qualification would be useful for Educational Leaders (Chris, line 141). She explained her mentoring role as making time to talk to educators who were unsure or lacking confidence in implementing the educational programme of the centre. Chris used the term ‘coaching’ when referring to ways she might support colleagues. “It could just be me coaching them through” (Chris, line 114). Chris was involved in room leader meetings and ran a section of the staff meeting, usually focused on critical reflection practices.

...if we are attempting to implement new practices...I source as much information as I can for the varying age groups and then we work with the room leaders as to how we’re going to implement and roll those practices out (Chris, lines 45-48)

At the time of the initial interview Chris had just completed a leadership course. She had initiated attendance on this course herself, as part of her own professional development plan. Chris explained that although the course was "...titled early childhood specific but, it seemed fairly generic" (Chris, line 122). Chris expressed the opinion that a mentoring or leadership qualification was important for Educational Leaders to have, particularly if they were not confident in their role.

Bec described her leadership role as collaborative. "I believe in bringing everybody on board and as a team. We need to all be of the same understanding and have the same goals" (Bec, lines 150-151). She felt that positive leadership characteristics included "Not so much in the sense of knowing everything there is to know about education and care, but more about themselves, who they are as a person and their wider beliefs" (Bec, lines 80-82). Bec stated that this sense of self gave her the strength and determination to set goals and focus on how to achieve them.

Dana felt that a tool set of skills was vital as an Educational Leader. She included mentoring skills in this tool set. Dana stated that her mentoring skills had mostly developed through experience and her own personal development. Any formal courses that she had attended were not necessarily focused in the early years and weren't entirely relevant. Dana felt that having an aspect of mentoring in early childhood educator training would be useful "...and then maybe a little more in-depth if you decide to become...would like to be an Educational Leader..." (Dana, lines 28-30).

4.4.2 Concept of Life Experience

The four Educational Leaders frequently described themselves as collaborative. They noted that the ability to form positive relationships with educators was key to effective leadership.

Abby made numerous references to the concept of life experience throughout our conversation. Abby stated that an important characteristic for a leader was having an understanding of "...people's different points of view, uhh, people's life experiences and people's cultures and things like that" (Abby, lines 49-50). In terms of her own life experience, Abby felt that as a leader she has had to learn flexibility, to allow

others to take a path that she may have already tried herself, "...so that they can learn from their mistakes" (Abby, lines 164-165). This understanding of life skills, in her opinion, helped leaders to communicate collaboratively (Abby, line 51). Abby was the first of the Educational Leaders to be interviewed, but this concept of life experience and leadership was also implied or discussed in two of the other initial interviews.

Chris was the only participant who did not explicitly mention the concept of life experience as it relates to leadership. However she did refer to the positive impact her professional experience as a primary school teacher has had on her role as an Educational Leader. "Umm...managing groups of staff. Umm...having some of those tougher conversations. And professional conversations. Those conversations aren't new to me" (Chris, lines 135-137).

Bec initiated a conversation about her prior life experience. Her role as Educational Leader was something she came to do later in life, after working in occupations other than education. One of her previous occupations included working in the hospitality sector. Bec describes herself as working her way up through the ranks of the ECEC service where she was previously employed. She started as an unqualified childcare educator, studying for her diploma in early childhood studies. Once qualified she moved from an educator position to a management position, to the role of Educational Leader and centre manager, all in the space of five years. Bec felt that the life experiences she has gained have helped her understand "...people that don't have the same passions that you do and being able to understand that it's not a personal attack and that it's not anything bad about yourself. And it took me a while to come to that understanding. But again I think it's just life experience" (Bec, lines 104-110).

Dana was asked what personal characteristics are important for the Educational Leader role. She immediately replied "patience. Uhh, experience. Life experience"(Dana, line 131). When prompted for further explanation, Dana offered the following explanation. "Because often you're dealing with people. It might, might involve dealing with families, dealing with other staff members. So life experience just helps with how you approach people and have empathy to situations" (Dana, lines 133-134). Dana noted that it was the diversity of life experience that she

found useful. It enabled her to deal with different personalities and different ideals, "...showing them that their personal ideals may not always be in line with what our professional ideals are" (Dana, lines 147-148).

The concept of life experience, as it pertains to leadership, may add richer depth to the qualities of an Educational Leader. Professional experience was rated highly in the job descriptions of each of the educational leaders. However three of the four participants emphasized the concept of life experience far more than they did their professional experience. This suggests further investigation into the notion of life experience, as something in addition to professional experience, is warranted.

4.4.3 Credibility

Confusion about the role of the Educational Leader formed the initial motivation for this research. This confusion was assumed to be about the lack of a definitive job description at a national level, which in turn left many Educational Leaders confused about the requirements of their role. However an interesting concept emerged from the data, namely the understanding of, and engagement with, the Educational Leader role by other educators in the early childhood services. This concept was not initially identified through interviews with the participants. Rather it emerged from the survey data, gathered from educators in the workplaces of the Educational Leader participants. The survey data is described under the heading *4.4.3.1 Field Credibility*.

Abby stated from the outset of the research that she did not think the Educational Leader role was necessary. Her leadership positions in the centre were blurred between being centre owner, centre manager, early childhood teacher and educational leader. "...if I've then got a separate teacher and an Educational Leader, on top of me being here and everything else, you're so top heavy!" (Abby, lines 416-417). Being a centre with a number of leadership positions concerned Abby. She used the example of an imaginary rural Western Australian early childhood centre, with fifteen children, two staff and numerous leadership positions. "You know, you've got two staff to look after all that, plus three or four very important people. Apart from the fact that you can't get all of those people in a remote country town,

little country towns or remote areas in Australia” (Abby, lines 406-409). Abby did not differentiate between her many roles in her centre or indicate that there might be an effect of power on her relationships with her staff.

Chris, who works solely as an Educational Leader, has a very clearly defined role within the centre. “So what I do is as soon as I start my day I make sure I go and see all the educators that are already on site. I have a quick check-in to see how they are going” (Chris, transcript 2, lines 7-9). Chris explained that she runs the critical reflection component at staff meetings and through this she felt the educators understood a little more about her Educational Leader role. She also works individually with some of the educators, so that they gain a better understanding of the support she can offer them as Educational Leader (Chris, transcript 2, lines 37-41).

Bec said she felt her educators understood the basics of how the role should look. This has been done through “shared discussions, and the mentoring, and working as a team, leading through conversations and stuff like that. I think they would definitely see what the role is meant to look like” (Bec, transcript 2, lines 28-29). In the survey a number of educators described an Educational Leader as someone “to oversee, facilitate and support all aspects of the education provided within the service”. Bec emphasized that the Educational Leader role should be a specialised position. She felt that the role should never be undertaken by the nominated leader, such as the centre manager “...because you need a leadership team to run a centre the best that you possibly can” (Bec, lines 190-191).

At the time of the interviews Dana’s role was in a state of change and development.

“But I think that’s still really, umm, changing as things go on. So as things are, umm, drawn into the right shape for our settling, for our centre, then its informing staff of that. Because it’s still evolving really, because it’s, there’s such a wide scope for the Educational Leader role that really, it will evolve as that person is in the role, doing the role, acting out the role”
(Dana, transcript 2, lines 50-53).

Dana also regarded the Educational Leader role as something separate from the centre manager role. She defined the centre manager as someone who deals with finance, budgets and oversees the whole staff of the ECEC service (Dana, line 225). Dana believed that educators would find it confronting to have their centre manager observing their professional practices or mentoring them "...because they may be concerned that they are not performing and it could be used as part of an appraisal" (Dana, lines 229-232).

4.5 Concept of Community

The participating Educational Leaders held varying views of their role in the ECEC communities in which they worked. Abby, as the first participant interviewed, stated that she didn't think most parents and families were aware of the Educational Leader position. "...I think the Educational Leader is, is connected to the staff and not to parents. It is about being in charge of what the staff are doing within the educational basis of the programme" (Abby, lines 359-361). However she was happy to refer to herself as a mentor, and to share this mentoring with families in the centre by providing them with information about their child's development.

In contrast Chris viewed educating parents and families about the importance of early childhood education as a key aspect of her role. She said "...they're looking to see how, how are we supporting the early education of their children. And I believe that does take somebody...that role is there now for that person" (Chris, lines 81-84). Chris assumed that parent and family education had been happening in early childhood centres before the creation of the Educational Leader role, however she didn't think it was as defined. "And now becoming more defined" (Chris, lines 87-88).

Bec also described herself as supporting the development of colleagues, children and families in early childhood education. "I think the role of the Educational Leader is someone who just needs to be there for the staff, as a pillar of support" (Bec, lines 47-48). Bec described her interactions with families as an opportunity to bridge the gap of knowledge between what ECEC educators do and what families might think

happens in ECEC. Bec felt that she was constantly seeking ways to improve the children's skills and develop their interests (Bec, lines 67-69).

Dana described her community role as a supportive one. Her response was closely linked to that of Abby, in terms of considering the role to be about mentoring staff and sharing child development information with families.

It's informing them [parents] that you are there to support staff and also support the families so that if there is anything that they're concerned about with their child they can possibly come to myself and I can then look at ways to provide them with information... (Dana, lines 158-160).

4.6 Activist Leadership: The Educational Leaders' vision for their ECEC communities

Abby aligned her role with ensuring that educators understood the National Quality Standards and Early Years Learning Framework, linked their planning to the centre philosophy and to the direction that Abby wants the centre to go in. Abby said:

...I spend quite a lot of time, you know, in the room with the staff and the children. So that I can role model what, what I expect and what I believe is the best programme practices for the children (Abby, lines 43-45).

Chris reiterated a desire for credibility, a concept she frequently mentioned during the interview process. She was focused on building levels of professionalism amongst the staff in the ECEC service. "Children still call it daycare and that, I think that comes from their parents. And I think the more that we can show them what we're doing...we are having that shift with parents" (Chris, lines 58-61).

However Dana acknowledged the complexities of leadership, stating that she did not think everyone should "...become robots and everybody does everything in the same way. But we all have the same ethos...way that we want to work and provide the best practice and the best care that we can" (Dana, lines 152-154). Dana wanted to build a shared philosophy amongst the educators in her service so that everyone was

working towards common goals. She also placed emphasis on supporting colleagues as they took on leadership roles in her ECEC service. “Knowing that there are, there can be frustrations, there can be stresses, and supporting them in that role” (Dana, lines 50-51).

Bec emphasized the use of reflection in ensuring the team had shared pedagogical practices and understandings. “...you need to be continually reflecting on your practices, your own approaches, to be able to help them reflect on theirs” (Bec, lines 53-55). Bec explained her developing role in engaging with families and the community as “bridging the gap of knowledge between what we actually do as childcare educators, and what they think we are” (Bec, lines 67-68). Bec strongly emphasized her desire for credibility, as had Chris in a previous interview. “Being an advocate for our industry. Same as in the wider community. I refer to myself as an educator, rather than a childcare worker. Because I want to be seen as a professional” (Bec, lines 182-183).

4.7 Observations of the Educational Leaders in Practice

In addition to two interviews, the current research included an observation of the Educational Leaders in practice. The observations of each Educational Leader provided a way to visually observe participants in situations that they had verbally described, as well as develop a holistic understanding of the sociological context of each Educational Leader (Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

Abby’s perceptions of her practices were that she was a mentor, inspiring others and being ‘hands on’ and ‘leading by example’. In practice Abby was observed asking educators if they needed assistance with children, and encouraging educators to reflect on the reasons why certain behaviours were occurring for a child. Abby approached a student who was on practicum in the ECEC service and encouraged her to interact with the children. She spent time explaining policies and procedures to a reliever and later checked on her to ensure she felt comfortable in the service. Abby was asked for her opinion about a documentation board, which she expressed. The educators disagreed with Abby’s input and she respectfully listened to their reasoning. As centre owner, manager and Educational Leader, Abby was the primary

person that families interacted with. This was beneficial as Abby was able to build relationships with numerous children and their families. She knew the names of all children and staff present in the service on the day of the observation.

Abby had introduced online portfolios for educators to document the children's learning. The children's online portfolios were accessible to families through a website. Abby was responsible for checking the educator contributions to the online portfolios, and used these portfolios to give feedback to educators about their programming and documentation. Abby constantly used open-ended questioning with educators, as well as with the children, that she believed role-modeled positive early childhood practices for her educator staff. Abby perceived herself as skilled in meeting different learning and communication styles. This was evidenced through her interactions with the student on practicum in the centre, interactions with educators who were setting up a documentation board and encouraging educators to take on various responsibilities throughout the centre. This included different educators leading staff meetings each month.

Chris described her leadership practices as collaborative and focused on inspiring others. She emphasized relationship building as crucial to her Educational Leader role. Chris was the only Educational Leader employed solely in the role. She did not work as an educator in the ECEC service. In practice Chris was observed collaborating with educators about displays. She shared her ideas and listened to the ideas of the educators. She worked on the display with the educators, helping to place photos and children's artworks. Chris met with the centre manager and spent fifteen minutes sharing information related to her Educational Leader role. Chris also spent time working with a staff member who was struggling to support a colleague with the online programming app that the centre used. Chris was observed giving lots of positive feedback, praise and encouragement to educators, whilst also using questioning techniques to keep conversations purposeful.

In the first interview with Chris, she verbally identified her skills in meeting different educator learning styles and personalities. During the observation Chris was noted using non-confrontational language such as "my suggestion would be...". She sat on the floor with an educator who was busy with a child, in order to have a conversation

about the programming board in the room. This was both respectful and considerate of the pressure the educator may have felt about attending to the needs of the child, versus conversing with someone in a leadership position. Chris further described herself as a respectful leader and this was evidenced through conversations where Chris gave advice, rather than directions, and used language such as “Is that still working?” and “Okay, I’ll think about that”.

In her verbal interviews Chris described critical reflection as imperative to quality ECEC practices. She perceived developing the critical reflection skills of the educators as an important part of her Educational Leader role. This was observed in Chris’ questioning techniques which included lots of “How?” and “Why?” questions, following up on changes made in the different areas of the centre, giving feedback to a student on practicum in the centre and during staff meetings. Chris was observed in a meeting with both the centre manager and with a staff member. She shared the agenda for the next staff meeting that included a critical reflection question. Chris stated that this is an ongoing component of each monthly staff meeting in the centre.

Bec described her Educational Leader role as collaborative, energetic and passionate with a focus on bringing all educators “on board with the basics”. She emphasized building the knowledge and skills of educators in her centre and wanted to bridge the gap between the centre and families. In practice Bec was observed actively involved in a music and movement session. She shared an enjoyable time with educators and children. The children were familiar with Bec and referred to her by name, indicating that she frequently spent time interacting with the children. Bec stated that she was able to appreciate the challenges faced by educators if she spent time in each area of the centre. Bec was then able to mentor the educators to find solutions for these challenges. Bec’s name appeared on the weekly staffing rosters in the opening or closing shifts. Bec stated that this enabled her to meet and greet families and see the flow of the daily routines in the centre. Bec also shared the online social media page of the centre where, as Educational Leader, she regularly posts articles or updates for the centre families. Bec also writes up a newsletter for the families, inclusive of contributions from educators in the centre.

There was a shared philosophy between Bec as Educational Leader, and other centre staff who all reacted in the same way when one child refused to participate in the music session. Their approach was very relaxed and reassuring to the child. Bec shared evidence of regular staff meetings that incorporate a reflective question and answer session, as well as the sharing of professional readings or articles that she used to increase the professional knowledge and reflective practices of all educators. When Bec's centre was first visited she had recently been employed as the centre manager and Educational Leader. The observation and second interview occurred four months later and changes to the environment were obvious. Bec had introduced natural wood furniture and toys throughout the centre. Documentation about the children's learning and the educational programme were now prominently displayed.

Dana illustrated her Educational Leader role as being supportive of the practices of educators, as well as supportive of families. She described herself as a mentor to educators but expressed feeling overwhelmed by the amount of documentation and the challenges of being both an educator and Educational Leader within her centre. Dana was based in the office during the time of the observation. She chatted to another educator who was on their non-contact time, giving feedback about a learning story that the educator had written. Dana used language such as "I hear what you're saying", "Have you considered...", "Did I show you this?". She shared an article on schemas that related to the learning story the educator had written. Dana extended this discussion with the educator by sharing information with families about schemas. She did this using an online app that the service uses to share news or information with families. Dana frequently uses this app to share the educational programme with the families. Dana was also approached by an educator to ask if she could source ideas for a numeracy activity that they wanted to do with a group of children. Dana spent fifteen minutes observing a child with behaviors that educators were finding challenging. She used a running record to document interactions between the child and educators and then returned to the office to analyse what she had observed. Dana said that she frequently refers to information on the internet for ideas and strategies to support the educators, or relies on her own professional experiences. At the end of the observation period Dana returned to her role as an educator in the centre.

4.8 Field Credibility

Following the work of Hard (2005) the notion of field credibility was explored in relation to the Educational Leaders participating in the current research study.

According to Hard (2005) field credibility results when educators explicitly see what a leader knows and does, and as a result are more accepting of the leader's role. In order to explore the field credibility of Educational Leaders, the perspectives of ECEC educators were sought. This was done through an anonymous survey sent to educators working with the participating Educational Leaders.

4.8.1 Mentor, Guide, Facilitator

The respondents were asked to convey their notions about the role of an Educational Leader in ECEC settings. Seven educators (N = 11) used words such as mentor, guide, advisor and facilitator when describing the Educational Leader position. One educator described an Educational Leader as someone they should be able to “go to for advice, direction, inspiration and confirmation that I am moving in the right direction”. During the initial interviews with the participating Educational Leaders there was discussion about the qualities that made them effective in their leadership position. The Educational Leaders had each referred to their role as guiding, mentoring and supporting educators, descriptions that were validated by seven of the respondents.

4.8.2 Supervising and Checking

In contrast one of the educators stated that they were not sure about the Educational Leader role, “to look at our observations I think”. A second educator stated that they thought an Educational Leader was “in charge of making sure we do the programs properly”, whilst a third educator responded that an Educational Leader should be responsible “for the day to day running of the room” and to ensure “all staff are working in the correct way”. These three responses implied an alternative and more authoritarian perspective of the Educational Leader role than the role described by the Educational Leaders themselves. The four Educational Leaders had described themselves as collaborative with a responsibility to develop the pedagogical skills of their teaching teams.

4.8.3 Necessity of the Educational Leader Role

Through the survey the educators were asked if they thought an Educational Leader role was necessary in ECEC settings, and why. Six educators (N = 11) said yes, but with one of the six stating that they believed the role was necessary only if the Educational Leader “was fulfilling their role as required, to be a support and guide to Educators”. An additional perspective was expressed by an educator who wrote that they thought the Educational Leader role was needed as “...every centre needs someone an educator can go to for help on any subject or problems they may have”. This response indicated a perspective of the Educational Leader role as a trustworthy position, offering security and confidence for educators that they are being supported.

The remaining five educators felt that the Educational Leader role was either unnecessary or only necessary in larger ECEC settings. Two educators were negative in their response, stating “they don’t seem to do much” and “Not really. Our boss does it”. One educator wrote “In a busy centre, yes, as the centre manager would be too busy to help the educators. In a smaller, quieter centre, not necessarily as the centre manager probably has more time to help”. Another educator felt that a separate Educational Leader position wasn’t always necessary. The educator expressed the idea of a room leader or centre manager taking on the Educational Leader responsibilities, as long as they had sufficient time to engage with individual educators on a regular basis.

4.8.4 Raising Quality

Two of the respondents related the Educational Leader role with quality in ECEC, “...to improve quality in centres” and “...to ensure our educators are providing the best quality program to all the children”. The two educators did not define what the term ‘quality’ meant to them.

4.8.5 Qualifications and Experience

The survey asked educators for their opinion on the qualifications or experience an Educational Leader needed. Responses in favour of a diploma or degree in ECEC

were dominant, with eight of the eleven educators agreeing that, at a minimum, a diploma was necessary. Of these eight responses, three emphasized the need for a teaching degree qualification. Further to this four of the eight respondents referred to extensive practical experience in the ECEC sector as key to employment as an Educational Leader. “I believe they should at least have over 5 years experience as a qualified in this field, and have recommendations from the director and staff members”.

In contrast three of the eleven respondents considered skills and experience as the primary consideration in employing someone as an Educational Leader. One educator wrote “Qualifications are not nearly as important as experience because the more experience they have the more likely they are going to be able to help you”.

4.8.6 Qualities and Characteristics

Qualifications and experience were acknowledged as important in the appointment of an Educational Leader. However the survey respondents also listed a number of qualities and characteristics that they believed an Educational Leader needed to have, in order to be successful in the role. These included being knowledgeable, patient and a good listener. The educators emphasized the word ‘approachable’, with five educators explicitly listing the word in their responses, and four others referring to characteristics such as open-mindedness and being personable.

One educator responded that they were unsure about the characteristics of an Educational Leader. This was the same educator who felt that Educational Leaders did not do much and they weren’t sure why the role existed.

The survey results provided insight into educator perspectives of the Educational Leader role (see Appendix F). There was a range of descriptions of the Educational Leader, from being a mentor, to educators being unsure as to why the role existed at all. The Educational Leaders who participated in the current study also expressed confusion about the purpose and scope of their leadership position. The participating Educational Leaders did not express how they ensured educators in their workplaces understood the purpose of their role, or whether there had been consultation with the

educator staff when introducing the Educational Leader position to a particular ECEC setting.

4.9 Substantive Grounded Theory

The final stage of Grounded Theory research is the formulation of a Substantive Grounded Theory, generated from the data that has been described in this chapter of the research study. Birks and Mills (2015) define the word ‘theory’ as an explanatory scheme, consisting of a set of concepts that are interrelated and connected through relationships and patterns (p.108). The theory generated by the research is contextually constrained, relating to the particular set of Educational Leaders involved in the research, at a particular time and point in their leadership role.

The purpose of the current research was to explore the professional practices, understandings and experiences of the Educational Leaders within their specific sociological environments. The research explored how the Educational Leaders described and enacted their roles, what values, skills and beliefs influenced their role and how the Educational Leader role was interpreted in the four ECEC settings. As outlined in Chapter 4, the core category that arose from the data was the participants’ interpretations of their role. They viewed what they do as something separate from other leadership roles in their early childhood service, with a focus on transformative, pedagogical leadership. Although there were similarities in the way that each Educational Leader described their role, each role was also very context-specific. This was confirmed by a number of categories that developed during ongoing comparative analysis of the data and emerging concepts.

Once no further information could be added to each category, a theory, grounded in data, emerged from the research. The Grounded Theory that thus emerged from the data is the Theory of the Activist Educational Leader, modelled on the Sustainable Professionalism Framework of Fasoli, Scrivens and Woodrow (2007). Figure 4.1 illustrates the development of the Substantive Grounded Theory of The Activist Educational Leader.

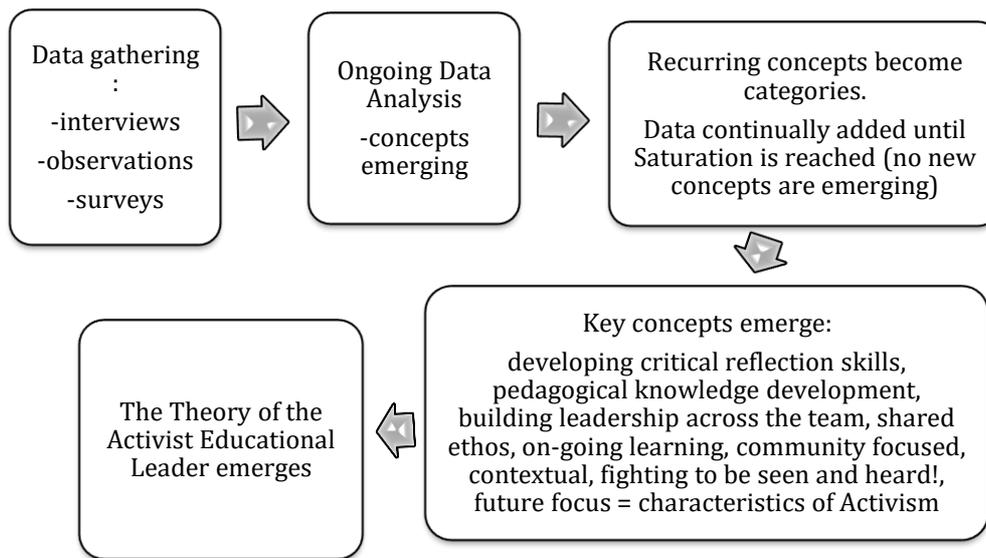


Figure 4.1 *Developing a substantive grounded theory, generated from data*

The grounded theory of The Activist Educational Leader will be further discussed in Chapter 5: Discussion.

4.10 Summary

This chapter presented the findings from two interviews and one observation of the Educational Leaders in practice. Additional data was gathered from an anonymous online survey, sent to ECEC educators working with the Educational Leaders. Continual data analysis confirmed that the participants were uncertain and confused about their role. They expressed insecurity and wanted to know if they were performing their role in a similar way to other Educational Leaders. There was evidence that the broad and undefined parameters of the role, intended to enable flexible and circumstantial leadership, were in fact constraining for the participants. The participants were focused on external sources for assurance that they were performing their educational leadership role correctly. For many of the Educational Leaders there were tensions between wanting to do what Educational Leaders in other centres were doing, and what their workplace requirements were. The numerous examples from the interviews with the Educational Leaders illustrate the connection between the motivation of the Educational Leaders to fulfill their role responsibilities, but being inhibited by a lack of professional identity.

Chapter 5

Discussion

5.1 Introduction

This chapter deliberates the categories and resulting Grounded Theory of the current research that were presented in Chapter 4. The categories of *A Hopeful Future Perspective* and *Activism* that were identified in Chapter 4 have been further refined and grouped together in the current chapter. According to Fraenkel, Wallen and Hyun (2015) grounded theory categories are constantly refined and changed in a dynamic, cyclic process. Whilst acknowledging the limited sample size of the current research study, a number of implications for the development of the Educational Leader role in Western Australia are identified.

The current research study has established that the Educational Leaders' interpretations of their roles formed the primary category, and it was from this category that further categories and the Grounded Theory emerged. This chapter discusses the ways in which the Educational Leader role is perceived and practiced by the participating group of Educational Leaders. These findings are measured in relation to current understandings about the role of the Educational Leader, as identified in Chapter 2 of the current research study. Lastly, the chapter discusses the theory, grounded in data, which emerged from the research findings.

5.2 Descriptions of the Educational Leader Role

In alignment with the original research question, the current research study explored the professional practices, understandings and experiences of the participating Educational Leaders. The Educational Leaders described their roles in terms of transformative and collaborative leadership. These terms included words and phrases such as support, collaboration, mentoring, critical reflection and a focus on professional practice improvement. The Educational Leaders' expressed beliefs that relate closely to prior research about leadership: a desire to be collaborative and collegial, critically reflective and to spread leadership responsibilities across the

educator team (Hopkins & Jackson, 2003; Rodd, 2006). The Educational Leaders constituted their role as something separate from the managerial responsibilities of the organisational leader. Rather the Educational Leaders regarded the primary purpose of their role as being responsible for the pedagogical skills development of their colleagues. These beliefs were reinforced by the data gathered from the educator surveys. Over half of the respondents also used concepts such as 'inspirational, approachable, mentoring' when asked to describe the characteristic of an Educational Leader.

5.2.1 Ethical Entrepreneurs

Ethical entrepreneurs in ECEC consider the effects of their actions on their whole ECEC community (Fasoli, Scrivens & Woodrow, 2007). In accordance one participant defined herself as an advocate for the ECEC sector, using her position to raise community perceptions about early childhood education. Another participant emphasized a desire for credibility, which she hoped to achieve by developing existing relationships with families and the community of the ECEC service, and using these relationships to promote the educational aspects of early childhood education and care. The Educational Leaders also spoke of being overwhelmed by time constraints, leaving them dissatisfied with how they approached their role. Five of the educators who participated in the survey wrote that they were not sure why the Educational Leader role existed and that it was unnecessary.

The findings of the current research indicate that with time and other constraints, the Educational Leaders found it challenging to meet the needs of the educators in their services and this made it difficult for educators to see the purpose of the Educational Leader role. There are noteworthy similarities between the findings of the current research study, regarding time constraints and support within the workplace, and the findings proposed by researchers such as Fleet, Soper, Semann and Madden (2015). In their analysis Fleet et al. (2015) identified that developing supportive workplace environments were a priority for the success of the Educational Leader role. This support included budgetary assistance and having a specific job description.

Opportunities for coaching and mentoring relationships were strongly accentuated by the Educational Leaders, but limited time and having other roles within the ECEC service made forming these relationships challenging. These findings offer examples of the realities experienced by the participating Educational Leaders. Several previous studies noted the positive impact of contextually relevant pedagogical coaching on quality outcomes in ECEC (Dowling & O'Malley, 2009; Hedges, 2012; Colmer, Waniganayake & Field, 2014). As suggested by the findings of the current research study the Educational Leaders understand the value of mentoring and coaching relationships as a means to enhance quality educational outcomes, but currently lack the time and resources to develop these. Furthermore the Educational Leaders identified a lack of knowledge about adult learning styles. ACECQA (2019) makes the assumption that ECEC Educational Leaders are skilled in areas such giving feedback to colleagues, mentoring and coaching models and adult learning styles. The current research findings are contrary to ACECQA's assumptions, and this adds more complexity to the limited description of an Educational Leader as an educator, coordinator or other individual with suitable skills (Government of Western Australia, 2012). A description of what these suitable skills might be is not contained in the Education and Care Services National Regulations (Government of Western Australia, 2012). Based on the findings of the current research study, it is recommended that skills, such as coaching and mentoring, are included in ECEC-specific leadership qualifications.

Ethical entrepreneurs in ECEC are described as those leaders who believe they can make a positive and strategic impact on the quality of early childhood education for their colleagues, children, families and community (Fasoli, Scrivens & Woodrow, 2007). The research data highlighted similarities between the participants' conceptions of their Educational Leader role as that of a pedagogical leader tasked with raising the quality of pedagogical practices, and the legislative description of the Educational Leader role as a tool to help to raise levels of educational quality across the Australian ECEC sector (COAG, 2009; ACECQA, 2019). Conversely the findings of the current study indicate that the participating Educational Leaders view themselves not just as *tools* for change (power over others), as described in legislative documentation, but also as *agents* of change (empowering others) (Bloom, 2004). This finding is supported by the research of Lloyd and Hallet (2010) and

Rouse and Spradbury (2015). They noted that those in the Educational Leader role had the potential to increase professionalism and become advocates for the ECEC sector, but without supportive infrastructure the opportunity to do this would be lost. The Educational Leaders risk being overloaded with responsibilities that are irrelevant to their colleagues and local community (Rouse & Spradbury, 2015). Furthermore, Lloyd and Hallet (2010) suggest that Educational Leaders are intended to be change agents whose achievements should result in raised standards of quality in the ECEC sector. The findings of the current research study, as well as those of Lloyd and Hallet (2010) indicate that without a communal professional identity Educational Leaders are challenged in empowering not only their colleagues, but also themselves.

There are similarities between the Educational Leaders descriptions of themselves as pedagogical leaders, accountable for improving pedagogical quality within their ECEC services, and the findings of previous research that supports the notion of a specialized individual who focuses on professional practice development (Scarr et al, 1994; Siraj-Blatchford & Wong, 2006). This is in contrast to the broad legislative description of an Educational Leader as an educator, coordinator or an individual with appropriate qualifications and experience (Government of Western Australia, 2012). The findings of the current study highlight the vagueness of the legislative description in describing what is arguably a highly specialized role.

5.2.2 Constrained

Providing particular impetus for the current research was that the 2012 Australian Education and Care Services Regulations (Government of Western Australia, 2012) offer an unspecific and broad description of the Educational Leader role and this has led to uncertainty about how the role should be enacted. The Educational Leaders in the current study expressed a sense of constraint that they believed prevented them from developing their leadership role. They felt constrained by a number of factors, including allocated time to fulfill their responsibilities, a perceived lack of workplace support and their perception of the role as undefined and lacking in credibility, with a perception of limited support at both a local and governmental level.

The participating Educational Leaders clearly expressed uncertainty about their role, with three of the participants voicing concerns about 'not doing things correctly'. One Educational Leader explained how frustrated she felt when she compared what she was doing with what other Educational Leaders were doing in their ECEC settings. She expressed disappointment in her leadership efforts. She had to remind herself that she had to work within an allocated timeframe to perform her Educational Leader role. Another Educational Leader stated that she wanted to find out what other Educational Leaders were doing in order to feel reassured about how she was enacting her role. In alignment with the findings of Rouse and Spradbury (2015), the current research study found that Educational Leaders commonly identified that networking opportunities with other Educational Leaders, professional development opportunities and recognition of their role would provide them with reassurance.

Further findings of the current research study are that, without definitive guidelines, the Educational Leaders were drawing on their individual professional knowledge and skills, and understandings of their sociological environment to create and define their Educational Leader role. These findings are in line with those of Hedges (2012) who concluded that educators drew on their prior knowledge and experiences to respond to children's learning, but with mentoring were able to extend their professional understandings. Whilst Hedges was referring to the education of children her research applies to the findings of the current study as the Educational Leaders grapple with a role they express as borderless. This has left the Educational Leaders frustrated, uncertain and insecure about their performance within the role.

Legislative requirements and workplace expectations, whether broadly described or more specifically outlined, meant that the Educational Leaders felt certain pressures of accountability. This sense of accountability emerged as an influential factor in how the participating Educational Leaders enacted their role. Being accountable for pedagogical quality can be positive and motivating if expectations are clearly outlined (Rodd, 2006). However accountability can also be crippling if one is unsure about one's professional responsibilities. One of the Educational Leaders discussed how she had repeatedly requested clarity about her role from her centre manager, whilst another Educational Leader was without a written job description as the

Educational Leader role was still being defined in her ECEC service. These findings again emphasize key weaknesses of a broad role description, such as that contained in the Education and Care Service Regulations (Government of Western Australia, 2012) and are corroborated by Cunliffe (2009) who stated that if leaders are clear about their professional and personal identities then knowing what to do in practice is a natural evolution.

5.2.3 A Socially Constructed Role

Another finding that emerged from the research is the dichotomy of the Educational Leader role between ECEC services. In consideration of the broad descriptors for the Educational Leader role in legislative documentation (ACECQA, 2019), it is evident that the Educational Leader position was intended to be contextually fluid in order to meet the needs of specific ECEC communities. The findings of the current research study are that while the role is varied from one service to another, it is often varied in contradictory ways and not necessarily because the Educational Leaders or centre management understood the need to make the role contextually specific. One Educational Leader stated that the Educational Leader role was about connecting with staff and not about connecting with parents. She felt that families in her centre were unaware of the Educational Leader role, and did not necessarily need to be aware, as in her centre it was a role focused on educator improvement. In contrast two other participants viewed sharing child development information with parents as vital in reinforcing existing relationships with families. These opposing views highlight how the Educational Leader role is being enacted with variance in individual centres, adding to the confusion about this leadership role. Attempting to define the effectiveness and value of the Educational Leader role becomes complex, given the broad, and at times conflicting, interpretations of the Educational Leader role in the ECEC sector.

Furthermore, if families in each of the four centres were aware of the Educational Leadership role, then it was because the Educational Leaders had introduced themselves and their role to the families. Centre management did not necessarily highlight the position. This contrasts with ACECQA's recent advice for centres to inform families about the Educational Leader role (ACECQA, 2019). ACECQA

states that families would be reassured to know who is guiding the quality of practices and programmes for their children (2019, p.32). The surveyed educators were predominantly in favour of an Educational Leader who held a minimum ECEC diploma qualification. The educators also stressed practical experience as important for someone in the role, a notion that correlates with the emphasis that the Educational Leaders placed on the impact of their life experiences on their leadership styles.

The findings of the current research study indicate a need for some mandatory role descriptors for the Educational Leader, providing a framework from which each ECEC service can then build their own sociological version of the role.

5.3 Activism for a Hopeful Future

Although none of the Educational Leaders specifically mentioned the word ‘vision’, the findings of the research revealed that they identified key aspects of visionary leadership: identifying a need to focus on what was important to their ECEC community, developing the pedagogical skills and knowledge of educators, utilizing critical reflection to develop professional practices and establishing a common ethos with a focus on quality practices (Campbell-Evans, Stamopoulos & Maloney, 2014). In line with the research of Rodd (2006), the current study found that the Educational Leaders expressed visionary leadership as wanting to provide direction and momentum for the educator team as they work towards achieving shared goals. It is interesting to note that the two Educational Leaders who held multiple leadership roles frequently adopted an authoritative stance when discussing their vision for their ECEC settings “I want the community to see...” (Bec, lines 93-94), “I can role model...what I expect” (Abby, line 44).

Jorde-Bloom (2003) contends that there are times when a leader exercises power and influence over colleagues, as long as the leader’s commanding stance empowers their team members. In contrast the other two Educational Leaders emphasized partnerships and the individual development of educators. “When people ask me what I do I say well I now work with the staff” (Chris, line 149), “So you’re guiding them and showing them, rather than saying “that’s wrong” (Dana, lines 12-13).

As suggested by Cunliffe (2009) the findings of the current study were that each Educational Leader authored their own leadership contexts, but they equally encouraged critically engagement with their colleagues about pedagogical practice development. It can be argued that when educators critically engage in reflection about their pedagogical practices the result is higher quality professional practices and improved outcomes for children (Hedges, 2012).

5.3.1 Communities

Highlighted throughout the study were the participants' views about positive and collaborative relationships between themselves and their team of educators. The Educational Leaders regarded strong professional relationships as vital in fulfilling their role. Whilst the research participants emphasized engagement with the educators, the educators themselves expressed mixed understandings about the Educational Leader role. When asked if the Educational Leader role was necessary, and why, the educators' responses ranged from uncertainty about the role in general, to an understanding that the Educational Leader role provided pedagogical support. There exists an emphasis on educating parents and families about the Educational Leader role (ACECQA, 2019; Stamopoulos, 2015; Colmer, Waniganayake & Field, 2014). However as Rouse and Spradbury (2015) also noted, the findings of the current research study are that, as long as there is a lack of understanding about the Educational Leader role, the participating Educational Leaders will battle for credibility from their fellow educators.

The current study contends that there is a need for widespread education across the ECEC sector about the importance of pedagogical leadership, particularly the pedagogical leadership and support that can be provided by the Educational Leader role in each service.

5.4 Leadership with an Ethic of Care

Data analysis revealed that the Educational Leaders descriptions of their roles aligned closely with Tronto's (1993) expanded definition of care. "Care consists of four elements: caring about, taking care of, caregiving and care receiving. An ethic

of care has a further four elements – responsibility, competence, integrity and responsiveness” Tronto (1993, p. 40). The Educational Leaders expressed caring concepts such as ‘mentoring’, ‘supporting’, ‘challenging’, ‘collaborating’, ‘respecting’, ‘communicating’ and ‘relationship building’ when referring to their work with colleagues.

The concepts of care and support arose in numerous conversations with the Educational Leaders, was evidenced through observations of their practice, and in the feedback from their colleagues. However, when asked to describe their own role, the Educational Leaders referred to confusion, uncertainty, and fulfilling multiple roles. They expressed feeling overwhelmed by their ‘borderless role’ (Waniganayake, 2014). One Educational Leader referred to the positive support and guidance that she had received from the organizational leader in her centre. Other participants described a lack of allocated time, clear job descriptions and colleagues who did not understand their purpose.

The findings of the current study indicate a lack of mentoring support and opportunities for the four Educational Leaders themselves. The current study contends that whilst modeling an ethic of care towards their colleagues, the participating Educational Leaders did not always receive a reciprocal level of support within their workplace. The implications of this are challenging workplace environments, affected morale and challenging relationships between the Educational Leader, other nominated leaders in the ECEC service, the Educational Leader’s colleagues and the community that they serve. This is an area for future investigation.

5.4.1 Life Experiences

The current research study draws attention to the concept of life experience as a key skills set of educational leadership. The Educational Leaders expressed their personal life experiences as being essential to understanding educators’ own varying life experiences, cultural backgrounds and individual abilities. The Educational Leaders identified life experiences as important as these experiences helped them when developing individual programmes of support for each educator, as well as adapt their communication styles to suit each educator. Key aspects of life

experiences that were accentuated by the participants were: the ability to form positive relationships with people from varied backgrounds, understanding different points of view, understanding cultural diversity, understanding different learning styles, understanding ways to approach individuals and situations and understanding ways to conduct professional conversations in challenging circumstances.

This section of the current research provides insights into an unconventional concept of effective leadership, namely the role that life experience plays in supporting leadership skills development. Existing research refers to the skills and knowledge base of educators (Hedges, 2012; Waniganayake & Hadley, 2018) but the findings in the current study indicate that these skills and knowledge are not necessarily based in educational experiences or in formal academic contexts. Rather, the life skills that the participating Educational Leaders referred to were skills that they had developed through exposure to situations over a number of years and in a variety of contexts, specifically in their personal, rather than professional, lives. These life skills were very important to the Educational Leaders. Further investigation in a future study is warranted in order to verify these findings of the current study.

5.5 Grounded Theory

The Educational Leaders interpretations of their role formed the core category of the current research. This, and the other categories that occurred from the research data, led to the formation of the Grounded Theory. The Theory of the Activist Educational Leader emerged. The Theory of the Activist Educational Leader provides scope for a paradigm of educational leadership unique to early childhood education. Activist Educational Leadership is a leadership model based on one of the frames from the Framework of Sustainable Professionalism (Fasoli, Scrivens & Woodrow, 2007). Fasoli, Scrivens and Woodrow's (2007) framework suggests that leadership in ECEC is a shared experience in which individuals are expected to take responsibility for setting and achieving goals through collaboration with colleagues. The findings of the current study were that the participating Educational Leaders identified collaboration as key in bringing out the best in their educator teams. They described a role that involved developing shared goals amongst educators, whilst also emphasizing the unique ways in which educators might achieve these common goals.

An activist, by definition, implies someone who leads change and energizes followers to achieve organisational vision (Abah, 2012). The participating Educational Leaders identified numerous activist characteristics in their descriptions of their roles. These included concepts such as collaboration, part of a whole, future-focused and being an influencer. Oke (2018) refers to the wisdom of the crowd as leadership models begin to evolve from stable hierarchical structures into roles driven by constant innovation. The findings of the current study were that the four participants viewed their Educational Leader role as different to organisational or 'traditional' leadership positions. Rather they viewed the Educational Leader role as innovative, focused on pedagogical leadership and educator support. Kagan and Hallmark's (2001) research supports these findings of the current study, stating that ECEC demands new leadership approaches that embrace multifaceted leadership styles.

The research participants viewed themselves as influencers of practice, expressing the notion that their colleagues should share the same goals, work ethos and attention to pedagogical practices as they did. The term 'influencer' has become prevalent in modern society, particularly on social media sites, but holds relevance in an educational context too. An influencer can be defined as someone who embraces change and has an impact on the way that other people embrace change (Faulkner & Latham, 2016). The findings of the current study were that the Educational Leaders felt most influential when they were actively involved in programming, planning and reflection alongside their educator colleagues.

Furthermore, the current research study highlighted the Educational Leaders perceptions of the process of critical reflection. The participating Educational Leaders viewed critical reflection as key to quality educational leadership and pedagogical development. These findings are reinforced by the work of Golinkoff and Hirsh-Pasek (2016) who listed critical thinking as one of six essential skills for future-focused professionals to develop. Fasoli, Scrivens and Woodrow's framework of Sustainable Professionalism (2007) states that adopting a future-focus in leadership requires critical reflection on past practices, an understanding of the current context and having a transformative attitude towards the future

In contrast one of the Educational Leaders did not see any benefits to having a specific Educational Leader position. She interpreted the Educational Leader role to be an administrative, documentation-checking role. In her opinion the Educational Leader role added an additional level to an already overloaded hierarchy of organisational leadership positions in ECEC settings. As the centre owner the Educational Leader's concerns related to the financial implications of what she perceived as another designated leadership position. Her understandings about the Educational Leader role contrasted with the other Educational Leaders that participated in the research, yet in practice she was observed using similar strategies to those described by the other three Educational Leaders, including mentoring techniques and distribution of leadership decisions. These findings indicate that sole-proprietor leaders have unique leadership challenges. One of these challenges is when leadership roles are combined, defining the elements of the Educational Leader position becomes even more challenging, a finding reinforced by the work of Sims et al. (2018).

According to Jorde-Bloom (2003) the development of leadership skills across teams of ECEC educators is complex and challenges understandings of traditional, hierarchical forms of leadership. The four Educational Leaders expressed transformational leadership opportunities as being able to extend the professional teaching practices of each educator through reflection and action on authentic workplace experiences. Waniganayake (2014) offers the idea of a distributed model of leadership, utilising the collective intelligence and expertise of individual ECEC educators in formal and informal leadership roles. Models of distributive leadership, where leadership is distributed amongst team members, have been inherent in the early childhood sector for many years (Wenger, 1998), but have not been specifically related to the role of the Educational Leader.

The findings of the current research study suggest that the characteristics of transformative leadership models, such as those of distributed leadership, will help to clarify commonalities of the Educational Leader role across all early childhood services. The characteristics of transformative leadership models will further enhance a future-focused and context-specific Educational Leadership position. The characteristics of transformative leadership models will also enhance the grounded theory that emerged from the data, namely The Theory of the Activist Educational

Leader. The Theory of the Activist Educational Leader places the Educational Leader in a position to mentor and collaborate with educators in a way that is sociologically relevant and future-focused.

5.6 Summary

This chapter provided a discussion of the findings of the current study and their contribution to understandings about the Educational Leader role in Western Australian ECEC services. Similarities between the perceptions and practices of the Educational Leaders and existing literature have been noted, as have a number of key differences. The findings of the research evolved into a theory, grounded in data. This grounded theory was entitled The Theory of the Activist Educational Leader, underpinned by one of the four frames of The Framework of Sustainable Professionalism (Fasoli, Scrivens & Woodrow, 2007). Whilst acknowledging the limited scope of the current research study, a number of implications for the development of the Educational Leader role in Western Australia have been identified. The recommendations that have evolved from the findings of the current study are discussed in the next chapter, Chapter 6.

Chapter 6

Recommendations and Conclusions

6.1 Introduction

The purpose of the current study was to capture the professional understandings, practices and experiences of a group of Western Australian Educational Leaders within their sociological environments. The current study also sought to identify similarities and discrepancies between what those in the role were experiencing in practice, with existing literature about the Educational Leadership role. A qualitative research study, utilizing a Grounded Theory methodology, was developed in an attempt to generate a context-specific Educational Leadership theory, grounded in data.

This final chapter presents the recommendations and conclusions of the current research study. Recommendations are made, based on the research findings. These recommendations offer insights for ECEC educators in general, educators in leadership roles, particularly those in the Educational Leader role, and for future areas of research. Lastly the chapter concludes with a final summary of the current research study.

6.1.1 How do Educational Leaders describe and enact their roles?

The findings of the research indicate that the role of Educational Leader is something separate from the managerial responsibilities of the organisational leader. Rather, the participating Educational Leaders regarded the primary purpose of their role as being responsible for the pedagogical skills development of their colleagues. This conclusion was reiterated by existing literature that described pedagogical leadership as a specialised role. Legislative policy describes Educational Leaders as a tool to raise quality pedagogical outcomes in ECEC (a passive role), but the Educational Leaders described their role in purposeful terms, as a role to bring about professional improvement, development and change in their particular ECEC environment (a dynamic role).

Adding to the confusion surrounding the Educational Leader role is the absence of some form of national framework to guide the formation of a nationally utilised role description for Educational Leaders. ECEC services and the Educational Leaders themselves are confused about the purpose of the Educational Leader role. As a result of these findings, it is recommended that the Educational Leader role be defined as a specialised role, in addition to the nominated or other leadership roles in ECEC services. It is also recommended that a national body, such as ACECQA, be tasked with developing a framework from which to develop the Educational Leader position in individual services.

Furthermore, the Educational Leaders stressed the value of building coaching and mentoring relationships with their colleagues. However the Educational Leaders also reported that various constraints made forming coaching and mentoring relationships challenging. These constraints included insufficient time delegated to the Educational Leader role and a lack of resources to support the Educational Leaders in their role. These resources included professional learning opportunities, peer support and mentoring opportunities for the Educational Leaders. The current study recommends the development of an ECEC-specific course that focuses on the development of adult mentoring and coaching skills.

6.1.2 What changes do the Educational Leaders envisage for their role?

The research findings were that the participating Educational Leaders understood and expressed key aspects of visionary leadership. The Educational Leaders expressed visionary leadership as a desire to provide direction and momentum for the educator team as they work towards achieving shared goals. The Educational Leaders also emphasized the use of critical reflection to encourage their colleagues to participate in critical thinking about programming and practice. However both the implementation of visionary leadership and the use of critical reflection require allocated time and opportunities for the Educational Leaders to engage with their colleagues. It is recommended that an Ethic of Care (Tronto, 1993) be emphasized as central to the role of the Educational Leader. This would enable Educational Leaders to focus on being responsive to the professional needs of individual educators.

6.1.3 What values, skills and beliefs influence the Educational Leader role?

The current study concludes that life experiences are strongly related to successful practices as the Educational Leader, enabling strong relationships, targeted communication strategies and pedagogical development designed for individual educators. The notion of life experience as a key skill set for educational leadership is an unconventional, but important conclusion of this research study. It is recommended that the concept of 'life experiences' be included as a key attribute of effective leadership, along with professional qualifications, knowledge and skills. It is further recommended that the concept of 'life experience' as it relates to leadership models in ECEC be further investigated.

The current research study identified that Educational Leaders were working in a multifaceted role that required them to support the ongoing professional development of their colleagues. This research study concludes that in order to do this effectively implies knowledge of adult learning styles. This was a tension for the participating Educational Leaders who did not necessarily have experience working with adults in an educational capacity. The Educational Leaders found that a different skill set was required when mentoring and educating adults but they were unaware of ECEC specific courses that would provide them with the skill set that they required. In light of these findings it is recommended that tertiary training organisations focus on leadership courses specifically designed for the ECEC sector, particularly courses with an emphasis on adult education and training strategies, as well as mentoring and coaching models.

6.1.4 How was the role interpreted in the four early childhood settings

There was a dichotomy within the role of Educational Leader from ECEC service to service, often in contradictory ways with potentially negative outcomes for families, educators and the Educational Leaders themselves. These negative outcomes include impacts on quality educational outcomes for children if the Educational Leader role is not being used to improve pedagogical practices in each service.

The findings of the current study were that the role of the Educational Leader was not always explained or promoted to families or the wider community of the ECEC service. One of the participating Educational Leaders felt that the Educational Leader role was there to support educators, rather than be involved with families. In contrast, recent advice from ACECQA (2019) is that families should be informed that there is a designed educator responsible for guiding the development of quality pedagogical practices in the ECEC service. It is recommended that the role of the Educational Leader be clarified in terms of family and community engagement, especially if they do not hold the position of nominated leader in the ECEC service. This would ensure that clear boundaries and role responsibilities are established for the Educational Leader, the nominated leader and the educators in the ECEC service.

The Educational Leader role was broadly defined at national level, with the intention of enabling individual ECEC services to contextually shape the role to suit their pedagogical needs (ACECQA, 2019). This notion was explored in this research study, with the findings indicating that this intention is neither clear, nor well understood by the participants. The creation of strategies is needed to explain this approach to the early childhood sector in general, and to specifically dialogue directly with those in the Educational Leader position.

The current study found that the participating Educational Leaders were battling for credibility in the workplace from their fellow educators. This became most obvious when analysing the data gathered from the educators survey. The current research study concludes that educating the educators about the purpose of the Educational Leader role in individual centres is vital for successful implementation. It is recommended that advocacy for the Educational Leader role needs to occur at a national level, by ECEC advocacy organisations within the state of Western Australia and by the management of individual ECEC services. Advocacy and support at a national level could include the development of a nationally legislated Educational Leader role framework. Advocacy and support could further extend to the development of ECEC-specific leadership courses, the formation of Educational Leader networking opportunities and professional development opportunities aimed at educating ECEC educators about the Educational Leader role. This would ensure that Educational Leaders felt empowered about the purpose of their role and

confident about building on the activism opportunities of the Educational Leader position. It must be noted that attaining what Hard (2005) described as ‘Field Credibility’ is the responsibility of those in the Educational Leader role, achieved by being engaged with their fellow educators in daily practice and in promoting the Educational Leader role to educators, families and the wider community.

6.2 Summary of Recommendations that were indicated by the research:

1. Defining the Educational Leader role as a specialised role and in addition to the nominated leader, or other traditional leadership roles in early childhood education. This could initially be done by a government organisation such as ACECQA through the development of a framework to guide the development of the Educational Leader position for individual services.
2. An emphasis on professional development or tertiary education courses aimed at educating Educational Leaders about adult learning styles, mentoring and coaching styles.
3. Emphasising an Ethic of Care as central to the Educational Leader role and enabling the Educational Leader to focus on caregiving, competence, integrity and responsiveness to educator needs. Attention should be given to the time allocated to perform the Educational Leader, as well as professional development and training. Furthermore an Ethic of Care should also be extended to the Educational Leaders themselves, through networking opportunities, professional development and peer support models.
4. Definition of key attributes necessary for effective educational leadership, inclusive of both professional AND life experience, and using these to create a framework to guide the development of context-specific role descriptions.
5. Clarifying the role of the Educational Leader in terms of community engagement, particularly if they do not hold the role of organisational leader in their service. This includes engagement with educators, children, their families and the wider community.
6. Educating ECEC educators about the purpose of the Educational Leader role. Specifically the contextual scope that is contained in the current broad definition of the role. This is also a responsibility for the Educational

Leaders themselves, who are in a position to generate understanding about their role by promoting what they do to fellow educators, families and the wider community. Thus building a shared and supportive understanding of the Educational Leadership responsibilities and intentions within specific communities.

6.3 Concluding Comments

This research study explored the beliefs, practices and perceptions of four Western Australian Educational Leaders about their leadership role. The research investigated how the role is interpreted, developed and supported in early childhood education and care settings in Western Australian, from the perspective of the Educational Leader. A small sample size in the current study lent itself to in-depth qualitative research, utilising a grounded-theory methodology. Qualitative research studies have differing sample sizes, but are considered effective if the sample size provides enough data to answer the research questions (Emmel, 2013). The current study identified how the participating Educational Leaders described and enacted their roles, what values, skills and beliefs informed their practices and how the role was interpreted in each setting. Throughout the study Fasoli, Scrivens and Woodrow's Sustainable Professionalism Framework (2007) provided guidance in interpreting and analysing the data, alongside a Grounded Theory methodology.

The Grounded Theory that emerged from the data was that of The Activist Educational Leader. The Activist Educational Leader is motivated by a focus on the future, encouraging critical reflection on practice, developing the pedagogical practices of their educators and encouraging educators to take ownership of the educational programme. Being an Activist Educational Leader also places a level of responsibility on the Educational Leaders to actively promote their role to colleagues, families and the wider community.

The discussion of early childhood leadership is a contested and emerging process (Krieg, Davis & Smith, 2014). This is particularly true of the Educational Leader role in Western Australia, as highlighted in this research. The ECEC sector in Western Australia is facing increasing pressures due to continued political and social

examination. By promoting the Educational Leader role as a specialised pedagogical leadership position, there is the potential to raise the quality of ECEC in Western Australia. Educational Leaders would be empowered by an activist model of Educational Leadership in which individual Educational Leaders are encouraged to develop their role within a nationally recognised framework. An Educational Leader who feels empowered to drive transformational pedagogical practices is a means to transform and mobilise the professionalism and future-focus of the early childhood sector as a whole.

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Every reasonable effort has been made to acknowledge the owners of copyright material. I would be pleased to hear from any copyright owner who has been omitted or incorrectly acknowledged

Appendices

Appendix A – Participants

The four participants were given the following pseudonyms: Abby, Chris, Bec and Dana, for the purposes of anonymity.

Abby had previously been the Educational Leader before taking time off from the role to complete a teaching qualification. She had been in her current Educational leader for one year at the time of the interview. A had completed numerous tertiary qualifications, including her Bachelor of Education (Early Childhood). A held the roles of Centre Owner, Centre Director, ECT and Educational Leader within her centre. A worked in an independently ECEC service.

Chris had held the position of Educational Leader for two years at the time of the first interview. Prior to that she had worked as an early childhood teacher. C had completed her Bachelor of Education and had recently undertaken a course in Leadership. C worked as the EdL for a privately owned group of ECEC services.

Bec had also previously been the Educational Leader in another centre for fourteen months. She had only recently been appointed to the positions of Centre Director and Educational Leader in her current centre. At the time of the first interview B had been in the role for two weeks. B had completed her Diploma in Early Childhood Studies and was, at the time of the first interview, studying a Diploma of Business Management. B worked in a school-based ECEC service.

Dana had held the position of Educational Leader for two and a half years at the time of the first interview. She had worked at her current centre for four years. D had completed an Early Years qualification overseas, with equivalency to an early childhood diploma qualification in Western Australia. D worked in a school-based ECEC service.

Appendix B – Initial Recruitment Letter



The Role of the Educational Leader: Practices and Perceptions

Dear Centre Director and/or Educational Leader

My name is Caryn-Lee Bodger and I am a postgraduate student completing a Master of Philosophy (Education) at Curtin University in Perth, Western Australia.

I would like to invite your Educational Leader to take part in the research study: '***The role of the Educational Leader: Practices and Perceptions***' that I am conducting as my Master's degree thesis.

The research will explore the practice and understandings of four Educational Leaders working in Western Australian Early Childhood Education and Care settings. The information collected from the Educational Leaders will help with future research about the Educational Leader role in Early Childhood Education in Western Australia.

If the Educational Leader agrees to participate in the research they will be invited to participate in two short interviews and an observation. Detailed information is attached in the ***Participant Information Statement*** and Consent Form. Their centre colleagues will be invited to fill in an online survey. The survey will explore early childhood educator's ideas about the Educational Leader role **in general**. The survey won't ask them to discuss the Educational Leader's role in their centre. A copy of the survey questions is also attached for you to read through.

Information collected from the interviews and survey will be kept strictly confidential. Participation in the research is voluntary. Educational Leaders who agree to be part of the research can withdraw at any time, either by letting me know in writing or verbally. The Educational Leader may also choose not to answer any questions during our interview that they are uncomfortable about answering.

If your Educational Leader would like to be a part of this research study, please ask them to read the attached Participant Information Statement and scan and return the consent form to me. We can then arrange a mutually suitable time for the first interview to take place.

If you, or the Educational Leader, have any further questions please don't hesitate to email me and I can phone you to answer your questions. Otherwise you are welcome to phone me directly on xxxxxxxx

Yours sincerely,
Caryn-Lee Bodger

Appendix C – Participant Information (6 pages)



The Role of the Educational Leader: Practices and Perceptions

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION STATEMENT

HREC Project Number:	HRE2017-0115
Project Title:	<i>The role of the Educational Leader: The Practices and Perceptions of Educational Leaders in Four Early Childhood Education and Care Settings in Western Australia</i>
Principal Investigator:	<i>Dr Jenny Jay, Associate Professor for Early Childhood Studies, School of Education</i>
Student researcher:	<i>Caryn- Lee Bodger</i>
Version Number:	<i>1</i>
Version Date:	<i>16/01/2017</i>

What is the Project About?

The Educational Leader role is included in the National Quality Standards (NQS) but there very few guidelines about the role. Individual early childhood centres are encouraged to create an educational leader role that suits their unique setting. Educational Leaders are working in the role with different levels of experience and qualifications. The proposed research will explore the practice and understandings of four Educational Leaders working in Western Australian Early Childhood Education and Care settings. The information collected from the Educational Leaders will help with future research about the Educational Leader role in Western Australia.

Who is doing the Research?

I, Caryn-Lee Bodger, am doing the research as part of my Master of Philosophy (Education) degree thesis. As a student researcher I am working under the guidance of two supervisors, Associate Professor Jenny Jay and Associate Professor Karen Nonis.

Why am I being asked to take part and what will I have to do?

I am looking for four Educational Leaders to participate in this research project. You have received this letter because you are the designated Educational Leader in an early childhood centre. Your centre is also located within Perth, Western Australia.

Each Educational Leader (EdL) will be invited to participate in an interview with me, at a time and place that suits both of us to meet. The interview will take approximately one hour. The first

The Role of the Educational Leader: Practices and Perceptions

interview will explore your ideas about the Educational Leader role and how you put these into practice. This interview could include an observation of you in your role as Educational Leader (optional). I will make an audio (voice) recording during our interview so I can concentrate on what you have to say and take notes. After the interview I will listen to the recording again, and write what was said word by word. You will be asked to share examples of documentation that you use to support you in your role (for example information sent to parents or feedback to colleagues). A second interview might be needed to clarify any questions that may have arisen during the first interview|

Your colleagues will be invited to fill in an online survey about educational leadership. By filling in the survey they will give their consent for their answers to be used anonymously in the research. This will be made clear to them at the beginning of the survey. No one, not even the research team will be able to identify their information as no names will be part of the survey. The survey will explore their ideas about the educational leader role *in general*. The survey won't ask them to discuss your role as the EdL. A copy of the survey questions is attached for you to read through.

Information collected during the interviews and survey will be kept strictly confidential. Codes will be used for any written information. The coded interview information will be collected and stored securely at Curtin University. The research findings will not name you or the other educational leaders taking part in the research. The research findings won't name the early childhood centre that you work for either.

Participation in the research is voluntary. Educational Leaders who agree to be part of the research can withdraw at any time, either by letting me know in writing or verbally. You may also choose not to answer any questions during our interview that you are uncomfortable about answering.

Are there any benefits' to being in the research project?

Sometimes, people appreciate the opportunity to discuss their opinions and ideas. The research may also give you opportunities to reflect on your role, and might result in professional discussion within your educational setting.

The Role of the Educational Leader: Practices and Perceptions

I hope the results of this research will allow me to:

- o add to the knowledge we have about the Educational Leader role in Early Childhood Education in Western Australia
- o add to your knowledge about your specific Educational Leader role
- o add to future educational research in Early Childhood Education

Are there any risks, side-effects, discomforts or inconveniences from being in the research project?

There are no likely risks to you or your workplace from this research project. As a result of participating in the interviews you might find yourself reflecting on your role as an Educational Leader.

Apart from giving up your time to participate in the interviews, I do not expect that there will be any other inconveniences linked with taking part in this study.

Who will have access to my information?

The information collected and stored from our interviews will be re-identifiable (coded). This means that I will remove identifying information on any data or sample and replace it with a code. Only the research team have access to the code to match your name if it is necessary to do so. Any information I collect will be treated as confidential and used only in this research unless otherwise specified. The following people will have access to the information I collect in this research: the research team (myself, Associate Professor Jenny Jay and Associate Professor Karen Nonis) and, in the event of an audit or investigation, staff from the Curtin University Office of Research and Development

The information collected in the survey will be non-identifiable (anonymous). This means that we do not need to collect individual names. No one, not even the research team will be able to identify their information. Any information we collect and use during this research will be treated as confidential. The following people will have access to the information we collect in this research: the research team and, in the event of an audit or investigation, staff from the Curtin University Office of Research and Development

How information will be stored?

Electronic data will be password-protected. It will initially be recorded on a laptop and iPad during interviews and observations, and securely backed up to the R:drive at Curtin University. Hard copy data (including any written notes, printed surveys, USB drivers or audio tapes) will be kept in locked storage in Associate Professor Jay's office at Curtin University.

How long the information will be stored and what happens at the end of the storage period?

The information we collect in this study will be kept under secure conditions at Curtin University for 7 years after the research has ended and then it will be destroyed. The results of this research may be presented at conferences or published in professional journals. You will not be identified in **any** results that are published or presented, unless further consent has been requested from you to do so and you have agreed.

Will you tell me the results of the research?

Once my thesis is completed I will send you a copy of the completed thesis. The thesis will have a chapter on the findings of the research, based on all the information I collect and review as part of the research.

Do I have to take part in the research project?

Taking part in a research project is voluntary. It is your choice to take part or not. You do not have to agree if you do not want to. If you decide to take part and then change your mind, that is okay, you can withdraw from the project. You do not have to give me a reason; just tell me that you want to stop. Please let me know you want to stop so I can make sure you are aware of anything that needs to be done so you can withdraw safely. If you choose not to take part or start and then stop the study, it will not affect your relationship with the University, staff or colleagues.

I will destroy any information I have collected from you.

The Role of the Educational Leader: Practices and Perceptions

What happens next and who can I contact about the research?

If you have any further questions about the research you can contact me directly:

Caryn Bodger

Email: caryn-lee.bodger@postgrad.curtin.edu.au

Phone: xxxxxxxxx

Or my principal research supervisor:

Dr Jenny Jay

Associate Professor for Early Childhood Studies | School of Education

Early Childhood Course Coordinator

Curtin University Tel | +61 8 9266 2170

Mobile | 0417 929 744 Email | jenny.jay@curtin.edu.au

If you decide to take part in this research I will ask you to sign the consent form. By signing it is telling me that you understand what you have read and what has been discussed. Signing the consent indicates that you agree to be in the research project and have your information used as described. Please take your time and ask any questions you have before you decide what to do. You will be given a copy of this information and the consent form to keep.

Curtin University Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) has approved this study (HREC number XX/XXXX). Should you wish to discuss the study with someone not directly involved, in particular, any matters concerning the conduct of the study or your rights as a participant, or you wish to make a confidential complaint, you may contact the Ethics Officer on (08) 9266 9223 or the Manager, Research Integrity on (08) 9266 7093 or email hrec@curtin.edu.au.

The Role of the Educational Leader: Practices and Perceptions

CONSENT FORM

HREC Project Number:	HRE2017-0115
Project Title:	<i>The role of the Educational Leader: The Practices and Perceptions of Educational Leaders in Four Early Childhood Education and Care Settings in Western Australia</i>
Principal Investigator:	<i>Dr Jenny Jay, Associate Professor for Early Childhood Studies, School of Education</i>
Student researcher:	<i>Caryn-Lee Bodger</i>
Version Number:	1
Version Date:	16/01/2017

- I have read the information statement version listed above and I understand its contents.
- I believe I understand the purpose, extent and possible risks of my involvement in this project.
- I voluntarily consent to take part in this research project.
- I have had an opportunity to ask questions and I am satisfied with the answers I have received.
- I understand that this project has been approved by Curtin University Human Research Ethics Committee and will be carried out in line with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007).
- I understand I will receive a copy of this Information Statement and Consent Form.
- I consent to be observed in my Educational Leader role by the researcher

Participant Name	
Participant Signature	
Date	

Declaration by researcher: I have supplied an Information Letter and Consent Form to the participant who has signed above, and believe that they understand the purpose, extent and possible risks of their involvement in this project.

Researcher Name	Caryn-Lee Bodger
Researcher Signature	
Date	

Note: All parties signing the Consent Form must date their own signature.

Appendix D – Framework of Initial Interview Prompts

Interview prompts

1. How long have you been in the EdL role
2. What aspects of the role do you find most enjoyable
3. Any aspects that you find particularly challenging?
4. Would you have chosen this role for yourself, why/why not?
5. In your setting would you describe the EdL role? (prompts - hours of work, staff you are responsible for, duties, job description?...)
6. What support do you receive in role?
7. How do you see your role in terms of family and the wider community?
8. Is the role necessary, in your opinion...why/why not?
9. What personal characteristics do you believe an EdL needs?
10. What qualifications do you have?
11. Are there skills or qualifications that you believe would benefit you in your EdL role?
12. How long had you been involved in ecec before taking on the role? (teaching or another role?)
13. In terms of the EdL role, how do you see it developing in your service? In general?
14. Is there anything that you would like to share about, or know more about, the EdL role?

Appendix E – Survey for Early Childhood Centre Staff



Survey for Early Childhood Centre Staff **(using the Survey Monkey website)**

The information collected in this survey will be anonymous (I won't know who has filled in the survey and you don't need to give your name). No one, not even the research team, will be able to identify your information. The information you share with me will be used as part of my thesis studies for the Master of Philosophy (Education) at Curtin University.

By doing this survey you agree for me to use your responses, anonymously, to include in my research.

When answering the questions you don't have to write about your Educational Leader or your workplace. Write **your ideas** about the Educational Leader role, as you think it should be.

- How would you describe the role of an 'Educational Leader' in an early childhood centre?

- Do you think the Educational Leader role is necessary in early childhood centres, and why?

- What qualifications or experience do you think an Educational Leader should have?

- What qualities or characteristics do you think an Educational Leader needs?

- How much time should an Educational Leader spend in each area of the early childhood centre per month? Please give a reason for your answer

- Would you like to take on a leadership role in your centre? Please give a reason for your answer

Appendix F - Summary of survey results for Early Childhood Centre Staff

(The answers to the first three questions are summarized below)

Questions	How would you describe the role of an educational leader in an early childhood centre	Do you think the EdL role is necessary, and why?	What qualities or characteristics does an EdL need?
Respondent 1	*To guide the educational programme	*maybe just to be checking our programming	*mentoring, communication, programming
Respondent 2	*to be in charge of making sure we do the programs properly	Not really sure but they don't seem to do much really	*not sure
Respondent 3	*Don't really know, to look at our observations I think	*Not really, our boss does it	*Good at explaining things
Respondent 4	*to oversee, facilitate and support all aspects of the education provided within the service	*Yes, to ensure our educators are providing the best quality program to all the children	*Leadership, passion for early childhood, flexible, approachable and open to all opinions
Respondent 5	*the person I can go to for advice, direction, inspiration and confirmation that I am moving in the right direction	*Yes	*Firm, supportive, approachable
Respondent 6	*A mentor	*Yes it's good for staff and room leaders to have xtra support in developing programs for the children	*They need to be personable, approachable and be good at developing other skills
Respondent 7	Support program development and mentor team	Yes, to improve quality in centres	Great listener, people skills, ability to mentor, knowledge, big picture

Respondent 8	Leading practices. Guiding educators. Someone to get professional advice from	Yes and no. Could be the room leader or centre manager. But they need more non-contact time to work one to one with educators. Good to know someone is focused on our programming and practice through	I think they should be a teacher, so degree qualified. In early childhood education. Or at least lots of experience in the profession
Respondent 9	The person responsible for the day to day running of the room, someone who needs to make sure that all staff are working the correct way, to make sure there are no problems between staff members, to help research anything that the room may need or any other courses the staff members may be interested in, helping with the program and making sure it's done correctly	Yes as I believe every centre needs someone an educator can go to for help on any subject or problems they may have	I think they should at least hold a diploma of children's services no lower. I believe they should have over 5 years experience as a qualified in this field and have recommendations from the director and staff members
Respondent 10	An Educational Leader is someone who is there to support and give advice to the educators with any questions or problems they have with planning, programming and observations. They would also run meetings out of hours for staff training	In a busy centre, yes, as the centre manager would be too busy to help the educators. In a smaller quieter centre, not necessarily as the centre manager probably has more time to help	Diploma of early childhood plus some form of training and or management qualification
Respondent 11	I believe an Educational leader should be there to guide and support Educators practice and the implementation of the Educational program and cycle of planning based on the EYLF	I believe an Educational Leader is necessary (if they are fulfilling their role as required) to be there as a support and guide to Educators and to ensure the whole centre is meeting the children needs through the Educational program and cycle of planning	A teaching degree, a bachelor or a diploma

Appendix G – Sample of Observation Field Notes

Observation of EdL

Approx 1 hour 10.15-11 am

4th July 2017

In practice EdL describes herself as:

Collaborative (Evidence)

- sharing ideas about the display & improvements for that
- Questioning technique to encourage collaboration
- Sharing information about things that EdL is doing to. (fittingly catch-up).
- Working with staff member to find ways to support colleague re: online programming

Inspiring others (Evidence)

- NA100C - move away from tokenism
- Again through questioning techniques related to practice
- Lots of praise & encouragement for all staff while also raising questions to keep conversations purposeful.
- Enabling students to experiment & trial ideas, with follow-up feedback?
- Humour! Feedback to staff member who was challenged by online programming

Focused on building relationships with others (Evidence)

- Enquiry about staff "How is ... going?" Opportunity for room leader to seek support.
- Arranging individual meetings with staff member who expressed need to meet privately (Toddler room)
- Staff member programming role - seated alongside staff member. Tone was casual but purposeful.
- Support for staff - us!

Meeting different learning styles and personalities (Evidence)

- Babies Room "My suggestion..."
- Sitting down with staff member who was busy with a child - not expecting her to get up & leave what she was doing
- Room leader did not want to programme so gave role to another staff member. EdL took time to ensure staff member understood the process. EdL noted staff member struggles with wider tasks.
- Feedback about positive changes