Dissertations   Social Sciences

2019-4

An investigation into the Conceptualisations of Leadership Among Early childhood Teachers in Ireland.

Edel Fenlon

TU Dublin - City Campus Online Dissertation Copyright Policy

The TU Dublin City Campus Library Online Dissertation Collection is comprised of undergraduate and postgraduate taught dissertations.

The copyright of a dissertation resides with the author. All TU Dublin students are bound to comply with Irish copyright legislation during their course of study. A dissertation is made available for consultation on the understanding that the reader will not publish it in any form, either the whole or any other part of it, without the written permission of the author.

To learn more about copyright and how it applies to you click **here**:

The Online Dissertation Collection is only available to be accessed by registered TU Dublin City Campus staff and students. Non-members of TU Dublin cannot be given access to the Online Dissertation Collection. (Please note that this also applies to graduates of TU Dublin and graduates of the former Dublin Institute of Technology requiring a copy of their own work). In using the Online Dissertation Collection students should be fully aware of the following points:

- Usernames and passwords are for personal use only. They must not be divulged for use by any other person.

- The Online Dissertation Collection is provided for personal educational purposes to support you in your courses of study. Use of this collection does not extend to any non-educational or commercial purpose.

- You must not email copies of any dissertation or print out copies for anyone else. You must not under any circumstances post content on bulletin boards, discussion groups or intranets etc.

- You must not remove, obscure or alter in any way any copyright information or watermarks that appear on any material that you download/print from the collection.

TU Dublin City Campus Library has to right to temporarily or permanently remove a digitised dissertation from the collection.

An investigation into the conceptualisations of leadership among early childhood teachers in Ireland.

Submitted to the Technological University of Dublin in part fulfilment of the requirements leading to the award of Master of Arts in Mentoring, Management and Leadership in the Early Years

By:

Edel Fenlon

April 2019

Word count: 12,710

Declaration of ownership

I declare that the attached work is entirely my own and that all sources have been acknowledged.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to thank the participants, without whom this dissertation would not be possible, thank you for volunteering your time and sharing your open and honest answers with me. I would also like to thank my supervisor Martina Ozyonia for her support and guidance throughout this process.

I also wish to express my thanks to all my family, friends and colleagues (past and present) who have supported, motivated and encouraged me each step of the way. Special thanks to my parents, to whom I will always be eternally grateful for your love and encouragement. A very special thank you to my partner, Joe, I would not have gotten through this without you. I am very fortunate to have such a wonderful support network, who have been so understanding and caring during this process.

Table of Contents

Appendices

Acronyms

AIM	Access and Inclusion Model
CPD	Continuous Professional Development
DCYA	Department of Children and Youth Affairs
DES	Department of Education and Skills
ECCE	Early Childhood Care and Education
ECEC	Early Childhood Education and Care
ECT	Early Childhood Teacher
EYEI	Early Years Education-focused Inspections
EYP	Early Years Professional
EYPS	Early Years Professional Status
InCo	Inclusion Coordinator
MA	Master of Arts
NFQ	National Framework of Qualifications
QRF	Quality Regularity Framework

Abstract

Leadership in an Irish Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) context is a new and emerging ideology at a policy and practice level. This study aimed to gain an understanding of the conceptualisations of leadership held by early childhood teachers who work directly with children in Ireland. This study explored the associations of leadership held by participants, recognition of leadership potential and attributes of effective leadership; through an interpretivist paradigm. Within this paradigm, a qualitative research design was selected to capture the lived experiences of leadership of participants. Six semi-structured interviews we completed with early childhood teachers from rural Ireland. The findings were extracted from the data collected using a thematic analysis, the themes which were established were shared leadership, development of others, characteristics of effective leadership, relational leadership and challenges of the profession. Overall the study identified a conceptualisation of leadership as a shared entity or co-leadership among early childhood teachers, which is reflective of the national policy agenda currently. Furthermore, the reciprocal nature of relationships was also a key factor in effective leadership in ECEC settings.

1. Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This study investigates the conceptualisations of leadership among early childhood teachers employed in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) settings in the Irish context. This chapter provides an overview of the rationale for the study, objectives, research questions and finally an overview of the forthcoming chapters.

1.2 Rationale /Background

Leadership in an Irish ECEC context is a new and emerging ideology. With a new focus of leadership and management in the Early Years Education-focused Inspections (EYEI), "opportunity is provided to each practitioner in the setting to take a leadership role in promoting good quality learning" (Department of Education and Skills (DES), 2016, p. 27). In addition to this new inspection focus, the emergence of specific national continuous professional development (CPD) programmes such as the Technological University Dublin's Master of Arts (MA) in Mentoring, Management and Leadership in the Early Years, Mary Immaculate College's Level Six Leadership for Inclusion (LINC) Programme. These are available in addition to further MA programmes in Institute of Technology Sligo and Carlow, all of which have modules which have leadership as a central learning outcome. This specific research area is of great professional interest to the researcher, as they seek to establish the extent to which early childhood teachers understand the concept of leadership. Leadership in ECEC contexts is broad construct, which proves difficult to define (Rodd, 2013). With authors such as McDowall Clark and Murray (2012) outlining that a variety of conceptualisations of leadership exist within the ECEC field, Rodd (2013) then asserts that to a certain extent leadership as a construct is rejected by those employed in this sector owing to the associations held with leadership and power. Initial review of the literature suggests that there is no explicit research on leadership within the Irish context. Literature such as Moloney and Pettersen (2017) explores the difference between management and leadership from a management position. This study however wishes to explore the concept of leadership among those holding a variety of posts in ECEC settings.

The term Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) is used throughout this study to refer to the ECEC sector nationally and internationally. The term Early Childhood Teacher is used as a broad term to represent those who work directly with children in the ECEC sector; who hold but not limited to the following post titles: Early Childhood Assistant/Practitioner, Montessori Teacher, Room Leader, Supervisor, or Manager in the sector. The participants held both formal and informal leadership roles in their settings; for the purpose of the findings, discussion and conclusion chapters participants who held formal leadership roles are referred to as leaders and those who held informal leadership roles are referred to as practitioners.

1.3 Aim and Objectives and Research Question

The aim of the study is to gain a wider understanding within the Irish context of the conceptualisations of leadership among early childhood teachers who work directly in ECEC settings.

The objective of this study is to establish the perceptions of leadership among early childhood teachers in an Irish context through qualitative data collection.

Specifically, the study will focus on the following research questions:

- Do early childhood teachers associate leadership with being in charge or holding an appointed leadership role?

- Do early childhood teachers recognise their own leadership potential?

- What characteristics and attributes do early childhood teachers perceive to be important for effective leadership in early childhood settings?

1.4 Overview

Chapter two literature review presents an overview and analysis of the literature nationally and internationally on leadership. Literature was drawn from policy, practice and theoretical sources.

Chapter three methodology details the methodological processes which the research study is based upon. Detailing the research paradigm, design and method. The data collection and processes, along with the ethical considerations for the study.

Chapter four findings presents the findings of the six qualitative interviews completed as part of this study. Findings are presented under the following themes which were identified during the data analysis process; shared leadership, development of others, characteristics of effective leadership and challenges of the profession.

Chapter five discussion presents discussion on the findings in relation to the literature presented in chapter two and makes connections to the relevance of the findings to the wider ECEC sector.

Chapter six conclusions and recommendations concludes this research study by providing a brief summary of the study and finding in relation to the outlined aims, objectives and research questions presented in this chapter one.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the literature related to leadership nationally and internationally, perspectives will draw from business orientated and ECEC contexts. Initially the current context of leadership at a policy level in Ireland will be explored to establish the national framework within which ECEC services are operating. A brief overview of where the ECEC sector has come from in relation to expectations from a policy level will also be explored. Constructions of leadership will be discussed to provide a framework for the conceptualisations of leadership which support this review of literature. Underpinned by a social constructivist view such concepts will be analysed, taking into consideration the complexities of enacting leadership. The relational aspects of leadership and gender perspectives of leadership shall be examined in relation to their impact on the enacting of leadership in ECEC settings. The researcher will examine the influential nature of leadership and the overall value of leadership in ECEC settings. Theoretical categorisations of leadership will be provided, with a specific focus on the impact of transformational and distributed leadership models to this sector as a best fit approach. Throughout this review of literature, a construct of leadership being more than a formal role will be examined, grounded in the research question seeking to explore how early childhood teachers associate leadership.

2.2 Policy Context in Ireland

In recent years the Irish ECEC sector has seen vast changes from a practice and policy level in relation to leadership. November 2018 saw the launch of 'First 5' A Whole-of-Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families 2019-2028, Irelands first ever cross-Departmental strategy to support babies, young children and their families, herein a strategy for an effective ECEC system is outlined (Government of Ireland, 2018). It makes recommendations for the creation of a new Workforce Development Plan which will establish a career framework and leadership development opportunities. With ambitious goals of up to fifty percent of staff with a degree-level qualification, how these developments will be implemented on a practice level is yet to be prescribed (Government of Ireland, 2018). The introduction of the Access and Inclusion Model (AIM) in 2016 (AIM, 2018a) saw the creation of the role of Inclusion

4

Co-ordinators (InCos) in ECEC settings, this role is to provide leadership in the areas of "diversity, equality and inclusion" (AIM, 2018b, p. 1). To fulfil this role early childhood teachers must complete a Special Purpose Award in 'Leadership for Inclusion'. The Tusla (2018) Quality and Regulatory Framework (QRF) also refers to leadership capacity within the team, where effective management and staff development are outlined as a means to aid staff to show leadership skills (Tusla, 2018), which has an important association with the distributed leadership models which will be discussed later. Similarly, the Early Years Education-focused Inspection's (EYEI) posits a goal of each early childhood teacher having a leadership role (DES, 2016). These changes in the policy and practice landscape are further complicated by the diverse nature of ECEC settings nationally; where settings are operated on a private and community basis and vary in size and structure (Pobal, 2018). Drawing on these developments there is a clear vision for a construct of leadership existing within ECEC teams rather than formal leaders such as managers and supervisors.

Preceding these developments' ECEC in Ireland was considered a private family matter, with little state contribution up until the 1990's (Moloney, 2010; OECD, 2004). The Child Care Act 1991 (Pre-School Services) Regulations 1996, outlined the requirements for team members to be a competent adult, with no provisions for a minimum qualification or experience (Government of Ireland, 1996). The introduction of a minimum qualification did not come into place until the enactment of the Child Care Act 1991 (Early Years Services) Regulations 2016, within which all staff members working directly within children must hold a minimum qualification of a National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) Level 5 (Government of Ireland, 2016). During the 2000s ECEC investment in Ireland was largely targeted at social inclusion and labour force activation, through the creation of additional childcare spaces, there was little to no investment or acknowledgement of the leadership capacity of the ECEC workforce (Hayes, O'Donoghue-Hayes, & Wolfe, 2013). The introduction of the Free Preschool Year in Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme in 2010, provided one academic year of ECEC to all children in the state prior to entering formal education. This programme saw the introduction of a minimum qualification of an NFQ Level 5 for a room leader, which was subsequently increased to an NFQ Level 6 for those operating an ECCE Programme. Notwithstanding these qualifications as a minimum requirement, there has always been a financial incentive to employ a graduate as a room leader under this programme.

2.3 Constructions of Leadership

Leadership is a term which is used across multiple contexts in business and organisational domains, and owing to its broad nature, leadership is defined in many ways. Dimmock (2012) posits a mainstream business orientated definition of "an influence process over a group of individuals, workers or employees aimed at gaining their commitment to shared values and goals and subsequent goal achievement" (p. 6). Alternatively, from an educational perspective Leithwood and Riehl (2005) describe leadership as "the work of mobilising and influencing others to articulate and achieve the school's shared intentions and goals" (p. 14). Dimmock's (2012) definition reflects the business orientated structures of goals and potential targets whereas Leithwood and Riehl's (2005) definition emphasises the subtle influences of processes to fulfilling goals. The ECEC sector internationally is complex in nature by comparison to other sectors and is presented in many different forms and structures (Aubrey, Godfrey, & Harris, 2012). Rodd (2013) highlights the challenge this presents "to deconstruct, analyse and define leadership" (p. 27). With this in mind, rather than presenting an overarching definition of leadership, leadership shall be discussed as a construct.

Leadership can be viewed through a social constructivist or interpretivist lens, through this lens it is believed that knowledge is constructed through the interactions one has with the social world. Research suggests that leadership in an ECEC context is a socially constructed phenomenon and is situated within the immediate context of an individual's experience (McDowall Clark & Murray, 2012; Rodd, 2013; Rodd, 2001; Siraj-Blatchford & Manni, 2007). This broad and changing concept, suggests that a multitude of concepts of leadership exist within this field (McDowall Clark & Murray, 2012). Heikka and Hujala (2013) discussed how multiple perceptions of leadership were highlighted by research participants, this is echoed from a theoretical perspective by Hard and Jónsdóttir (2013) who highlighted the breadth of interpretations of leadership evident in literature. As a result, it can be expected with an overabundance of interpretations, that on a practical implementation level, leadership in ECEC settings is varied in nature. Perceptions of leadership held by early childhood teachers and leaders influenced the variety of supports provided to early childhood teachers as highlighted by Heikka, Halttunen, and Waniganayake (2018). Northouse (2015) suggests that leadership theory is conceptualised from a relational or an information

processing perspective or as a trait or a behaviour which further complicates the constructions of leadership which are present.

The research of McDowall Clark (2012) explored the assumptions of leadership held by early childhood teachers or Early Years Professionals (EYP) engaged in or who had attained Early Years Professional Status (EYPS) in England. Here drawing on the aforementioned social constructivist nature of leadership, McDowall Clark (2012) coined a new construct of "catalytic leadership" which draws heavily on the ideas of leadership involving change and early childhood teachers acting as change agents (p. 398). This construct also draws on the recognition that leadership lies with all early childhood teachers and not one significant individual who holds a formal position of authority in the ECEC setting, citing the "position of influence rather than authority" as the critical factor (McDowall Clark, 2012, p. 399). Within an Irish ECEC context this is reflected by both inspectorates in the QRF (Tusla, 2018), and the EYEI (DES, 2016), and the new role of the InCo (AIM, 2018b) which all recognise the need for leadership from within the team.

Leithwood and Riehl (2005) describe "leadership is an influence process" (p. 14), which as a concept of leadership comes from empowering others, subtle influence and as Murray (2013) describes it, the influence of leading from the middle. Drawing on McDowall Clark's (2012) catalytic leadership, the early childhood teachers position to influence is considered rather than their authority. Colmer (2017) discussed leadership as a medium of influence towards the involvement in shared and collective goals. Owing to the influential nature of leadership (Harris, 2008), Hackman and Wageman (2007) suggest that leadership can be enacted by anyone, as Schon (1983) describes leadership as "symbolic, inspirational and educational" in nature where one can be a leader without a formal title (p. 36).

2.4 Complexity and Local Context

Nicholson and Maniates (2016) suggest that leadership is an ever-evolving concept, where modernist views of leadership as a leader/follower construct are rejected and a more complex acknowledgement of leadership unfolds. Nicholson and Maniates (2016) propose that leadership in an ECEC context be discussed as "dynamic, relational, negotiated, emotional as well as cogitative, and in (different contexts) potentially

contradictory" (p. 77). Conversely, Rodd (2013) asserts that often "effective leadership is enacted by standing back, saying or doing nothing" again reinforcing the complexity of leadership constructs (p. 233). In addition to this complexity Aubrey *et al.* (2012) highlight the multitude of different structures and forms which ECEC leadership takes, and comparatively suggest that one approach to leadership is not a good fit owing to the diversity of the sector. Consequently, reinforcing Nicholson and Maniates (2016) multi-layered definition owing to its dynamic and flexible approach. Coupled with this complex nature, one must also consider the local contexts in which leadership is enacted (Waniganayake, 2014). Early childhood teachers hold a variety of roles, some of which are context specific and determined by local communities (Muijs, Aubrey, Harris, & Briggs, 2004). Additionally, Leeson, Campbell-Barr and Ho (2012) discuss the cultural context in which leadership happens, while Heikka *et al.* (2018) and Aubrey *et al.* (2012) suggest it can be dependent on the nature of individual ECEC settings; it is therefore important to consider that leadership is both "contextual and contingent" (Leithwood & Riehl, 2005, p. 14). Such a consideration is reflective of the complex nature of the ECEC sector nationally and internationally (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 2017).

2.5 Gender Perspective

Nationally and internationally those who choose ECEC as a career are typically female (OECD, 2017; Pobal, 2018). The most recent statistics in the Irish context place this figure at ninety-eight percent of the total workforce (Pobal, 2018). It is therefore pertinent to discuss leadership in this sector from a gender perspective, as it is in direct contrast to that of the business world (Aubrey *et al.,* 2012; Muijs *et al.,* 2004). Hard and Jónsdóttir (2013) draw attention to the fact that leadership literature and practice was male dominated until the latter part of the 20th century. Hard and Jónsdóttir (2013), and Rodd (2013) draw on this gender perspective and discuss how leadership in ECEC is to a certain extent a rejected concept owing to an aversion to power, which is constructed with the male dominated leadership discourse. This can be explored from a professional identity perspective and how early childhood teachers see themselves. Hard and Jónsdóttir (2013) suggest that the female dominated ECEC culture is abound with a "discourse of niceness" (p. 319), this implies that leadership is entwined with the caring nature of the ECEC profession, who are motivated by the passion of care and

8

education of young children (Murray, 2013). Consequently, a distinct construct of leadership is required in relevant discussion of leadership in ECEC owing to the aversions to power and female dominated cultures of ECEC practice (Hard and Jónsdóttir, 2013; Rodd, 2013).

2.6 Relational Leadership

Nicholson and Maniates's (2016) above multi-layered recognition of leadership in ECEC outlined the relational element of leadership in the sector. Lee (2008) highlighted that positive relationships were crucial to the development of leadership in their Educational Leadership Project in New Zealand. Similarly, several studies highlight that leadership is relational and exists within social relationships (Colmer, 2017; Lee, 2008; Leithwood & Riehl, 2005; Rodd, 1997). As an illustration of this relational nature Aubrey *et al.* (2012) emphasise the importance of "collegial ways of working, and a climate of trust and openness" (p. 26). Sims, Forrest, Semann, and Slattery's (2015) research participants ranked the relationship element of leadership higher than mentoring element of leadership which was contrary to the literature argued for by the authors. Effective leadership cannot be enacted without the presence of positive professional relationships (Siraj-Blatchford and Manni, 2007). For this reason, it is important to acknowledge the complexities of relationships and effective leadership. Goleman (2011) suggests effective leadership can only be enacted when a leader demonstrates high levels of emotional intelligence, characteristics of which are motivation, self-awareness, empathy, self-regulation and social skills. These characteristics are high-level competencies which enable them to manage their emotional state and promote self-awareness at a level which ensures appropriate positive interactions and relationships with the whole team (Siraj-Blatchford & Hallet, 2014).

As noted, leadership within an ECEC setting is varied and contextual, however as Muijs *et al.* (2004) highlights "whatever else is disputed, the contribution of leadership to improving organisational performance and raising achievements remains unequivocal" (p. 157). Effective leadership provides a core vision, a purpose and direction (Aubrey *et al.*, 2012; Leithwood & Riehl, 2005), which can be enacted by any team member who can create change and positive development (Hard & Jónsdóttir, 2013). Central to such effective leadership and the creation of positive reciprocal relationships is the ability of

the leader to be an effective communicator (Siraj- Blatchford & Manni, 2007). This in turn enacts quality ECEC, which is enshrined in national policy such as 'First 5' A Whole-of-Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families 2019-2028 (Government of Ireland, 2018), the EYEI (DES, 2016) and the QRF (Tusla, 2018). The importance of relationships in the constructs of ECEC leadership are highlighted within the following categorisations of leadership.

2.7 Transformational Leadership

A variety of categorisations of leadership theories exist within the literature, most commonly; transactional, transformational and liassez- fiere (Campbell-Barr & Leeson, 2016; Northouse, 2015). According to Northouse (2015) transactional leadership is a broad classification of most leadership models in literature, which focus on leadership as an exchange of power; trait theory as an example. This category of leadership utilises negative strategies such as criticism, and negative reinforcement to achieve goals and tasks, with a clear hierarchical structure (Northouse, 2015).

These above authors emphasise the transformational category as the most effective leadership category. The visionary leadership style of a transformational leader promotes a vision, which "emerges from the collective interests of various individuals and units in an organisation" (Northouse, 2015, p. 200). This linear rather than hierarchal model of leadership encapsulates the contextual nature of leadership, recognising that leadership does not lie solely with a formal leader rather leaders both influence and are influenced by their followers (Campbell-Barr & Leeson, 2016). This vision is reflected in the previously outlined policy context in Ireland through the enactment of 'First 5' A Whole-of-Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families 2019-2028 (Government of Ireland, 2018), the EYEI (DES, 2016) and the QRF (Tusla, 2018). Furthermore, a transformational leader provides an idealised influence; intellectual stimulation; individualised consideration and is inspirational to their followers (Northouse, 2015). Distributed leadership while under the same categorisation of leadership takes a specific focus towards leadership as a part of the collective of an organisation (Siraj-Blatchford & Hallet, 2014); team members have equal opportunities to lead in their own areas of expertise.

2.7.1 Distributed Leadership

Siraj-Blatchford and Manni (2007) advocate for a construct of leadership as a collective and shared entity rather than the more traditional view of leadership encased in one significant individual. This model of leadership can be categorised as distributed leadership, where leadership is viewed as a collective function (Siraj-Blatchford & Hallet, 2014). Colmer, Waniganayake and Field (2014) discuss distributed leadership as a highly applicable to ECEC settings, owing to the relational and interactional nature of this theory. Waniganayake (2014) posits a reconceptualised model of distributed leadership specific to ECEC settings, in which knowledge and knowledge sharing between stakeholders is the core to successful leadership. This model is a means through which the ideals of the EYEI's goal of each early childhood teacher having a leadership role and as such leadership potential and knowledge sharing (DES, 2016).

Within a distributed leadership approach the role of the formal leader is vital to its success, as they create the conditions through which this can take place (Aubrey *et al.*, 2012). Through the implementation of information sharing and decision making systems, leadership can be exhibited by informal leaders (Heikka & Hujala, 2013), without the supporting role of the formal leader, distributed leadership is unlikely to occur or be effective (Harris, 2013). Harris (2013) emphasises that distributed leadership is a "co-leadership" which involves both formal and informal leaders (p. 548). Heikka and Hujala (2013) suggest that enacting distributed leadership relies on interdependent relationships between people, which further emphasises the relational nature of leadership highlighted by Aubrey *et al.* (2012), Colmer (2017), Lee (2008), Nicholson and Maniates (2016), and Sims *et al.* (2015). To successfully enact distributed leadership, formal leaders must provide opportunities for early childhood teachers to lead, through coaching and mentoring (Denee & Thornton, 2018).

Notwithstanding that distributed leadership is posited as a good fit model of leadership for the ECEC sector (Colmer *et al*, 2014; Waniganayake, 2014), there are some cautionary elements within the literature which must be considered. Siraj-Blatchford and Manni (2007) caution of its effective application where staff are inexperienced or where there are high rates of staff turnover. Within an Irish ECEC context this is important to consider as, the Pobal Early Years Sector Profile 2017-2018 put turnover rates in Ireland at almost twenty-five percent (Pobal, 2018). As a distributed leadership approach is based within a team of early childhood teachers, with high rates of staff

turnover, one must also consider the stages of group development. When Tuckman's (1965) stages of group development or maturity as forming, storming, norming and performing are considered, effective distributed leadership can only occur when a team are performing. As a result of high turnover rates, it is likely that teams are in a cycle of the initial stages of maturity, namely forming and storming, therefore impacting on the enactment of distributed leadership. Furthermore, conceptions of leadership were highlighted by Denee and Thornton (2018) as a challenge to enacting distributed leadership, which can present if team members understand leadership as a hierarchical rather than linear model. As an illustration Lambert (2007) argues that "how leadership is defined will determine how people participate" (p. 312), reflecting the views of Rodd (2013) and the difficulties presented in defining leadership.

2.9 Conclusion

Several key themes emerge from the literature in relation to ECEC leadership; leadership is difficult to define and is often discussed within a social constructivist framework. As a result, leadership cannot be discussed without consideration for the local context within which it is experienced, this local context can be individual to each early childhood teacher, setting or at a broader national/international level. Within the ECEC sector, leadership, its constructs and enactment are also influenced by the gendered nature of the ECEC sector, further highlighting the breadth of constructions of leadership which must be considered. Throughout the literature, leadership is discussed as being enacted by formal and informal leaders, the importance of considering the early childhood teachers' capacity and position of influence within their ECEC setting. This builds on the construct of distributed leadership as a shared and collective entity, a 'co-leadership' rather than a traditional hierarchical model. Leadership is identified as a complex construct which for effective enactment is potentially contradictory in implementation. Throughout the literature on leadership in ECEC a dominant discourse is the relational nature of leadership in this sector, without positive relationships in ECEC teams, effective leadership cannot be enacted. Overall, the importance of effective leadership within the ECEC sector is unquestionable as to its impact of enacting high quality ECEC and implementing change.

3. Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The focal point of this research study is to explore the perceptions of early childhood teachers of leadership in the ECEC sector. The researcher adopted a qualitative approach, grounded within an interpretivist paradigm to capture the perspectives of the data sample.

3.2 Research Paradigm

According to Flick (2015) a research paradigm influences the selection of appropriate research methods and how these should be applied in a research study, often referred to as a world view or framework which guides the research process. The paradigm which has been utilised for this study is an interpretivist paradigm, which involves the researcher grasping the "subjective meaning" of actions (Bryman, 2015, p. 26). Interpretivism proposes that researchers clarify participants' understandings of concepts and issues, rather than assume understanding of such are shared; through this process researchers analyse the concepts produced (Flick, 2015). An interpretivist framework facilitates the proposed research questions, which aim to establish what conceptions of ECEC leadership are held by early childhood teachers. This is achieved through the recognition that knowledge is not a fixed entity, rather a construction of social meaning (Creswell, 2014; Lincoln, Lyndam, & Guba, 2011).

3.3 Research Design

Engrained in the interpretivist framework, this study utilised a qualitative research design to investigate the conceptions of leadership among the early childhood teachers. The researcher had initially envisaged undertaking a quantitative approach to garner a broad view of these concepts, as a quantitative approach would have facilitated a larger sample size and possibly multiple geographical locations thus providing a "breadth" of data (Blaxter, Hughes, & Tight, 2010, p. 65). However, in the course of the initial literature review several studies concluded that a qualitative data gathering approach be undertaken as it facilitates a more detailed and considered response from participants (Clyde & Rodd, 1994, as cited in Rodd, 1997; Sims *et al.*, 2015). Utilising a qualitative

research design allows for a smaller scale study which provides a "depth" to the data which could not be attained in a quantitative design (Blaxter *et al.*, 2010, p. 65). A qualitative approach is subjective in nature as opposed to the objective nature of a quantitative study (Blaxter *et al*, 2010). As this study aims to gain understanding of leadership concepts rather than facts about leadership, a subjective lens suited best. A phenomenological design was chosen as the specific qualitative approach for the study; phenomenology is described within the interpretivist paradigm as "how individuals make sense of the world around them" (Bryman, 2016, p. 26). This research design involved the researcher gaining an understanding of participants social realities and points of view (Bryman, 2016) and, capturing the lived experiences of participants which is achieved through the conduction of interviews (Creswell, 2014).

3.4 Research Method

The research questions outlined in this study aim to gain understanding of early childhood teachers' perceptions of the role of leadership and asks do they recognise their own leadership potential. As these are individual social realities for participants the data collection method which was deemed most suitable for this study was semi-structured interviews. This method was also selected drawing on the interpretivist paradigm and utilising the phenomenological design which inform this study. According to Kerlinger and Lee (2000) interviews are one of the oldest and most frequently used data collection instruments in qualitative research. Semi-structured interviews allow the researcher flexibility, in so far as they can be adapted to the individual situation and the question sequence can deviate to facilitate the flow of discussion (Flick, 2015; Kerlinger & Lee, 2000). Use of open and semi-structured questions facilitate data collection which would not otherwise be accessible using data collection instruments such as questionnaires or observations (Blaxter *et al.*, 2010).

It is important to note that the sole use of interviews as a data collection method is not without its limitations. Kerlinger and Lee (2000) caution of the time-consuming nature of interviews throughout the data collection and analysis processes, owing to the time required to complete each interview and the large volume of data which is collected and analysed during the process. Furthermore, one-to-one interviews may be directly or indirectly affected by the interviewer/researcher and the possibility of bias must be noted (Sarantakos, 2013). It is therefore important that the researcher is aware of this

possibility and adopts a non-leading and reserved approach to their interview technique, to limit any potential bias during the interview process (Sarantakos, 2013). Notwithstanding these limitations, based on the research aims of this study interviews were selected as the most suitable research instrument. Facilitating the researcher to capture the opinions and views of the early childhood teachers and allow the flexibility to capture individual circumstance owing to the broad nature of the ECEC sector in Ireland (see Appendix A).

3.5 Research Sample and Accessing Participants

This study required the recruitment of early childhood teachers currently working in the ECEC sector. Owing to the small-scale sample of participants needed, a non-probability sampling approach was utilised. As the recruitment commenced it became apparent that a pragmatic approach would be required, as gaining access to participants was proving challenging; many citing time constraints at the time of year as a reason for not partaking. As a result, a convenience sample of participants who were available to the researcher were recruited (Bryman, 2016). During this process the importance of gatekeepers became apparent to gaining access to participants who were willing to participate in interview (Blaxter et al, 2010). The first couple of participants put the researcher in contact with additional potential participants who were available to participate. This process is referred to as a "snowball sample" (Foster, 2006, p. 80), which as Bryman (2016) outlines is similar in form to a convenience sample. It is also important to note that this sampling approach may provide an unrepresentative sample and it will be impossible to generalise the findings of the study (Bryman, 2016; Foster, 2006). The research sample consisted of six early childhood teachers, who at the time of the research study were employed in two rural ECEC settings which employed eight to fifteen staff. Four of the participants held formal leadership posts such as room leader or manager, while the other two participants held the post of practitioner. All the research participants held a minimum of a NFQ Level seven qualification in early childhood, with the majority (five) holding a NFQ Level eight qualification.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

Throughout the research process ethical considerations were of paramount importance. Creswell (2014) stresses the role of the researcher in protecting the participants and promoting integrity throughout the process. Prior to the commencement of the research, the researcher sought and obtained, ethical approval from the Technological University of Dublin. When research participants were recruited their informed consent was critical. An information letter (see Appendix B) was provided to all participants in advance to ensure they had sufficient detail on the rationale, purpose and processes involved in the research study (British Educational Research Association [BERA], 2018). In addition to this, written consent was sought from each participant confirming their informed consent and their right to opt out at any time in the research process without reason (see Appendix C). At all stages of the research process the anonymity and confidentiality of the participants was respected, and data gathered was held in the strictest confidence (BERA, 2018). All digital data gathered during the data collection process was held securely on password protected devices.

3.7 Data Collection Process

A series of interview questions were drafted prior to the commencement of the research study, these questions were then piloted with a colleague. Wilson and Sapford (2006) note that it is essential to pilot the data collection instrument prior to commencement of the research to assess the accuracy, relevancy and question clarity. Wilson and Sapford (2006) also caution that the pilot sample should be representative of the main sample, this was considered in the selection of the colleague with whom the interview questions were piloted. Upon completion of the pilot interview, one of the proposed interview questions was removed from the final interview schedule owing to the repetitive nature of the responses provided. The data collection took place in a meeting room in setting one, which was convenient for participants from that setting. One interview took place in the researcher's personal work office as the participant did not have a suitable space available to complete the interview. The interviews were recorded using an app on a smartphone device, this device was password protected and only the researcher had access to the data. Once completed the recording was transferred to a personal password protected laptop for transcription and analysis.

3.8 Data Analysis

Once the initial interviews had taken place the researcher began the process of standard orthographic or "verbatim transcription" of the recorded data (Hepburn & Bolden, 2017, p. 14). This format of transcription enabled the researcher to produce a simple and searchable transcript of each interview. During the transcription phase, the researcher commenced the process of thematic analysis and the transcripts were read through to get a general interpretation of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Creswell, 2014). Following on from this a process of data coding commenced, according to Flick (2015) coding is the process through which the raw data is broken down, which leads to the development of themes and extrapolating of meaning from the data. This coding process was emergent and inductive rather than predetermined and allowed the researcher to establish similarities, differences, recurring themes and ideas in the data (Creswell, 2014). The researcher was cognisant of the importance of accurate and consistent coding application during this process (Sarantakos, 2013). In the final stages of the thematic analysis process, the data labelled during the coding process was further analysed to search for initial themes and sub-themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This analytical tool was a means to establish recurrent patterns and themes in the data across participants (Sarantakos, 2013). The researcher returned to the data on several occasions prior to finalising the themes which are presented in chapter four.

3.9 Reflexivity

Reflexivity is an important aspect of the methodological process of this study as the researcher's reflections and feelings during the research process "become data in their own right, forming part of the interpretation" (Flick, 2009, p. 16). A reflective narrative is presented here, providing some insights into the researchers' reflections. One area which a focus of a reflection is the use of probing questions, which can facilitate further elaboration or discussion on a participant's response to an interview question (Sarantakos, 2013). Another area of reflection is potential bias, and the assumed status of parties (interviewer and interviewee), where the interviewer may be perceived as an 'expert' on the subject matter (Sarantakos, 2013). As this is a reflective section, the first person is used.

3.9.1 Reflections

During the data collection phase, I believed, I used probing questions effectively. However, during the data analysis phase, it became apparent to me that this form of questioning could have been executed more proficiently. I feel some opportunities were missed owing to my inability to recognise in the moment a probing question could have allowed the participant to provide me with a more detailed response. I believe this can be attributed to my inexperience as a novice interviewer, as I found as the data gathering progressed, I became more proficient and confident in the use of such questioning styles. On reflection, increasing the number of pilot interviews I completed may have aided in developing my interview technique.

During the research phase and conducting each interview I was acutely aware of potential interviewer/interviewee bias and the possibility of my own influence on the data collection process during interview.   Upon commencing each interview, I presented each participant with the background information on the study and outlined the processes involved in the interview. I took this time to reassure the participants that I was looking for their honest answers and as the focus of this research study was conceptions of leadership, their answers were all valid. A number commented at the end of the interviews that they hoped their answers were 'right' which emphasised the importance of providing reassurance at the beginning of each interview.

4. Findings

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of six qualitative interviews carried out with early childhood teachers who held both formal and informal leadership roles in the ECEC services they were employed in. The findings are presented under themes and sub-headings which were identified during the data analysis phase of this research study. These themes were identified using a thematic analysis approach as outlined in chapter three Methodology. These themes include:

- Shared leadership

- Development of others

- Characteristics of effective leadership

- Relational leadership

- Challenges of the profession

Quotes from participants are presented in a coded format; early childhood teachers who held formal leadership roles in their settings are referred to as leaders and those who did not hold a formal leadership role are referred to as practitioners.

4.2 Shared Leadership

Participants highlighted the importance of the role of each team member in effective day to day operating of ECEC services. With one leader identifying that *'they all feel they have an important role in the classroom'*. This was reinforced by a practitioner who acknowledged that *'our room leader, she wants everyone to be involved, it's not just what she says…'*

'Inclusion' and equality were noted by both practitioners as vital aspects to their recognition as team members where *'everyone gets choice in the decisions … and it's all equal'*.

When asked about their current understanding of leadership in ECEC settings, it was evident that non-hierarchical models of leadership formed part of both leaders and practitioners' conceptualisations.

'I think that a leader, that everybody that works in an early years setting is a leader in some sense, I don't think it is just the manager, I think room leaders are obviously different, but then I think us working under the room leaders we lead the room in a different way as well, planning and getting involved and things like that' (Practitioner)

'It means basically that you are the person in charge of the room but doesn't mean that you are any better than the rest of the people, you need to motivate the people that you are working with, you have to do the same work as they do, show them, be a role model for them' (Leader)

4.2.2 Collegial ways of working.

Furthermore, some of the leaders noted collegial ways of working as being significant to a whole team approach, both within individual classroom teams or as a whole setting to achieve common goals and tasks.

'working together as a team... it's really important I think that everyone kind of does things together'

'if we have something that we need, ... we'd muddle together and do everything together as such ... we all work together'

'I class the people I work with as friends that we work together harmoniously, ... it's kind of all level'

4.2.4 Promotion of autonomy.

The promotion of the autonomy by those in formal leadership roles was discussed by both practitioners in relation to leading the curriculum. With one practitioner noting that her room leader *'would give us time to go out ... plan an activity and then take charge of it'* and another practitioner stated that *'they definitely give us a chance to lead as well in the room, planning and things like that'*.

4.3 Development of Others

Most participants who were leaders spoke about the development of others within their teams. With one of the leaders recognising that '*at the end of the day they are on their own career paths as well*'. There was a recognition outlined by the other leaders of the importance of everyone being supported and how this is achieved.

'the time they have with me, I want them to take that they learned from me, ... that they learn new skills, ... because they might become a room leader in their future. So, ..., I

want their work time to be a learning process rather than this is just what I am doing at the moment'

'Like if you are new to a room, you do not know what is going on, ... you need that little bit of instruction, ... then once you get used to it you start doing it on your own initiative, you'll see what needs to be done and do it.'

'I make sure they are supported, that if there are any areas, they think they need extra support in, that they can come to me for starters and talk about it'

This ethos of being supported in professional development was echoed by one of the practitioners, in that *'they to facilitate you so that you so that can work with the children... feel like that you are supported with what you're doing'*.

4.3.1 Continual professional development.

One participant who was a more senior leader, spoke about providing access to continual professional development for her team.

'we would have, try to have regular supervision meetings, whether it's like once a month, once every two months, so the staff would come to me, ... even outside the meetings, if there are any courses they want to go on, we would always facilitate training or if I see an area that I think they need some training in or they would be interested in. The people that work here would always let me know what they are looking for in training wise ... if they want to go on it, they can so they feel that they are encouraged to do continual professional development and that's available to them that's not something that they can look for and hope that they get and available to them.

4.3.2 Initiative.

From the perspective of two leaders, it was evident that these participants tried to encourage those who they worked with to use their initiative and promote the autonomy of the colleagues.

'using their initiative is a big thing for me, I like them to use their initiative and not having to wait for me to tell them what to do... I like that people can do that, that I don't have to do it all myself'

'I give the staff members all the chance to bring up their ideas. ... I think it is important never to shoot anyone's ideas down, to always give it a try at first anyway and then to reflect to see if it's after working or not'

21

While one leader talked about the importance of *'reflective practice'* with her team, when they were afforded the opportunity to take the lead in an area *'and then to reflect to see if it's after working or not'*.

4.4 Characteristics of Effective Leadership

When asked what makes a good leader, effective communication was a recurrent topic among both leaders and practitioners, with one leader noting *'you know it's about good communication'* and another stating that *'I would always be very open, a lot of communication with staff and I think that's important that you are approachable, and you can communicate with people'*.

While both practitioners recognised the importance of communication in team leadership and a leader being *'able to lead a team, to be able to communicate effectively'*. One highlighted communication as the most important attribute of a good leader.

'Communication would be number one like, because say if they go in and they want such a thing done on one day and but if they haven't told you about it and you do something else so then the plan or routine are messed up for the day'

4.4.1 Mutual respect.

Leaders and a practitioner highlighted the importance of the creation of a culture of mutual respect when it comes to leadership.

'If they genuinely listen to you, they are an active listener to you, not just like kind of go in one ear out the other and like respect you then as well like ... if they listen to you, they respect you, make you feel part of like well you're in this as well, not that just what I say goes, make you feel like you are equal as them like, that not just because I have the title of a leader or manager what I say goes like' (Practitioner)

'I respect them, and they respect me ... I think once you start walking around like that ... you're going to lose respect from people, and you're into a whole different ball game then' (Leader)

'Someone that can provide direction, but at the same time do it in a friendly way, not that they are telling you that you have to do this this and this, if you kind of say these things need to be done, let the staff in the room take initiative and do it themselves' (Leader)

4.4.3 Compromise.

The ability to compromise was also highlighted as an important quality in relation to leadership. With one leader suggesting that leaders should be able *'to compromise, to see it's not just their ... view on things'*. While another noted the importance of *'being reasonable as a leader, like being reasonable that not everyone knows everything as such'*.

4.5 Relational Leadership

Relationships and trust were discussed in most of the interviews with participants highlighting the significance of positive reciprocal relationships where there is an openness and trusting atmosphere.

'so that you would be able to talk to your managers or supervisors about something, like say something is going on in the room or you're not happy or your finding something difficult that you don't feel like I can't talk to them about it cause they are only going to think that I'm not going to be able to do it like' (Practitioner)

'for starters you need to be open with staff, with anyone, so that they feel that they can approach you, that, ahem, I suppose, that if your like with children if your modelling behaviour with staff that you want back.' (Leader)

'I love not that I love hearing stuff about me, but I take the bad with the good. So, if a worker did say to me, I find it very stressful that you go out at a certain time during the day. I'd rather that than having that worker coming in dreading that hour... that they feel comfortable to come to me with any problems they have and just to get the work done to have, to make all the workers strive but yet in a fun atmosphere, warm atmosphere. (Leader)

'if anyone had a problem in the room I feel that I get on with the people I work with that they can come to me if they had an issue or if they weren't comfortable in what we were doing that they feel they could come to me and chat to me about it' (Leader)

Furthermore, two of the leaders mentioned the use of positive reinforcement to create a positive working environment.

'I love giving complements to the workers when they do a good job it just gives them a spring in their step I suppose and boosts confidence'

'rewarding them, telling them they did a good job and all it always makes it, you feel good about yourself doing what you are doing, so you are going to work harder then.'

4.5.1 Leadership and associations of power

On the contrary a number of the participants also discussed the association of leadership with power and traditional hierarchical models of leadership associated with a dictator style of leadership.

'I think that's a big thing with a leader that you're not kind of coming across like I'm the boss and you have to do as I say kind of thing, ahem, cause we don't work like that in here.' (Leader)

'you're the manager but it's not that they are the boss… like if you have a big scary boss like you are not going to go to them with any problems' (Practitioner)

'I think you can be a very good leadership and have good responsibilities and good leading styles without the power going to your head… yes to be headstrong but not to the point that your stubborn or don't want to hear other people's opinions, I suppose … a big trait would be not to … I know it sounds awful but a power head' (Leader)

'if you are very closed off and very dictator like towards them … they are not going to respond to you' (Leader)

Both practitioners noted the traditional hierarchal models of leadership and the relational element to these in relation to leading from a more linear model.

'just because they … are not on the same level as someone else, doesn't meant that you can't do what they can do, like respect and listening to you'

'Model the behaviour that they … want to see in the room. If you expect someone to do work you should be seen to be doing that work too, like everyone does… you role model and do it first and then people will follow as you do'

Additionally, the word friendliness was a recurrent phrase used when participants were asked about their own personal qualities in relation to leadership. One leader stated, *'I would be quite friendly and approachable'*, while another noted that she tries '*to bring a friendly atmosphere'* as she recognises that both leaders and practitioners are '*working all our lives, were working what thirty-nine hours a week it is a part of us try and make it as nice as possible'*. One practitioner ranked *'friendliness'* as her most important leadership quality.

4.6 Challenges of the Profession

Challenges of working in the ECEC sector were noted by a couple of the participants with one leader acknowledging the demanding nature of the work load, *'I know how hard it is being, working in a classroom, eight hours a day'*. While another leader

acknowledged the difficulties presented to her in the changing nature of her core team weekly.

'I have different staff on different days... every time they are in, I have to go through kind of the children's routines and if any things changed ... I love to have both of them, but I would love to have the one person all of the time ... cause it is more difficult sometimes ...'

4.6.1 Professional boundaries.

While the notion of friendliness was noted in an earlier section, it was identified by two leaders in relation to their responsibilities and professional boundaries which are associated with holding such positions.

'you can be a good leader and have friendships among your staff, but to always remind them, that work is work and outside is outside... that the rules are kind of in place like if I have I to bring up something to them a couple of times and it's not done right, that it will go to higher authority and it's nothing personal it's just at the end of the day it's my job '

'Well you do need that kind of friends, while you also have to think, well if things aren't being done, you have to be able to have those tough conversations with people. ... They ... need to have a side that they can have those conversations, and tell you look we have to do things differently, I know we are friends but at the same time we are in business or setting that needs structure or stuff to be done, according to... certain standards, and having that balance.'

4.6.2 Onus of responsibility the role of a formal leader.

Three of the leaders identified that the overall responsibility for what happens falls on them. Acknowledging that *'I take full responsibility for everything'* and that day to day tasks *'falls on my responsibility to make sure all that is done'*. With an overarching acknowledgment that *'leadership is to ... make sure they are working within the ethos of the centre'*.

4.7 Conclusion

This concludes the findings of this study, the themes which were outlined were; shared leadership, development of others, characteristics of effective leadership, relational leadership and challenges of the profession. These are discussed in the next chapter in relation to the literature identified in chapter two and the research questions outlined in the introduction.

5. Discussion

5.1 Introduction

This research study aimed to garner an understanding of the conceptualisations of leadership among early childhood teachers in Ireland. This chapter discusses the findings of this study in relation to the literature identified in chapter two. The findings are discussed under the themes that were identified in chapter four findings utilising a thematic analysis of the data gathered during the research phase of this study. Findings are discussed under the following headings; shared leadership, development of others, characteristics of effective leadership, relational leadership and challenges of the profession. Additionally, some limitations are outlined in the context of their impact on the findings.

5.2 Shared Leadership

The findings highlighted that participants current understanding of leadership was that of a linear rather than a hierarchical model, with leadership as a shared entity among team members. This is in line with the EYEI's goal of each early childhood teacher having a leadership role (DES, 2016). Similarly, this is evident in the literature as advocated for by McDowall Clark (2012) who coined the construct of "catalytic leadership" (p. 398). This construct of leadership was evident in the findings in the shared entities of leadership outlined by participants, where leadership is more than just a formal position with influence imposed from above. Similarly, Murray (2013) and Leithwood and Riehl (2005) highlight this concept of leadership as empowering others and leading from the middle. This corresponds to Nicholson and Maniates (2016) who suggest that leadership is an ever-evolving concept, where modernist views of leadership as a leader/follower construct are rejected and a more complex constructs unfolds which was evidenced in the findings with participants highlighting a linear model of leadership.

Findings also suggest that leadership was recognised as a co-leadership by participants, which corresponds with Harris' (2013) view that distributed leadership is a "co-leadership" (p. 548), which involves both formal and informal leaders and in the case of the participants, in this study the leaders and practitioners. This construct of leadership is in line with Hackman and Wageman (2007) who suggest that leadership

can be enacted by anyone and Schon (1983) who describes leadership as "symbolic, inspirational and educational" (p. 36) in nature where one can be a leader without a formal title. Additionally, this corresponds with Hard and Jónsdóttir (2013) who recognise that effective leadership can be enacted by any team member who can create change and positive development. Such a co-leadership model further draws on McDowall Clark's (2012) catalytic leadership model which highlights the practitioner's position of influence as a consideration rather than their formal title. This co-leadership has a distinct link to distributed leadership model which advocates for a construct of leadership as a collective function and shared entity (Siraj-Blatchford & Manni, 2007; Siraj-Blatchford & Hallet, 2014). While, participants did not explicably state recognition of their own leadership potential this is implied in the findings, with a construct of shared leadership, acknowledging leadership as linear rather than hierarchical.

Waniganayake (2014) posits a reconceptualised model of distributed leadership specific to ECEC settings, in which knowledge and knowledge sharing between stakeholders is the core to successful leadership. This is acknowledged by the participants of this study in how the practitioners spoke about being given the opportunity to lead and take ownership of tasks which demonstrates recognition of their own leadership potential. This model is a means through which the ideals of the EYEI's goal of each early childhood teacher having a leadership role (DES, 2016) and as such leadership potential and knowledge sharing. Findings suggest that the practitioners were supported in their leadership capacities by those in formal leadership roles, which was recognised as an important factor in the successful enactment of distributed leadership by Harris (2013). Findings of this research study suggest formal leaders must provide opportunities for practitioner to lead, through coaching and mentoring which correlates with Denee and Thornton (2018).

Being a role model was suggested in the findings in relation to views on what makes a good leader, this is in line with a transformational leader who provides a vision for the whole team which stems from the interests of the whole ECEC team (Northouse, 2015). In addition, collegial ways of working within a whole setting were highlighted by participants, this links to the contextual nature and make up of individual settings and Aubrey *et al.'s* (2012) emphasis on the importance of such collaborative work practices. Collegial ways of working were also noted by participants in relational to achieving

common goals. This is in line with Colmer (2017) who discussed leadership as a medium of influence towards the involvement in shared and collective goals.

Significantly, the findings here suggest that the conceptualisations of leadership are viewed as a shared entity among both leaders and practitioners, which importantly demonstrates that practitioners associate leadership as a co-leadership rather than solely an entity attached to a team member in a formal leadership role. The coaching and mentoring of practitioners highlighted in the findings is also key to aid their recognition of their own leadership potential. To this extent it is noteworthy that such concepts as advocated for by both Inspectorate, namely TUSLA and the EYEI are evident in practice, and a shared vision of leadership from all team members.

5.3 Development of others

A specific focus was highlighted by several leaders to conscientiously develop colleagues, where support was provided to those working with them to develop as professionals. Recognition that each team member is on their own career path was noted in the findings, which is in line with the Tusla QRF which refers to leadership capacity within the team, where effective management and staff development are outlined as a means to aid staff to show leadership skills (Tusla, 2018). Which contrasts with Dimmock's (2012) mainstream business orientated definition of "an influence process over a group of individuals, workers or employees aimed at gaining their commitment to shared values and goals and subsequent goal achievement" (p. 6); which shows no recognition of the development of individuals within the team.

From an educational perspective, Leithwood and Riehl (2005) proposed a definition of leadership as "the work of mobilising and influencing others to articulate and achieve the school's shared intentions and goals" (p. 14). The findings demonstrated this construct of leadership when leaders articulated their role as mentors, role models and coaches; teaching new skills to practitioners. This is also in line with Northouse (2015) who discusses the intellectual stimulation and individualised consideration provided by a transformational leader. Heikka, Halttunen, and Waniganayake (2018) also found that the perceptions of leadership held by early childhood teachers and leaders influenced the variety of supports provided to practitioners, the findings of this study demonstrated this perception of leadership when the practitioner stated they are facilitated and

encouraged by leaders. Findings also raised the issue of reflective practice as a learning tool, when practitioners had autonomy to take the lead. Within a distributed leadership approach the role of the formal leader is vital to its success, as they create such conditions through which this can take place (Aubrey *et al.*, 2012). Following such, the importance of the availability of access to specific CPD opportunities in leadership in this sector is highlighted further. As the perceptions and understandings of leadership which are held by those in leadership roles determine the enactment of successful and effective leadership in ECEC settings nationally and internationally. In addition, this supports practitioners to recognise and develop their own leadership skills and potential, in ECEC environments where leaders provide opportunities for the practitioners to grow and develop through coaching, mentoring and modelling.

5.4 Characteristics of Effective Leadership

The participants provided several characteristics of effective leadership namely good communication skills exhibited by a leader, providing clarity, vision and direction. This corresponds with Goleman's (2011) skills of an emotionally intelligent leader who has the appropriate social skills to provide clarity, vision and direction, which require being an effective communicator (Siraj-Blatchford & Manni, 2007). Additionally, characteristics such as mutual respect and general respect for colleagues and team members were identified in the findings. This echoes Aubrey *et al.'s* (2012) ideology of the creation of an atmosphere of openness and trust, which is comparable to Goleman (2011) where the leader demonstrates social skills, self-awareness and empathy, all hallmarks of exemplary leadership characteristics.

Furthermore, another characteristic which was evident in the findings was the ability as a leader to compromise. Taking into consideration the opinions of the whole team, and not alone their way of doing things. This corresponds with a transformational leader who provides individualised consideration (Northouse, 2015), which contrasts with a transactional leader who focuses on the task or goal to be achieved rather than the individual team member (Northouse, 2015). Additionally, a practitioner outlined how a leader having reasonable expectations of a team member was also a favourable characteristic, which is similar to the aforementioned transformational approach of individualised consideration (Northouse, 2015). These characteristics of effective leadership can be viewed as an influence strategy to empower team member to the

involvement in shared and collective goals (Colmer, 2017). Accordingly, the findings in relation to the characteristics of effective leadership demonstrate that a multitude of characteristics are required. Namely, good communication and social skills, mutual respect, ability to compromise and having reasonable expectations of colleagues.

5.5 Relational Leadership

Most of the participants highlighted the relational element of leadership and the creation of a positive reciprocal relationship with an openness and trusting nature. This is in line with Colmer (2017); Lee (2008) and Rodd (1997) who highlighted that leadership is relational and exists within social relationships (Leithwood & Riehl, 2005). Sims *et al.'s* (2015) research also ranked the relationship element of leadership higher than mentoring element of leadership which was contrary to the literature argued for by the authors. Practitioners highlighted that being able and comfortable to talk to your manager or room leader, was of paramount importance, they recognised the need for a leader to be approachable. This finding is similar to Lee (2008) who highlighted that positive relationships were crucial to the development of leadership in their Educational Leadership Project in New Zealand.

The findings drew attention to leaders use of positive reinforcement to create a positive working environment, through which complements, and rewards were used when a team member performed well or used their initiative. Such reinforcement corresponds with Colmer (2017) and Leithwood and Riehl (2005) who discussed leadership as a medium of influence towards the involvement in shared and collective goals. In addition, Nicholson and Maniates (2016) discussed the emotional, relation and negotiated contexts of leadership which are highlighted by the findings here, owing to these contexts being highlighted through positive reinforcement. The findings also highlighted a concept of friendliness as a personal quality among leaders, the creation of a friendly working atmosphere; where a leader is approachable. Such a concept is in line with what Hard and Jónsdóttir (2013) refer to a "discourse of niceness" (p. 319) in leadership, and how practitioners see themselves as a professional identity perspective. This concept corresponds to the caring nature of the ECEC profession, which is motivated by the passion of care and education of young children (Murray, 2013) and therefore at odds with typical constructions of leadership.

The findings show an association of leadership and power, as a negative connotation, with participants noting behaviours such as; not coming across as a heavy-handed leader for example. The term 'boss' was used by a number of participants with an association of power in a negative sense and power going to a leader's head. Practitioners noted this in terms of the leader not adhering to traditional hierarchal models and accepting everyone on the same level. While these negative connotations of power associated with leadership are evident throughout the findings, they are reflective of the male dominated leadership literature which was a central focus of literature until the latter part of the 20th century (Hard and Jónsdóttir, 2013). Leadership in the ECEC sector is in direct contrast to that of the business world owing to the gender nature of this sector (Aubrey *et al* 2012; Muijs *et al* 2004). Hard and Jónsdóttir (2013), and Rodd (2013) also discuss this gender perspective and how leadership in ECEC, is to a certain extent a rejected concept owing to an aversion to power, which is constructed with the male dominated leadership discourse as evidenced in the findings of this study. This together with Northouse's (2015) transactional leadership, which focuses on leadership as an exchange of power is evident to the findings, in particular where the negative connotations of power are referred to by the participants. This category of leadership utilises negative strategies such as criticism, and negative reinforcement to achieve goals and tasks, with a clear hierarchical structure (Northouse, 2015), which is in direct contrast to the positive reinforcement used to create a positive leadership environment (Colmer, 2017; Nicholson & Maniates, 2016).

Overall, relational leadership as evidenced in the findings of this study must be held in high regard as Siraj-Blatchford and Manni (2007) highlight effective leadership cannot be enacted without the presence of positive professional relationships. In particular enacting distributed leadership which relies on interdependent relationships between people (Heikka & Hujala, 2013), which encompasses the relational nature of leadership highlighted by Aubrey *et al.* (2012), Colmer (2017), Lee (2008), Nicholson and Maniates (2016) and Sims *et al.* (2015). Furthermore, in relation to the national ECEC context it is evident that leadership is much more than a formal title, to be an effective leader one must understand the relational aspects to it and be mindful of this in practice as to how this is implemented on a day to day basis.

5.6 Challenges of the Profession

Siraj-Blatchford and Manni (2007) cautioned the effective application of a distributed leadership model where staff are inexperienced or where there are high rates of turnover. This was not explicably evident in the findings of this study; however, findings did raise the challenges faced in relation to changing team members over the course of a week in a classroom. This is similar to Heikka *et al.* (2018) and Aubrey *et al.* (2012) and their recognition that leadership is dependent on the nature of individual settings, these findings raised by a leader highlight that this can also be the case within individual teams in a classroom. Therefore, in this case it is important to consider that leadership is both "contextual and contingent" (Leithwood & Riehl, 2005, p. 14).

Findings outlined by several leaders, highlighted the onus of responsibility which they deemed they had in relation to all team members working towards the ethos of the centre. Which is reflected in Leithwood and Riehl's (2005) definition of leadership as "the work of mobilising and influencing others to articulate and achieve the school's shared intentions and goals" (p. 14). This is further complicated by Rodd (2013) who asserts that leadership is often "enacted by standing back, saying or doing nothing" (p. 233) which is at odds with the leaders view of their overall responsibility and what can be extracted as an unease with such a concept.

Hard and Jónsdóttir (2013) and Heikka and Hujala (2013) highlighted a challenge of the ECEC profession in the literature in the multiple perceptions of leadership. This however was not evident in the findings of the research study with participants conception of leadership clearly distinguished as a linear model, grounded in relationships, otherwise categorised as distributed leadership. Herein lies a challenge for the ECEC sector, are these perceptions limited to the participants of this study or do additional perceptions exist within the Irish context.

5.7 Limitations of study

This study is not without its limitations, namely the short time frame within which the data was collected, this did impact on the availability of research participants. If the researcher had more time perhaps, they would have been able to provide a wider sample of participants. The inclusion of alternative data collection methods, such a focus group could also have been considered if time and availability of participants was different;

this may have influenced the findings presented in this study. It is also worth noting that the researcher was a novice interviewer, as noted in the methodology chapter and this may have impacted on the data collected. Owing to the small sample size a further limitation to consider is the lack of generalisability of the findings to the wider ECEC context.

5.8 Conclusion

This concludes discussion on the findings of this research study in relation to the literature. Conclusion and recommendations will be outlined in chapter six.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

6.1 Introduction

The aim of this study was to explore the perceptions of leadership among early childhood teachers in an Irish context. Examining their current understandings, recognition of their own leadership and key attributes of effective leadership.

6.2 Conclusions

The overall objective of this study was to establish the conceptualisations of leadership among early childhood teachers in an Irish context. One of the conceptualisations which was identified in the finding was that of leadership as a shared entity. Leadership constructions identified by the participants identified a linear rather than hierarchical model, where traditional views of leadership being imposed from above by a leader in a formal role are rejected. This is in favour of a construct of leadership as leading from the middle and empowering others regardless of your formal position in an ECEC setting. Such a co-leadership or distributed leadership approach involves both the formal and informal leaders, where leadership is symbolic in nature and potential to be enacted by anyone. This construct of leadership was identified in the findings with a recognition that the practitioners were given ample opportunity to lead and take ownership of their tasks, building on their inherent skills through appropriate support structures such as coaching and mentoring. Furthermore, the construct of shared leadership was highlighted as participants noted the importance of collegial ways of working within and across teams in the ECEC services. Recognition of leadership as a shared entity also demonstrates the practitioner's recognition of their own leadership potential through engaging in leadership activities. Implications of these findings for the sector are encouraging, as they are reflective of the policy level goals for the sector prescribed by Tusla and the DES.

Conditions of effective leadership were identified in the findings, in so far as effective shared or co-leadership models, are inextricably linked to environments where leaders aid the growth and development of practitioners. This study provided evidence that several of the leaders made a conscientious effort to provide an environment in which there was opportunities for practitioners to develop their own leadership skills and potential. Examples of leaders acting as mentors and role models to practitioners were

identified. As a conceptualisation of leadership this is noteworthy as it demonstrates that leaders provide individualised consideration to team member to aid their development and provide them with opportunities to lead and by association aid the recognition of their own potential as leaders.

Aiming to establish which characteristics and attributes of leadership were of perceived importance to effective leadership, the findings established that amongst others communication and social skills were of paramount importance for effective leadership. Such skills are a means through which a guiding vision is enacted throughout each ECEC setting. It provides clarity and direction to all parties, which also informs another characteristic which was identified as having reasonable expectations for team members, which is grounded in effective communication skills. In addition to these characteristics' creation of an atmosphere of mutual respect where all leaders and practitioners have a state of trust and openness in their working relationships. Where a leader can comprise and provide individualised consideration of the opinions and ideas of all team members.

Significantly, one of the overarching attributes of effective leadership which the findings demonstrated was the capacity of leaders to form positive reciprocal relationship. The relational aspect of leadership was without doubt the most prominent feature of the findings of this study. With practitioners noting the importance of a leader being approachable and being comfortable to talk to them. The leaders also ranked friendliness as an important personal quality, through which positive working environments were created. On the contrary the negative relationships were also outlined in the findings, where participants outlined the connotations associated with the term 'boss'. This was seen in how they described leaders not coming across as overpowering or heavy handed, with the power going to their heads as an example. Such conceptions of leadership are reflective of the more traditional hierarchical transactional styles of leadership, where ranks and positions of authority are intrinsically associated with leadership rather than leadership as a shared entity. These perceptions are also linked to the underlining gendered nature of the ECEC sector, and that leadership in this field is discussed as in the findings here as an aversion to power. Herein, it is important to note that within the ECEC sector a distinct construct of leadership is required, one which is built upon the relationship formed in ECEC settings.

The challenges faced in the ECEC sector naturally can impact on the enactment of leadership. Findings of this study indicated some minor challenges which were faced by participants, namely the dichotomy which exists between the concept of leaders having an overall onus of responsibility and the shared concepts of leadership evident throughout these findings.

6.3 Recommendations

Considering the findings of this study, some recommendations are made in relation to the area of leadership in ECEC settings:

- There is potential for further research in this area to explore the conceptions of leadership among a wider sample, to include urban settings and participants who have completed specific training in leadership such as those outlined in the introduction.

- As noted in the findings how leadership is understood by early childhood teachers influences how it is enacted in settings, therefore all ECEC initial training programmes should include specific leadership learning outcomes. In addition, all those who are appointed to senior leadership roles should hold a qualification in leadership.

- Findings suggest that the development of others was important, here it is vital to recognise that formal structures around the support, supervision and mentoring of new and existing staff are implemented in all ECEC settings to facilitate recognition of own leadership potential.

References

Access and Inclusion Model (AIM). (2018a). *Access and Inclusion Model*. Retrieved from http://www.aim.gov.ie/

Access and Inclusion Model (AIM). (2018b). *Role of the Inclusion Co-ordinator*. Retrieved from http://aim.gov.ie/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/role-of-the-inclusion-co-ordinator.pdf

Aubrey, C., Godfrey, R., & Harris, A. (2012). How do they manage? An investigation of early childhood leadership. *Educational Management and Educational Leadership*, 41(1), 5-29. doi:10.1177/1741143212462702

Blaxter, L., Hughes, C., & Tight, M. (2010). *How to research* (4 ed.). Berkshire, England: Open University Press.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3*(2), 77-101. doi:10.1191/1478088706qp063oa

British Educational Research Association [BERA]. (2018). *Ethical guidelines for educational research*. (4th). London, England. Retrieved from https://www.bera.ac.uk/researchers-resources/publications/ethical-guidelines-for-educational-research-2018

Bryman, A. (2016). *Social research methods* (5 ed.). Oxford, England: Oxford University Press.

Campbell-Barr, V., & Leeson, C. (2016). *Quality and leadership in the early years: Research, theory and practice*. London, England: Sage.

Colmer, K. (2017). Collaborative professional learning: contributing to the growth of leadership, professional identity and professionalism. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 25(3), 436-449. doi:10.1080/1350293X.2017.1308167

Colmer, K., Waniganayake, M., & Field, L. (2014). Leading professional learning in early childhood centres: Who are the educational leaders? *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood*, 39(4), 103-113. Retrieved from https://search-ebscohost-com.libraryproxy.mic.ul.ie/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=100402443&site=ehost-live

37

Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods approach* (4th ed.). London, England: Sage Publications.

Denee, R., & Thornton, K. (2018). Distributed leadership in ECE: Perceptions and practices. *Early Years*, 1-16. doi:10.1080/09575146.2018.1539702

Department of Education and Skills (DES). (2016). *A Guide to Early-years Education-focused Inspection (EYEI) in Early-years Settings Participating in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme*. Dublin, Ireland: Department of Education and Skills.

Dimmock, C. (2012). *Leadership, capacity building and school improvement*. Oxon, England: Routledge.

Flick, U. (2009). *An introduction to qualitative research* (4 ed.). London, England: Sage.

Flick, U. (2015). *Introducing research methodology* (2 ed.). London, England: Sage.

Foster, P. (2006). Observational research. In R. Sapford, & V. Jupp (Eds.), *Data collection and analysis* (2 ed., pp. 57-93). London, England: Sage.

Goleman, D. (2011). What makes a leader? In *Harvard Business Review: On Leadership* (pp. 1-22). Harvard, USA: Harvard Business School Publishing Corporation.

Government of Ireland. (1996). *Child care act 1991 (pre-school services) regulations 1996*. Dublin, Ireland: Government Publications.

Government of Ireland. (2016). *Child care act 1991 (early years services) (amendment) regulations 2016*. Dublin, Ireland: Government Publications. Retrieved from http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2016/si/632/made/en/print

Government of Ireland. (2018). *First 5: A whole-of-government strategy for babies, young children and their families 2019-2028*. Retrieved from https://www.dcya.gov.ie/documents/earlyyears/19112018_4966_DCYA_EarlyYears_Booklet_A4_v22_WEB.pdf

Hackman, J. R., & Wageman, R. (2007). Asking the right questions about leadership: Discussions and conclusions. *The American Psychologist*, 62(1), 43-47. doi:10.1037/0003-066X.62.1.43

Hard, L., & Jónsdóttir, A. H. (2013). Leadership is not a dirty word: Exploring and embracing leadership in early childhood education and care. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 21(3), 311-325. doi:10.1080/1350293X.2013.814355

Harris, A. (2008). *Distributed school leadership: Developing tomorrow's leaders*. London, England: Routledge.

Harris, A. (2013). Distributed leadership: friend or foe? *Educational Management Administration and Leadership*, 41(5), 545-554. doi:10.1177/1741143213497635

Hayes, N., O'Donoghue-Hayes, B., & Wolfe, T. (2013). Rapid change without transformation: The dominance of a national policy paradigm over international influences on ECEC development in Ireland 1995-2012. *International Journal of Early Childhood*, 45(2), 1-19. doi:10.1007/s13158-013-0090-5

Heikka, J., & Hujala, E. (2013). Early childhood leadership through the lens of distributed leadership. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 21(4), 568-580. doi:10.1080/1350293X.2013.845444

Heikka, J., Halttunen, L., & Waniganayake, M. (2018). Perceptions of early childhood education professionals on teacher leadership in Finland. *Early Child Development and Care*, 188(2), 143-156. doi:10.1080/03004430.2016.1207066

Hepburn, A., & Bolden, G. B. (2017). *Transcribing for social research.* London, England: Sage.

Kerlinger, F. N., & Lee, H. B. (2000). *Foundations of behavioural research* (4 ed.). Orlando, Florida, USA: Harcourt College Publishers.

Lambert, L. G. (2007). Lasting leadership: Towards sustainable school improvement. *Journal of Educational Change*, 8(3), 311-322. doi:10.1007/s10833-007-9046-6

Lee, W. (2008). Educational leadership project: Empowering the leadership in professional development communities. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 16(1), 95-106. doi:10.1080/13502930801897087

Leeson, C., Campbell-Barr, V., & Ho, D. (2012). Leading for quality improvement: a comparative research agenda in early childhood education in England and Hong

Kong. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, 15(2), 221-236. doi:10.1080/13603124.2011.644327

Leithwood, K., & Riehl, C. (2005). What do we already know about educational leadership? In W. Firestone, & C. Riehl (Eds.), *A new agenda for research in educational leadership* (pp. 12-27). New York, United States of America: Teachers College Press. Retrieved from https://books.google.ie/books?id=sqDO67zQrfoC&lpg=PP1&pg=PA10#v=onepage&q=leithwood&f=false

Lincoln, Y. S., Lyndam, S. A., & Guba, E. G. (2011). Paradigmatic controversies, contradictions, and emerging confluences revisited. In N. K. Denzin, & Y. S. Lincoln, *The SAGE Handbook of qualitative research* (4th ed.) (pp. 97-128). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

McDowall Clark, R. (2012). 'I've never thought of myself as a leader but...': The Early Years Professional and catalytic leadership. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 20(3), 391-401. doi: 10.1080/1350293X.2012.704762

McDowall Clark, R., & Murray, J. (2012). *Reconceptualizing leadership in the early years.* Berkshire, England: Open University Press.

Moloney, M. (2010). Unreasonable expectations: the dilemma for pedagogues in delivering policy objectives. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 18(2), 181-198. doi:10.1080/13502931003784362

Moloney, M., & Pettersen, J. (2017). *Early childhood education management: Insights into business practice and leadership*. Oxon, England: Routledge.

Muijs, D., Aubrey, C., Harris, A., & Briggs, M. (2004). How do they manage? A review of the research on leadership in early childhood. *Journal of Early Childhood Research*, 2(2), 157-169. doi:10.1177/1476718X04042974

Murray, J. (2013). Becoming an early years professional: developing a new professional identity. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 21(4), 527-540. doi:10.1080/1350293X.2013.845441

Nicholson, J., & Maniates, H. (2016). Recognizing postmodern intersectional identities in leadership for early childhood. *Early Years*, 36(1), 66-80. doi:10.1080/09575146.2015.1080667

Northouse, P. (2009). *Introduction to leadership concepts and practice*. Los Angeles: Sage Publications.

Northouse, P. (2015). *Leadership: Theory and practice* (7th ed.). London, England: Sage.

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). (2004). *Early childhood education and care policy: County note for Ireland*. Retrieved from http://www.oecd.org/education/school/34425332.pdf

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). (2017). *Starting strong 2017: Key OECD indicators on early childhood education and care*. Paris, France: OECD Publishing. doi:10.1787/9789264276116-en

Pobal. (2018). *Early years sector profile report 2017-2018*. Retrieved from https://www.pobal.ie/app/uploads/2018/11/Early-Years-Sector-Profile-Report-2017-2018.pdf

Rodd, J. (1997). Learning to be leaders: Perceptions of early childhood professionals about leadership roles and responsibilities. *Early Years*, 18(1), 40-44. doi: 10.1080/0957514970180108

Rodd, J. (2001). Building leadership expertise of future early childhood. *Journal of Early Childhood Teacher Education*, 22(1), 9-12. doi:10.1080/10901027.2001.10486430

Rodd, J. (2013). *Leadership in early childhood: The pathway to professionalism* (4 ed.). Berkshire, England: Open University Press.

Sarantakos, S. (2013). *Social research* (4 ed.). Hampshire, England: Palgrave Macmillan.

Schon, D. (1983). *The reflective practitioner: How professionals think in action*. New York, USA: Basic Books.

Sims, M., Forrest, R., Semann, A., & Slattery, C. (2015). Conceptions of early childhood leadership: driving new professionalism? *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, 18(2), 149-166. doi: 10.1080/13603124.2014.962101

Siraj-Blatchford, I., & Hallet, E. (2014). *Effective and caring leadership in the early years*. London, England: Sage.

Siraj-Blatchford, I., & Manni, L. (2007). *Effective leadership in the early years sector (The ELEYS study)*. London, England: Institute of Education.

Tuckman, B. (1965). *Development sequences in small groups*. Psychological Bulletin, 63(6), 384–99. doi: 10.1037/h0022100

Tusla. (2018). *Quality and regulatory framework: Full day care service and part-time day care service*. Dublin, Ireland: Early Years Inspectorate, Tusla. Retrieved from https://www.tusla.ie/uploads/content/4566-TUSLA_QRF_DAY_CARE_LR.pdf

Waniganayake, M. (2014). Being and becoming early childhood leaders: Reflections on leadership studies in early childhood education and the future leadership research agenda. *Journal of Early Childhood Education Research*, 3(1), 65-81. Retrieved from https://jecer.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Waniganayake-issue3-1.pdf

Wilson, M., & Sapford, R. (2006). Asking questions. In R. Sapford, & V. Jupp (Eds.), *Data collection and analysis* (pp. 93-122). London, England: Sage.

Appendix A: Interview Schedule

Contextual/Warm Up Questions:

1. What is your current post/title in the ECEC setting you are employed in?
2. How many years have you worked in the ECEC sector?
3. What is your highest level of qualification relevant to the ECEC sector?

Focused Questions:

1. What is your current understanding of leadership in ECEC settings?

    a. What does it mean to you?

2. Do you engage in leadership activities in your ECEC setting currently?

    a. In what areas do you lead?

    b. Who do you lead?

    c. If no, are there opportunities for you to lead in your ECEC setting?

3. What personal qualities do you bring to leadership?

4. In your opinion, what do you think the most important things a leader has the ability to do?

5. In your experience, what characteristics are essential to effective leadership?

6. Finally, is there anything we haven't covered - In your opinion, what makes a good leader?

Appendix B: Draft Letter to Participants

Dear Participant,

My name is Edel Fenlon and I am a postgraduate student with Technological University of Dublin (former Dublin Institute of Technology). I am currently carrying out a Research Project in fulfilment of the requirements of my Master of Arts in Mentoring, Management and Leadership in the Early Years under the supervision of Martina Ozonyia. The purpose of the study, entitled "An investigation into the conceptualisations of leadership among early childhood teachers in Ireland" is to explore early childhood teachers' conceptions of leadership.

Ethical approval for this project has been attained from the Head of School of Languages, Law and Social Sciences, Angela Feeney. I would be very grateful if you could take the time to meet with me for short one to one interview on this topic. Participation in this research study is voluntary; your anonymity and confidentiality are guaranteed. You have the right to withdraw at any point in the process and the right not to answer any question you choose. Data collected will be securely stored and anonymised; findings of this study may be disseminated to the wider Early Years community.

Should you have any further questions or wish to confirm your availability please do not hesitate to contact me on the email address below.

Sincerely,

_____

Edel Fenlon

Postgraduate Student

D16127626@mydit.ie

Appendix C: Draft Consent Form

Researcher's Name: Edel Fenlon

Faculty/School/Department: School of Social Sciences and Law

Title of Study: An investigation into the conceptualisations of leadership among early childhood teachers in Ireland

To be completed by the interviewee:

- Have you been fully informed/read the information sheet about this study?

  YES/NO

- Have you had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study?

  YES/NO

- Have you received satisfactory answers to all your questions?

  YES/NO

- Do you understand that you are free to withdraw from this study?
  - at any time
  - without giving a reason for withdrawing

  YES/NO

- Do you agree to take part in this study the results of which may be published?

  YES/NO

- Have you been informed that this consent form shall be kept in the confidence of the researcher?

  YES/NO

Signed_____ Date _____

Name in Block Letters_____

Signature of Researcher _____ Date _____

Name in Block Letters_____